**There Are No Mean Girls**It is normal for kids to push each other buttons. And it is normal for them to hurt one another if they feel under stress, isolated, or disconnected from parents or friends. However, even though it is normal, we don’t want to say “boys will be boys” or “girls are always mean to one another”.

Instead, we can change how we view the boy or girl who is hurting their friends or classmates. Rather than “bully” or “mean girl”, we might instead think that he or she is a child that feels out of sync, is upset by stressors, or is an “amateur” socializer looking for coaching.

*Out of Sync*--is the child feeling left out by others. Or perhaps is struggling with keeping up in other areas of his/her life, and find that dominating others feels “successful?”

*Stressed Out-*-is the child experiencing extra stress. Most children today are much more stressed out than previous generations, from school, from stressed parents, from being over scheduled, etc. What can be done to help the child feel more centered?

*Amateur Hour*--is the child trying out new social skills? Some children graduate to new levels of social prowess sooner than their friends. Often they get labeled as bullies because they can perform sophisticated social maneuvers better than their age peers, and they seem to adults as conniving or malicious. But, really, children are not intending to hurt their friends. Often, they do not understanding the consequences of manipulating their friends (“queen bee” kids, and their lieutenants, pay a price for being socially adept, even if they don’t recognize it).

**Here are some suggestions for adults**

***(****These suggestions are written for parents of girls but can be applied to boys too)*

**Expect girls to respect everyone, but don't expect them to *like* everyone.**   
Grown-ups don’t like everyone they meet, why do we expect children. Grown-ups are expected to be civil and ideally to be friendly, considerate, and open-minded.

We can say, “you don’t have to *like* Jane or Sally. You do have to get along, both at school and elsewhere. I know that it is hard. I’m proud of you for working on getting along, even when you don’t like someone.”

**Behave the way you want the child to behave.**   
How can we expect our kids to behave if we don’t? Kids don’t always notice what we want them to notice. So you might have to point out how you treat your friends, neighbors, and colleagues. It is great to say what you like about your friendships, and about how you get along with others when it is difficult.

**Don't get over-invested in her social life.**   
Experts say that sometimes elementary-school girls' social pain is exacerbated by parents.

**Don't interview for pain.**   
"When girls get rejected, parents feel it too," says Michael Thompson. "But I encourage parents not to keep asking their daughters questions about who did what to whom. This doesn't help and it actually stirs up their feelings -- and yours. A better focus is helping your girls learn to take care of themselves. We absolutely want to comfort and console, but we don't want to dig for it out of our own anxiety or desire to fix things."

**Help your daughter learn how to speak directly.**"You can't fight her battles and can't choose her friends," says Steiner-Adair. "But you can help her develop the tools to say things like, 'It hurts my feelings when you don't talk to me at school,' or 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings that way.' "

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**Coaching vs. Conducting**

We might see our role as coaching our daughters, rather than as a teacher or counselor. The emotions that they are experiencing are natural and their behaviors are —to them—logical reactions to their strong feelings. Working through feelings and the behaviors that go with them is great practice for the more complex social situations of the adult world.

It is problematic to label some girls as “mean” and some as “nice”. Kids are experimenting with power and where they fit in within their social world. Label behaviors as positive or negative, and coach for pro-social behavior. Avoid labeling the children.

Some good coaching questions:

"What did you try?"

"How did it work?"

"What else can you try?"