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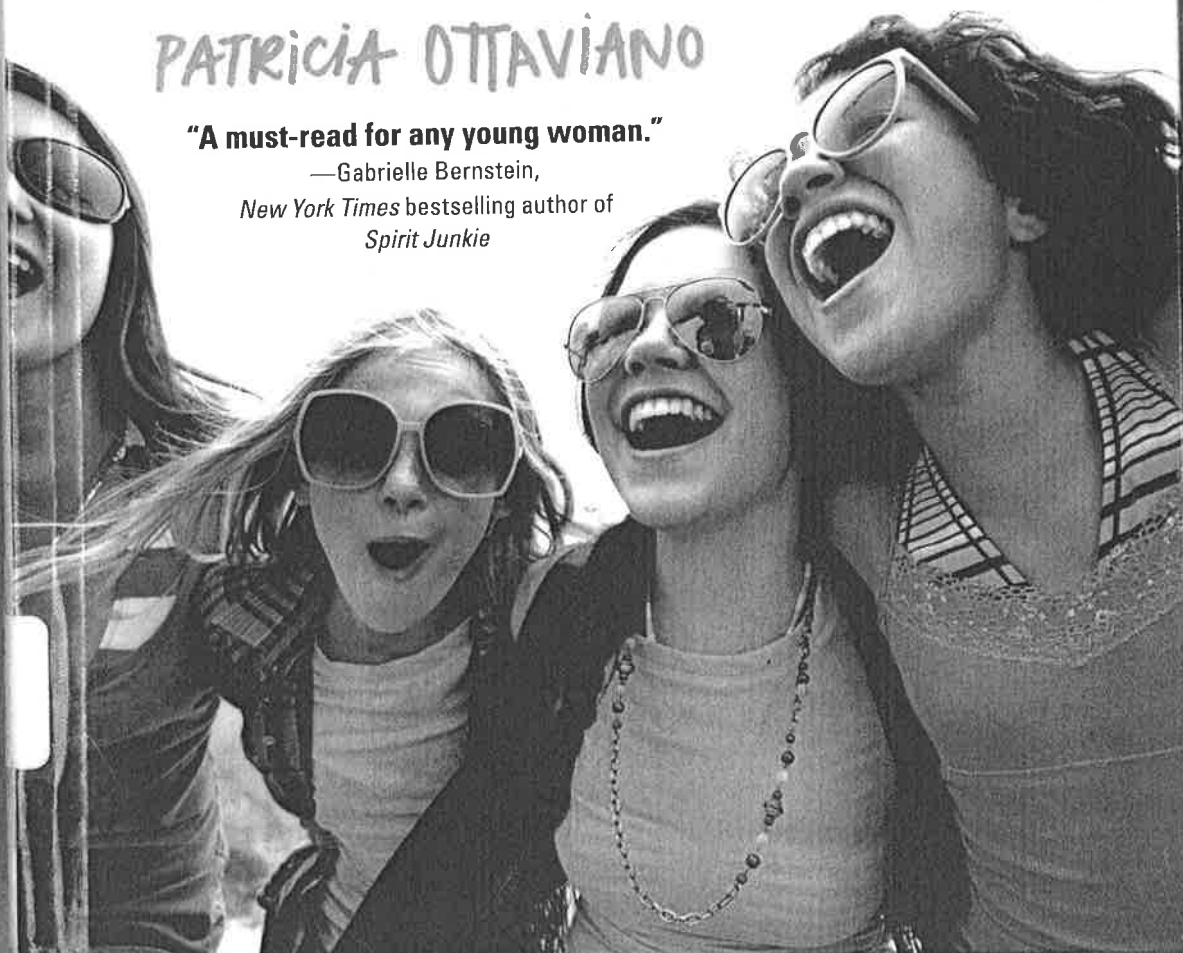
Girl World

HOW TO
DITCH
— THE —
DRAMA
≧ and ≦
FIND YOUR
INNER
amazing!

PATRICIA OTTAVIANO

"A must-read for any young woman."

—Gabrielle Bernstein,
New York Times bestselling author of
Spirit Junkie



are overly chatty in her presence. Do you think a lot more before you speak, to make sure you don't say something that might be perceived as "weird"? Perhaps you find yourself always agreeing with what she says or telling her only what you know she wants to hear. Have you ever tried to up your "coolness" to impress her? Don't worry; we've all been guilty of this at one time or another!

This point is not to make yourself feel bad. In fact, it's the exact opposite. We want to wake up your inner amazing and regain your confidence and composure *no matter the situation*.

If you are feeling intimidated, the way to break out of this behavior is by pulling back the layers that you have built up to protect and/or defend yourself. In doing so, you'll get to know yourself better than you ever have before. You'll start to understand *why you do what you do when you do it*. Many girls, if not all girls, have been intimidated, whether they voice it or not. When you dig deep and learn how your behavior changes when you feel intimidated, you can turn down, or off, the volume of the intimidation. By becoming aware of your habits and owning your reactions, you stay in control and don't allow others to get the best of you.

The next measure is to level the playing field. Translation: *stop inflating the intimidator*. Stop giving her way more credit, power, coolness, or popularity than she has earned. Constantly viewing her in this upgraded light only feeds into her intimidating aura. You are bound to feel bad about yourself as a result. No more holding your tongue or dodging the desire to disagree with her!

I know it's gutsy to take a stand, but you should not have to walk on eggshells or question your worth around others—particularly a friend. Even if you have to remind yourself a hundred times, before you know you'll see this intimidating girl, repeat that you are *both* amazing. No one is cooler or better than the other. Once this is drilled into your mind and you put it into action, you'll start to see your hesitations slip away. You won't waver or tiptoe anymore, my friend. And believe me, she'll pick up on that real fast.

Remember, the intimidation factor that some girls exude does *not* make them cool. It's actually *not cool*. You can't go through life intimidating people. You have a say in who you spend time with and see on a daily basis. Gravitate toward those who lift you up, who appreciate you, and who genuinely make you feel good.

Now, as we've just discussed, there are some people who have mastered the technique of intimidation and are quite aware of their effect on others. On the other hand, there are girls who truthfully don't know that they come across as intimidating. Usually underneath that bravado is a little feeling called insecurity. It can be disguised in different ways: maybe by bragging or talking loudly. Her attempt to mask her discomfort might manifest itself in behaviors that are perceived as intimidating. Instead of assuming a girl thinks she's "better than," consider that she might feel "less than." In that case, we have to revert to good old l-o-v-e. Some extra hugs and tenderness may be in order.

completely different social circle? That's great! You're not committing a friendship crime by hanging out with different people. It doesn't matter what your other friends might think about that person. You shouldn't have to forfeit one friendship for another. If you do, expect to make other sacrifices because your friends will see the pull they have over you, and believe me, they won't stop there. A friend should be concerned about the quality of friendship between you two, that's it.

Somewhere along the way, you may have equated happiness with being accepted by a particular group of girls. You would do anything to preserve these friendships—even if it means not being true to yourself. Adapting this mind-set will cause you to make compromises and conform, but it won't make you happier.

Do something baller. Throw away (or recycle!) all the ways in which you conform, all the ways in which you hide your personality to cater to your friends' expectations, all the ways in which you are not being yourself. It's time to break free of the pressures and insecurities that are making you stuck. OMG! Liberating, right?

Your authentic self is your happiest self.

You know that girl who enters the room and all eyes turn in her direction? She has that special glow that makes others think, *Whoa! I want what she has.* Well, here's the inside scoop: She has that glow because she's happy with herself. She's comfortable in her own skin. She doesn't wear a facade or try to impress others. She stands her ground, not

letting outside pressures sway her. People naturally gravitate toward her because there's nothing more refreshing than someone who is the real deal.

You may be thinking, *Well, that's great and all, but I'm scared that people won't like me if I'm my authentic self.* Can I tell you a secret? Deep down, everyone is frightened that if she reveals who she really is—flaws and all—people will run in the opposite direction. That is why we conform, because we think it's safer to blend in.

The thing is, being happy with yourself doesn't mean that you are perfect or that you are always in a good mood. Loving yourself means acknowledging your flaws and shortcomings, but instead of disguising them or pretending that they don't exist, you own them and move on. You know that happiness you crave? You will find it when you let go of the ways in which you conform to others' expectations and instead recognize that your truest self is pretty spectacular. No person, no group of friends, no possessions, no status, *nothing* will give you a buzz like when you're living authentically.

What's ironic is we think that by saying and doing things that go along with the groove of our group, we are more likely to retain our friends. It's actually the opposite. The more you stay true to yourself, the more friends you will have. People are attracted to girls who are genuine; people want to be around girls who are authentic. Being your true self transforms you into a magnet, and you'll attract a whole lot of greatness into your life.

by a recent situation, we will discuss what to do when you feel like you have few, if any, friends; don't quite fit in; feel left out or excluded; or used to be in a group but all your friends have turned against you.

Believe me. I know how difficult this can be. Remember: there are other people encountering the same hurdles. I'm here to share some comfort, healing, and guidance. Know that I have your back!

ODD GIRL OUT

Weird. Weird is a word I wish never existed. I can't tell you how many times I've heard girls say, "She's so weird." Nine out of ten times (or more like 9.99 times!), "weird" is used in a negative and hurtful way to exclude others. No one wants to feel like a total freak or a straight-up alien from another planet.

Feeling as if you are missing the piece to the puzzle that every other girl seems to have is one of the *hardest* internal battles to combat. When you're in that space and lower than low, it's easy to think: *What's wrong with me?* Hang tight. By the end of this chapter, we are going to slingshot that thought right out of your mind and refocus on what's *right*.

If you feel like you are lacking in the friends department (and I've been there), it's understandable that your self-esteem and confidence levels may be well below where they should be. Every single day at school, one is swarmed by cliques roaming the hallways together, sitting and laughing

together, doing homework together. In other words, it can feel like a constant reminder that you don't quite fit in.

This may seem foreign to some girls, and if you are one of them, I can't stress enough how important it is to consider how others might feel. We see people hanging solo all the time and brush it off, thinking, *Oh that's just who they are. They like being alone.* Do they? We forget that many of our peers want the same things we want. Acceptance and friendship rank high on that list.

One of the most important lessons I learned, if not *the* most important lesson, is: you cannot shape your identity and self-worth by how many friends you have or how others feel about you. For too long, I searched for validation from other people, instead of validating myself. I needed others to confirm that I was well liked, cool enough, good enough, and pretty enough. When I thought that people liked me, I liked myself more. When I saw people draw back, I drew back on myself. The thing is...that's a really shaky surface to be standing on.

Instead of letting time go by and waiting for others to make you feel good about yourself, why not feel good about yourself *now*? Don't sit idly, thinking that there's nothing you can do about how you feel and wishing you could be someone else. The only thing you need to change is that thought.

So how do you do that? The first order of business is to remember that *you* can build yourself up. You are in charge of the whole construction process and what the

end result will be. Maybe it's time for some renovation! Demolish the bad stuff. Get rid of the hazardous materials. Start from the ground up, working slowly and carefully to assemble a strong foundation. What are the qualities that make you special? Are you smart? Funny? Kind? Have a talent for playing a sport or an instrument or some other hobby? Think of all of the great aspects that make you *you*, and build a foundation of self-worth that is so sturdy and so reliable that *no one else*, I repeat, *no one else*, will be able to shake you. Because...

Truth #1: There are always going to be people who give you a hard time, no matter what.

The haters will always hate. Why let them have a say in how you view yourself? Your self-image and self-worth depend on what you think of you, not what others think of you.

Take a quick mental scan of the people in your life. Are there any uneasy feelings that come to mind when you think of certain people? Is there anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable rather than positive and secure? If so, that is a flashing red light telling you to keep your distance. Pay attention to it. That relationship is not building you up.

Next, pause to listen to the messages that are playing on repeat in your mind. Are they inspiring you, or are they saying you're not pretty enough or smart enough? If they are weighing you down, I want you to ask yourself, says who? Where is that sentiment coming from? If it's another person, you have to realize that no one gave them the power to decide who is good enough and who is not. If you are the one saying those things, you've just identified the culprit. And guess what? Now you have the chance to change that message. That damaging thought is no longer welcome. Choose a different thought, a more loving and real one: I am good enough. I am pretty enough. I am smart enough.

After you've done all this work on your foundation, you're not about to let it crumble again, right? Stay firm in your commitment to take care of yourself. Don't let anyone take away your shine. Dirty looks, hurtful comments, feelings of unworthiness and isolation—show them the door. Don't let them get inside your head and camp out. Because...

Truth #2: You are not any of the negative things that other people call you.

Quite the contrary, you are someone who is so special, so talented, and so deserving. There is no one else in the world quite like you.

That is why we cannot let the thoughts and actions of others diminish our potential to be great. Sometimes staying small almost feels safer than playing it big. If you're a behind-the-scenes kind of gal who doesn't like the spotlight, that is totally okay. When we feel inadequate or invisible based on how our peers view us, we tend to shrink and hide—and that's a problem. Thoughts of not being good enough can be paralyzing, preventing us from dreaming big. What if we were to bust through that wall, dream big, and fearlessly go after what we want? Be honest: Does that intimidate you?

Without a doubt, your mind is **INCREDIBLY POWERFUL**. It has the ability to make you feel like you are this small or **THIS BIG**. But of course, it depends on what you tell yourself, what you choose to believe. When you feel like an outsider, all those funky thoughts get in your head and bring you down. It can be extremely challenging to rise up when the world seems to be telling you to sit down.

You know what? No one benefits if you play small. I don't care if you have zero

friends, one friend, or fifty friends; you are talented and unique and have your own gifts to share with the world. Mind over matter, girls. Play big.

ODD GIRL OUT 2 (THE SEQUEL)

There's another type of being singled out that happens quite often. Rather than being an outcast because a girl is "different" than everyone else, this girl had a group of friends who, for some reason or another, turned against her.

It's like living in a nightmare. One day you're surrounded by people you think are your really good friends, and then the next day you're on the outside looking in. It occurred so quickly, you got whiplash! Often there are no warning signs, so it makes it harder to process. *Is this real life? Is this actually happening?* Two seconds ago these girls were your BFFs and now they're your arch nemeses. Wait—what? Hold up!

A deep-rooted sense of betrayal comes to mind. Friends can turn into frenemies overnight, and girls are left blindsided. It's rarely just one person who turns her back; everyone from the group usually hops on board the hate train. Often there's no rhyme or reason for why they do so. Perhaps it's out of boredom and the need for entertainment. The circle of friends may have crafted excuses for what the girl might have done wrong, but rarely does anyone deserve total and complete alienation.

Now our girl's forced to navigate the hallways by herself and make all new friends (that is, unless her ex-besties corrupt other people's opinions). How can she make new friends without being fearful and distrusting?

The reason I understand this girl and what she is going through is because *I was that girl*. It happened to me.

I was in seventh grade when all my friends got mad at me on the same day, at the same time, and I felt like a deer in headlights. I had no clue why it was happening. And when it persisted, that year became the most difficult year of my life. It had an impact on who I was and the trust I had for others for quite some time. Years have passed and all is forgiven, but my heart still hurts whenever I think back on it. I don't know if that will ever go away. But it's a part of me, part of my story, and if I can use that experience to help someone else avoid a similar situation, it was well worth it.

You *do* have the power to get through an incident like this. You are not hopeless or helpless. The power lies in how you *perceive* your surroundings and how you are *acting* within them. Instead of letting the situation control your thoughts and feelings, *you* must take hold of the reins. Shifting your thoughts to include more positive messages is a sure way to improve the situation. You can't bank on your "friends" coming around and for your relationships to magically get better. If you want to feel better, gain confidence, and be happier, you have to make a conscious effort to do so. Here's what you can do...

MAKE YOUR MOVE

Make time in your schedule, *every single day*, to boost your mood. Mood-booster time cancels out the moping-around-your-house-in-sweats-listening-to-a-depressing-song-on-repeat time. I am going to be tough on you for this step because it *works!* You, my friend, are *strong*.

Write a list of all the things that you enjoy. What makes you smile and brightens your day? Refer to this list whenever you are feeling down. You cannot control what others do and say, but you *can* control how you react and if you let it affect you. Before a situation gets the best of you, pull out this list and think of one of the happy moments there or complete one of the activities you wrote down.

If you dwell in a low space for a long time, you can start to wallow in those feelings. But if you decide to take action and do something to change that, *you* have power over your life, your feelings, your vibes, your mood. Do *not* let others dictate *your* state of mind. Don't put *your happiness* in the hands of someone else!

Next, seek out a new community. Look for people whose company you genuinely enjoy and with whom you can see yourself forming friendships. Don't limit yourself to just your school district. Perhaps you can join an out-of-school sports league or take some sort of arts or dance class. Maybe you volunteer for an organization that interests you

or apply for a part-time job where you'll meet people who are of a similar age.

Never *stop* making friends. I know some of you may be thinking that you're set for life with your BFF soul sistas, but things happen. Life throws curveballs, and what bad can come from having different groups of supporting, loving friends in your life?

It's easier to meet people when you're doing it casually, rather than desperately searching for new friends. If you consistently make one or two steps to surround yourself with new people, than you're really looking out for you!

Having different groups of friends helps a *ton* when there are conflicts and arguments in your crowd. You won't feel as though your *whole world just ended*. Life doesn't become a soap opera, maybe just a dramatic scene. You will not feel stranded or deserted, and you'll be able to rely on—and learn from—other people, not just one tight-knit group.

Also, having several different circles of friends provides a basis for comparison. You'll be able to recognize the friends who are good to you and good for you, rather than those who weren't such good friends after all. When you have a steady stream of people in your life, you'll be able to recognize the qualities of great friendships and start to weed out the bad ones from the good.

Last but not least, let's revisit an old saying that carries a lot of truth—*quality over quantity*. Friendship is *all about* quality. If you are ever the odd girl out, I want you to remember that, in the end, it doesn't matter how many friends you

have. This is a common misconception. All too often a busy social calendar or an increasing number of friends on social media boosts our self-esteem and confidence. If you have *one* great, true friend, you're set for life. Don't think you are lacking a thing, because really, you are *so lucky*. One phenomenal friendship is far more fulfilling than twenty superficial friendships. One amazing friend will not isolate and turn others against you.

Big groups can be overwhelming and intimidating, so not everyone wants to be part of a large friendship circle. I personally find that being surrounded by large groups can feel like sensory overload with eighty-five different conversations going on all at once. When you're constantly in a group with a lot of people, it prevents you from *really* getting to know each person as an individual and keeping up with the important things that are happening in their lives. There's something to be said about having several smaller groups of friends whose friendships were formed for different reasons.

If you find yourself bumming out and feeling like you don't have enough friends, I want you to stop, drop (if so desired), and scream: quality over quantity!

PARTY FOR ONE

So you never got the invite to the big party... This happens to *every single girl*—actually, *every single person*—at one point or another. Yes, it even happens to the girls we think of as

get their power because of the long-lasting impact that they have on others. When we are going through school, constantly surrounded by our peers, it's easy to lose sight of the meaning behind our insults because of the frequency with which we both hear *and* say them. But horrible, unkind words stick with people for *years*, as they try to prove to themselves that they aren't the names they've been called.

It's not just what someone labels them; it's the emotions that came with it. That is why you remember for so long. An intense feeling of pain is hard to forget. I know that I can recall, like it was yesterday, the hurtful comments that my "friends" said to me. Ask your parents. Do they remember an upsetting comment from when they were your age? I bet they do!

You can't control what other people say, but you can control the impact and longevity of *your* words. Which brings us to our first lesson...

LESSON #1: BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHAT YOU SAY (A.K.A. OWN YOUR WORDS)

Basically, every single thing that you say, whether it comes from your mouth, your cell phone, or your computer, belongs to you. Take responsibility for it. Ask yourself: Whatever I say behind someone's back, would I say it to his or her face? Whatever tone I use in my text messages, would I use the same tone in person? Whatever gossip I am putting out there, am I willing to own it?

Whoever made up that saying, "If you don't have

anything nice to say, don't say anything at all," was right on the money. If everyone did this, there would be a lot (emphasis on the *a lot*) less headaches and bad feelings. Bon voyage, 99 percent of girl problems!

This includes hearsay, the silent killer. "I *heard* you said that. I *heard* you were talking behind my back." This kind of talk is a recipe for disaster.

Remember that game Telephone that we played back when we were little tater tots? By the time a message went through the entire class, it was totally different from what the first person said. That is because everybody puts a spin on things. People translate and communicate messages differently.

Whenever you want to approach a friend about something that you heard, wait until you know *exactly* what was said. Don't just speculate. Even if you heard something from a trusty source, don't assume it to be the full truth. People do things for excitement, for shock value, for the thrill of the drama. Unless you have proof, everything else is just hearsay. Honestly, it's a cop-out. That is why you have to be accountable for what you say and if you do talk badly about someone behind their back (even those of us with the best of intentions do so at some point or another), you should be comfortable enough with what you put out there to say it to her face.

UNLIMITED

We are all guilty of limiting ourselves. We limit who we associate with and how much we think others will like

LESSON #1: DON'T SET LIMITS ON YOUR HAPPINESS

Example: that one group of friends + one crush + one sports team = *happy me*.

Instead of thinking in terms of limitations, start thinking in terms of possibilities. Okay, so you don't make the cheerleading team. Now what? Check what other teams are still having tryouts, what clubs you could become a member of. Maybe you trade cheerleading for gymnastics. Maybe if you don't get a role in the play, you help design the costumes. It may not be your first choice, but having options keeps you involved—and open to new kinds of fun. You'll take that bummed-out feeling and turn it right around. And when you can do something good in a bad situation, that makes you unbelievably awesome.

Also, how do you know you don't like something unless you try? We bank on x , y , and z happening because we have positive associations with it. It pairs up well with our identity or at least what we want our identity to be. When things don't work out in our favor, we take it really personally because it's more than just being, say, a member on a team. It's about being *perceived* as a part of something more. Even if you have negative associations with option #2, 3, or 4, even if you think, *I would never do that; I wouldn't be caught dead doing that*, go with it, give it a try. When you broaden your horizon, you are opening yourself up to a lot more joy and a lot more fun, and a lot more friends come rollin' on in. Who knows? Maybe you'll be signing up to do it again next year. At the very least,

you went outside your comfort zone, you took a leap of faith, you became more well-rounded, you tried out something new, and you did something about your disappointment... and that's pretty cool.

DRAMA OVERLOAD

There's no lack of drama in school, especially among girls. It's *always* there. There is always *something* going on. Before we know it, we become swept into its chaos. We fall into the trap and start engaging in drama every day. Either we are directly involved in a situation, or we are gossiping about one from the sidelines. It's as if we can't survive without it. What would we talk about? (Hint: *lots!*)

When a seed is planted, it grows. The more people who add their take on a situation, the more manipulated, exaggerated, and taken out of context the situation becomes. There's no such thing as a healthy dose of drama. Once the drama heats up, it's hard to put out the fire.

Let's admit it: it's easy to gossip about someone else. There's always something we can pick apart or find fault in. We share a comment and our friend adds hers, and then someone else at the table inserts their opinion. Before we know it, we just spent twenty minutes talking about how wrong someone is. Those twenty minutes are wasted. We could have been lifting someone up instead of tearing them apart, or laughing instead of gossiping.

Some of us may think it's just meaningless gossip, but if it's so meaningless, then why are we talking about it? We've

gotten in this habit of obsessing over insignificant things that others do. *She did this. She said what?!* We forget that no one is perfect. It's like no one is allowed to be human anymore, no one is allowed to make mistakes. It almost feels as though we are living under a microscope where people are waiting for us to slip up so they can talk about it.

Engaging in this insignificant drama has more of an effect than we think. Drama builds upon drama. A little gossip here and there tends to segue into something bigger. Another person listening tells someone else, the girl we were talking about finds out, a fight starts, and then there's full-blown drama fever!

How do we dial the drama back a notch so we don't hit an overload? That's where the next lesson can help us:

LESSON #3: DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE STUFF THAT MATTERS (AND THE STUFF YOU CAN LET GO)

In other words: don't sweat the small stuff. Don't get sucked into the drama. At times, there's so much of it that it starts to feel like the norm, and the more we engage in it, the harder it is to detach. Sometimes it can feel exciting to be part of it—almost a little addictive. But mostly the drama makes us start trippin' over insignificant matters. We have mini-meltdowns. We flip out over unimportant stuff. And we fly off the handle at the slightest remark.

Getting hung up on drama can literally make you sick. I'm not trying to be dramatic (pun intended), but it really

can. When the drama is headed in our direction, we get stressed out, anxious, and nervous. We start feeling paranoid that everyone's talking about us or that someone is trying to sabotage us. Perhaps we start second-guessing our true friends. We pay *extra* close attention to the signs. *How are they treating us? Are they acting different? Did she look at me strangely? Did she just whisper something?* We tune into even the slightest of clues that may confirm those thoughts that are bugging out in our minds. And all that is *no good*. We cannot put our energy into this negativity because it only breeds more of it.

The same thing happens when we're gossiping about others. There is this *need* to be involved in the craziness, but then it doesn't stop! We get in the habit of talking about everyone—the people we don't like and even the people who are our friends—and none of that is cool. We want to feel good about ourselves, we want to feel proud of ourselves, and that's not easy when we're engaging in drama and gossip.

I'm all for girls taking a drama-free pledge, but that just doesn't seem realistic. Life hands you curveballs and drama is inevitable. Take a step back. What is important and what can you let go of? You can control how much drama you let into your world. You don't have to contribute or engage in it. And whenever you're tempted, silently say to yourself: "Their drama is *not mine* to deal with."

Remember, friendships can still be made when you're not bonding over mutual dislikes or sharing negative

They are practically automatic. Within .05 seconds of meeting someone, we've already got them pegged...

She's too thin, she's not thin enough, she's stupid, she's a nerd.

She's ugly, her nose is too big, her chest is so flat.

She's spoiled, she's trashy, she has no friends, she's fake, she's a slut, she's a tomboy, she's so conceited, she's a freak.

Yeah...girls can be mean.

By now you can see that bullying is WAY more common than you might have thought. When I talk about bullying, it includes the entire spectrum of negative behaviors, the obvious, overt forms and the sly, covert forms, because they both have significant, harmful effects. The methods of attack may vary, but the motive stays the same: to hurt someone.

So ask yourself: Have you been bullied? And perhaps more important: Have you been a bully?

THE EFFECTS

We all enter the world as beautiful, innocent individuals who want the same thing: to be happy and to be loved. No doubt, there are people who support us and lift us up in this quest. But we also encounter people who make this

very difficult. Each negative comment and hurtful act that we experience may chip away at our self-esteem. Heartache after heartache, we can become a little cracked. Until one day, we simply feel broken.

Just as the severity of bullying falls on a spectrum, so do the effects. Even the more common forms of bullying, like gossip and rumors, are no walk in the park. It's not easy to just brush off these comments and pretend that everything is copacetic.

Think back to a time where someone called you something unkind. Why is it that you remember that? Because it affected you; it made an impression. Maybe with time, the impact fades, but it never completely goes away. And the results intensify the more frequently bullying occurs and the longer it persists.

Bullying can take quite an emotional toll, causing girls to feel anxious and fearful at school, not knowing what aggression awaits them. It can cause girls to feel humiliated and ashamed to simply be themselves. Bullying can cause girls to look in the mirror and hate themselves. It can cause girls to act in a way they normally wouldn't, changing who they are to avoid conflict. Bullying can cause girls to do things that don't sit well with them, just because they are afraid of what would happen if they don't. It can cause girls to shut out the rest of the world and isolate themselves so no one else can hurt them. Bullying can cause girls to lose their trust in people. It can cause girls to wish they were never born. Bullying can cause girls to cry *every single day*.

inside jokes. That same “best friend” of mine, the one from the Facebook story, and I decided that we wanted to take out a page. The thing is, we were very close with another girl. The three of us were always together. We could have purchased a page together. But because my best friend and I were friends longer, we thought we shared a special bond and opted to take out a page just the two of us.

Well, as you can imagine, that really hurt our friend. And to this day, I am so, so sorry for how we acted. Because the yearbook page didn’t matter. It wasn’t important. But how I made my friend feel? That was important.

Bottom line: we may not think our day-to-day actions and words carry much impact but that couldn’t be further from the truth. Not only do they affect the people we target, but also, they affect us down the road. Eventually we do feel the repercussions of hurting someone or treating someone unkindly. That’s a consequence of bullying. Whatever temporary satisfaction one may get from targeting someone else pales in comparison to the feelings of regret you eventually feel. You realize that certain fights or conflicts really just weren’t worth it.

WHAT’S THE POINT?

So if all this girl drama doesn’t serve anyone, why do girls engage in relational aggression anyway? There can be a number of reasons.

Some girls may perpetrate mean acts because it makes

them feel in control. Bullying gives them an avenue to exert power over others. Or maybe girls are bored and want to create excitement. Knowing the latest gossip or telling a juicy story might give them a thrill.

Perhaps they participate in rumors or planned schemes against a girl because it makes them feel closer to and more a part of another group. In many instances, girls may feel insecure and try and cover it up by pointing out other people's flaws. If they target another girl first, they may think they are less likely to be a target themselves.

Girls will also bully someone simply because they are jealous. They may feel she is prettier, smarter, or more popular. Targeting her may make her seem less desirable to others. Jealousy is truly an evil emotion that can make girls do crazy things. While everyone will experience jealousy at some point in her life, try not to act on those impulses. Instead, wait it out, let those feelings pass, because it truly is a destructive emotion.

Sometimes a girl is mean to others because she has been the victim of bullying herself. It may be how she releases the unhappy, pent-up feelings she has inside. In bullying someone else, she is probably trying to give off a tough vibe so that girls will be more hesitant to target her, lessening her chances of being a victim again.

This is by no means an excuse for her behavior, but it can be helpful to understand why someone acts the way they do. Instead of thinking her meanness stems from being pure evil, she may have a wounded soul. People who are genuinely

rewind time and take everything back, let's try be positive in everything we do, every decision we make, every action we take, and every word we speak.

Maybe we know a girl is having problems. If it's one of our closer girlfriends, she might have shared glimpses into what is going on in her life. And if that's the case, why on earth would we kick her—or let others kick her—when she's already down? She deserves all the love and support she can get. Cut her some slack. Lift her up; don't bring her down. But what if the girl is not someone we are friends with? What if you notice there is a girl at school who is on the constant receiving end of name-calling and is regularly left out? Maybe people are scared to be seen with her because everyone thinks she's a "freak" or a "weirdo." So everyone ignores her. Have you ever stopped to think what else is going on in her life and what challenges she faces?

MAKE YOUR MOVE

1. FLIP IT OR ZIP IT

If you find yourself tempted to utter some not-so-nice words, *count to ten*. Don't immediately act on impulses that are negatively directed toward someone else. In those ten seconds, ask yourself: Is this action worth it? Can I say this more nicely? Take some time to consider what you want

to say/do, how you want to say/do it, and what the consequences are. If you can't flip it to something nicer, zip it. We have to treat others with the respect and kindness that we want for ourselves.

2. STAND UP

Nobody likes to be treated badly. The sly, underhanded ways girls get at one another is mean—and it hurts. We cannot let these catty, harmful behaviors go under the radar while we sit back passively. It's time to stand up and speak out. People need *our* help.

Think about it: If you were being bullied, wouldn't you want someone to help you? What if it was your sister or brother? Wouldn't you want someone to intervene? If you do your part and the next person does theirs, it will cause a positive chain reaction in how we treat each other. Bullies will be stopped and there will be fewer victims.

Fear often prevents girls from acting—fear that if they stick up for someone, they will become the next target, that they will be made fun of or that their friends will turn on them. I understand that fear. There was a time in middle school when I was afraid to go against my friends. Remember what we said about true friends? Would they turn on you for lending a helping hand?

Do the *right* thing, even if it's not the *popular* thing. Just one person, one action, can change—or maybe even save—someone's life. So stand up. You will look back and be so proud of yourself.

3. GET HELP

You can also stop bullying by bringing it to the attention of an adult.

If you are being bullied, don't keep it to yourself for fear that saying something would make matters worse or because you think no one will believe you. Courage does not come from suffering in silence. Courage is having the strength to ask for help when you need it.

If you witness someone being bullied or if you know that certain classmates are making someone's life very difficult, don't keep it a secret. There *are* people to turn to for help.

4. REACH OUT

Another way to help is to reach out to the person who is being targeted. They likely feel alone and isolated, as if they have nobody by their side. A simple *hello* and *how are you* can brighten someone's day. So can a compliment. Do you like another girl's shoes? Did she make a great play during gym class or have a great answer in science? A little kindness can alleviate the pain someone is experiencing. Invite her to sit with you at lunch or include her in plans, like going for coffee or fro yo. By reaching out, you show that you care. You show that this girl is *seen*. Extend a hand. Make a difference. After all, wouldn't you like someone to do the same for you?



FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITTER, OH MY!

Welcome to the world of social networking—enter at your own risk.

Back in the olden days (sorry, Mom!), girls primarily only had to worry about bullies, conflict, and drama with friends during school hours. They didn't have other means of communication to keep the juicy gossip flowing. Enter the era of cell phones, text messages, and the Internet with Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and other outlets that give us girls access to pretty much anybody at any time or anyplace we like. All of these platforms also provide additional avenues for negativity and bullying...and let me tell you, girls get creative.

I bet the majority of us can remember seeing posts on one of those social networking sites that we wish we hadn't seen. Whether it was a picture posted of all your friends (except for you) that made you feel left out and or a

Essentially, you can view situations with empathy and compassion or you can understand them in a way that further brings you down.

For example, say a girl calls you a mean name, which makes you feel terrible. Your first instinct may be something like: *I am so pissed off! I hate her!* You might then call her something mean in return.

What if we didn't do that? What if our first instinct was to think: *Wow, she must be going through something difficult to lash out like that. I'm going to muster up some compassion and let this one slide. I am choosing to forgive her and not let her comment impact me.* How would that change the dynamic?

We cannot change what was said or done. How we respond, however, has a *major* influence on how we feel about what happened. When we choose to react with anger, we get stressed, tense, possibly even a little scary, and we might take a brief vacation to Crazytown. But when we choose to show love, we get calmer and happier, and we regain control over how we feel instead of letting another person's actions dictate that for us.

And those people who *really* get under your skin, *really* test your patience, and are *really* hard for you to like? They are your greatest teachers. They will challenge you to extend your capacity for compassion. They will push you to be more loving and more forgiving. Accept the challenge!

So the next time someone says something unkind, how will you respond? I hope that you'll show as much love as you can, because every girl has a story. And although they

may not have penned theirs in kindness, you get to decide how yours will be written.

MAKE YOUR MOVE

TO FORGIVE OR NOT TO FORGIVE? THAT IS THE QUESTION

In order to make the right decision, a little homework is needed. (Don't worry. You'll know all the answers.)

Start by picking one girl who evokes the strongest negative reaction in you. Below is a list of questions to answer about what went down between you two.

Grab a journal and write down your responses. This is for your eyes only, so vent and let it all out. This is a safe place to work through your thoughts and emotions, rather than gossiping about them with others.

I encourage you to do this assignment for anyone who you have a long-standing dislike and bad feelings toward. Note: I know this may look like a lot of work, but it really doesn't take long—and it is important! You'll be so much happier when you do.

1. Who is the girl: _____
2. What happened between the two of you?
3. When did this happen?

4. How did it make you feel? (Angry, sad, embarrassed, etc.)
5. Do you still have those feelings? To what extent?
6. Why are you hesitant to forgive her and mend things between you?
7. How has the situation affected you? (Self-esteem, confidence, trust, etc.)
8. Put yourself in the other girl's shoes. Why do you think she acted the way she did?
9. What is your part in this? Be honest. How might you have contributed to (or escalated) the situation?
10. What is one pleasant memory you have with this person?
11. What is one positive characteristic about her? (Yes, I assure you, there is at least one!)
12. Now that we've discussed forgiveness and how it benefits everyone involved, can you forgive this girl? What steps can you take to do that?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- ♡ Every person, every situation can teach us something new and help us grow.
- ♡ Everyone goes through a rough patch.
- ♡ Every day is an opportunity to start fresh.
- ♡ Sometimes to forgive others, you need to forgive yourself first.

Psst- Did you figure out the answer? Forgive!

Whenever there is tension in the air, you can bet the chances are high that it will turn into some type of heated interaction. Almost all instances are blown out of proportion and so much so that the aftermath creates enemies, long-lasting resentments, and distrust. The thing is, the girl or girls involved *still* go to your school, you *still* see them on a regular basis, and they are *still* going to be part of your immediate surroundings until we graduate. It's super hard to escape the animosity that follows a dramatic argument and a friendship breakup. So how we respond to conflict has *way* more importance in our daily lives than we might initially acknowledge. It's all about the approach you take, and that's what we are going to talk about in this chapter. Many of us might be tempted to retaliate or just avoid the problem altogether, but that is bound to backfire. Attacking an aggressor or dodging an argument doesn't really address the problem. Unresolved conflict will snowball into more hurt feelings over time. We need to respond in a way that keeps the drama to a minimum, that sets us up for the best-case-scenario resolution, and that ultimately leaves everyone feeling as good as possible.

While the outcome is also dependent on how the other person responds to conflict, there are still steps we can take to ensure that things get resolved quickly. This chapter has valuable steps to help you handle conflict or issues with your friends. You are bound to be hurt or upset by another girl's actions at some point, so we all should know what to say or how to approach the situation when that time comes.

So take a deep breath (yes, actually breathe) and let's tackle this together!

JUST ROLE WITH IT

The first thing you need do is pinpoint exactly who you are upset with and why. Sometimes it's very obvious, but other times, it's not so clear. For example, say a group of girls are behind the action that upset us. We get mad at all of them, when really it was just one or two girls who were responsible. The others may have only been involved by association. It's hard to think of each girl as separate when they are so closely connected, but we can't fault them for what their other friends did.

Next, it's time to try and figure out the role you had in the situation. Everyone plays a part. It's human nature to go on the defensive when you've been hurt. We think that we are being unjustly attacked. Sometimes that is true, but in most cases we aren't 100 percent the victim. This step is all about owning our actions and words. It's not every day that people have the courage to say, "Hey, you know what? I really messed up and I'm sorry." Or "Yes, it really hurt me when you did ____, but it probably hurt you when I did _____. And for that, I apologize."

So before you get upset, I want you to ask yourself: What was my part in this? Did I do anything that might have perpetuated her actions? This requires *a lot* of honesty. Do a little soul searching, some self-reflection. You

may realize, *Oh wow, maybe she did that to me because of x, y, z.* Understanding the situation from the other person's viewpoint can help put the situation into perspective.

For example, say one of our friends invites a bunch of people over but we weren't invited. That always stings. Maybe she didn't invite us because we didn't invite her to a get-together we had at our house a few months before. We can't hold people to a different standard than we hold ourselves. Although it's really hard to admit our part in a situation, especially when we feel offended or hurt by what someone else did, it is extremely admirable to own the role we played instead of pointing the finger or blaming someone for an issue that may not be entirely her fault.

Maybe your part is holding on to anger and hurt that is building resentment between you and a friend. Perhaps you are still unwilling to move past it, let it go, or have a conversation to say what's on your mind. Take responsibility and acknowledge that. It will help you move forward.

I applaud you for getting honest with yourself—this is a hard step!

SPEAK UP

There have definitely been times when I shied away from saying what was on my mind, only to find that those bad feelings surfaced whenever I saw the person whom I felt hurt by. I tried to avoid the hurt and the awkwardness

of confronting a friend, but that didn't make me feel any better. In hindsight, I wish I had said what was on my mind *when it happened* so I could move on from the situation. Getting relief and resolution from something that hurt you is **extremely** important. No matter how uncomfortable or on-edge you might feel about talking to the other person, trust that any type of closure is better than none. Keep in mind that if you let a situation go that really upset you without discussing it, that person might get the impression that they can do or say whatever they want without regard for your feelings. It is so important that you set a clear boundary and protect yourself from anyone who seems to be constantly throwing digs at you.

Anytime that you are upset or offended by what someone did, you have every right to tell them how you feel and to let them know how hurtful their action was. However, it has to be in a *calm* and *nice* manner. Always. Under *no* circumstance should we lash out, get all our friends to turn on that person, spread nasty gossip, or "make them pay." That is never okay, no matter what they did. Those reactions just make a problem bigger *every single time*. No one will get relief from the situation or resolve the issue.

Really, when someone hurts you, you want them to acknowledge what they did, how it made you feel, and say they're sorry. And a calm, cool, and collected approach is more likely to yield that result. And just as important as *how* we have the conversation is *why* we have the conversation. Which leads me to...

MAKE PEACE NOT WAR

Let's figure out exactly how to go about having this kind of conversation. Before you decide to talk to the girl(s) involved, ask yourself: What am I looking to get out of this conversation? It can be as simple as having your feelings acknowledged and gaining closure. Maybe it's to fix a problem in your relationship, so you can go back to being besties. Hold that intention close to your heart so that when the time comes to try and resolve the issue, how you act and what you say will be in complete alignment with that goal. And whatever your aim, look to make peace not war.

1:1

The next step is planning how and when to talk to them. The most important tip to keep in mind is to *always* keep the conversations one to one. There is power in numbers and people will feel intimidated if they sit down alone while the other person has friends with them. I know it's reassuring to have someone with you for support, but it's uncomfortable for the other person who is solo. So make sure that you guys agree to talk one-on-one and if there is more than one person involved in the situation, have your own separate conversations with each of them. Definitely don't talk to both girls at the same time because they will likely defend each other more strongly, and be less open and responsive to what you have to say. And of course, only talk to the

people involved in the situation or else it will get blown *way* out of proportion.

When you finally talk about what happened, make sure that the conversation takes place in person! It's *so* tempting to text instead of speak face-to-face, but there are about a million reasons why that is *not* a good idea. Texting definitely has its perks, I won't deny that. It's a lot less intimidating, as our cell phones can't exactly yell at us and we're less likely to censor ourselves, but we need to have a better relationship with *people*; not our cell phones.

Talking in person is the most mature and effective way to handle any sort of bad feelings or issues. Not to mention, anyone who suggests doing that appears calm and collected. Face-to-face conversations also have the highest potential to defuse a situation. They completely bypass the frustration of opening such a rude, blunt text. That's not to say that people aren't mean in person, but they tend to be a lot less mean than if they were communicating online or from their phone. Face-to-face conversations get to the point a lot quicker, without the unnecessary layer of drama and attitude that is so often infused in text messages.

"I DO"

One simple step when speaking with someone can *totally* change an entire conversation and prevent it from taking a turn for the worse. What is this secret? When you want to

express how you feel to a friend, use "I" statements. "I felt really hurt when ____ happened." It will create a *big* change in how the other person feels and responds.

Constantly starting sentences with "you," "you," "you" is accusatory and puts the other person on the defensive right from the start. Would you want to sit down with someone who is listing off all of these things that you've done wrong? I would definitely feel bombarded and defensive!

Even if the other person is at fault, there are certainly ways for us to express how we feel without pointing out all of their flaws and mistakes. When we say, "This made me feel..." instead of "You made me feel..." it puts the attention on the effects of the actions, which is a completely different kind of conversation.

In doing so, you will elicit a response in the person that is much more desirable. They will be more open and receptive to your feelings and more likely to listen to what you have to say, as opposed to being closed off, guarded, and unwilling to understand your perspective. The majority of times, the real conflict is about feelings anyway, not necessarily facts. You can argue about facts all day long and exchange opinions on what you both think happened. When it comes down to it, people just want to be heard and they want their feelings to be acknowledged. Keeping the conversation centered on your feelings as well as caring about the other person's is key to talking about and resolving conflict. That is way more important and productive than trying to get someone to accept blame.

R&R

This next step in addressing any kind of issue or controversy takes a great deal of restraint but works in our favor *every* time. This R&R does not stand for rest and relaxation, although that probably sounds great right about now! In this case, it actually stands for *respond* with *restraint*. We shouldn't react. Although it may not seem like it, there is a very big difference between the two. When a situation occurs that ignites immediate and strong emotions in us, we are tempted to react right away. But when we reACT, we are literally acting on our emotions, which in a tense situation are at an all-time high. Of course we are going to say and do things that we don't mean when we are far from centered.

Whereas reacting is based on a gut reaction that is usually inappropriate and irrational, the other way contains a very vital element—stepping back. Responding with restraint gives us that time to take in a situation, collect our thoughts, control our emotions, *and then* decide the best course of action to take. When we react, our emotions run the show and we have less of a choice. When we respond, our reasoning takes more of a central role. Responding is more thoughtful and contains more logic. We *think* about how we want to respond before we do it. Conversely, reacting lets our emotions drive us forward. As much as we may want to address an emotionally charged situation ASAP, when we respond to a situation, we are able to take a better

perfect just the way you are. Don't ever let someone make you think otherwise.

You should want your true personality to show because **there is *nothing more attractive than your real, authentic self***. That is when you shine the most. That is when you are the most *beautiful*, the most *engaging*, and the most *magnetic*. If you are loud and silly, be loud and silly. If you are shy and reserved, be shy and reserved. Own it! That doesn't make you any less exciting or loveable. It's when we try and be a different version of ourselves that we become unhappy. You don't have to be anyone other than you. In fact, the world could use all the *you* you have to offer.

Throughout my life, whenever I've been the most *me*, my life has been the most successful, *in all areas*... I am so happy with who I am, I feel great in my relationships and friendships, and I feel inspired to set high goals. In that state, things have a funny way of falling into place. Writing this book, for example, has been a total blessing and was the result of being myself, even when it meant stepping away from the crowd.

Pouring your heart into something is not easy; you're being vulnerable and putting yourself up for judgment. However, when you are being yourself, when you are being the real deal, good things flow to you naturally because you're right where you need to be. When you're trying to control, manipulate, grasp, or pretend, you don't feel so great about yourself because you know you're *not being yourself*. Stuff comes up, funky feelings head your way, and

you tend to be more irritable, stressed, and sad. You wonder why you can't just be happy. And that's because you've lost sight of the insanely incredible person that you are. The good news is, you can get her back.

When you stay true to yourself, you will always be happiest. It takes courage to stand your ground and be yourself. In those moments where you feel uncertain, nervous, or pressured to conform, trust your gut. Go with your instinct, even if it sets you apart. That is *always* the right decision.

You deserve all the happiness in the world. It doesn't matter what mistakes you've made in the past. You need to know that you are good enough, special enough, lovely enough, smart enough, wonderful enough just the way you are. You are pretty spectacular. And reread this paragraph any time you need a little reminder. ☺

EMBRACE DIVERSITY

Equally important in how we view our personal unique traits is how we view them in other people. We are *so* quick to label someone as "weird" or a "freak" just because they have interests or hobbies that are very different from our own. Maybe they do something that is foreign to us that we have absolutely zero interest in. Let me ask you a question: What if every single person in the world was exactly like us? Really think about that for a sec. What if every single person was just like you? Wouldn't you be so bored? I certainly would! There would be nothing to say because I

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~~~~~ The Cold Shoulder. ~~~~~  
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