

# INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



## A Girl's Way

*Girls are more inclined to want people to like them and have a greater desire to be accepted. It's important to open up conversations around values and beliefs.*

Article contributed by Catherine Gerhardt

Raising teen girls was never meant to be easy. With two pre-teen daughters myself I am keenly aware of the challenges that lie ahead. Already there are circumstances with friends, and there will be situations with boyfriends, work and online relationships, then add into that mix possible issues with body image and self esteem. Whew! That sounds like a potential mine field.



Girls can tend to be too trusting when it comes to relationships and may not pay enough attention to their instincts, that intuition that helps keep them safe. In general girls are more inclined to want people to like them and have a greater desire to be accepted. It is important that we open up conversations around values and beliefs.

Important safety discussions for girls:

### Friends vs. Cliques

Friends are those people that we share a lot in common with. We enjoy hanging out with them and supporting each other. Friendship groups share values and beliefs and welcome new friends.

Cliques are more restrictive. They have rules that set out who can be 'in' and how they should behave. There can be a lot of pressure to conform to a clique and it's usually controlled by a leader.

Have discussions with your daughter about knowing what they want and what they believe in, and emphasise the importance of keeping true to themselves. Are they being true to themselves in their friendships and activities when in a peer group? One of the messages we use in our home is 'Who is the boss of you?' Does your daughter have the skills to be the boss of herself or will she easily allow someone to take that position?

### Peer Pressure

Almost everyone finds themselves in a peer pressure situation at some point. Help your daughter understand that when something makes her feel uncomfortable, this means the situation is wrong for her.

Encourage her to know who she is and keep to her values. Take some time out this week to sit down with her and write some down and have them posted as discussion points for when you need them. Is she living in a way that respects her core values?

It is also worthwhile to have a plan and build discussions around potential peer pressure situations, like alcohol, drugs or sex? Think ahead and discuss what she can do and even have her practise what she can do or say. A lot of families have a code phrase that teens can use if they are feeling pressure and want to get out of a situation. One family I know uses 'mother' as their alert word; if they hear that word or have it written in a text that is their cue to mobilise.

### No means no

Believe it or not, NO is a word I want to hear my daughters using a lot as they navigate their way through their teenage years. The word NO is a powerful word. NO is a complete sentence. It is the most important word they can use to keep themselves safe. If someone does not listen to their NO, then that person is trying to take control of them or the situation. Help your daughter to understand that if they let someone talk them out of their NO, they are letting them take control. No means no – you do not need to say anything else. Let's say, for example, someone approached your daughter and asked to help carry her school bag and she says, 'No, thank you. I can do it myself. I don't have far to go'. This tells the person that she may be open to conversation and may be able to be convinced. NO means no negotiation.

The need to be noticed can be strong enough to lead girls into risky behaviours or behaviours that do not fit in with their core values. As parents, we need to support our girls to find and know their core beliefs and values and empower them to be true to these ideas and standards.

If the way your daughter wants to be remembered does not match the way she thinks others will remember her, then it is time to make some changes. If your daughter finds herself questioning what she is doing, get her to reflect on her list of core beliefs and values. The choices they make now will help build the foundation for the woman they are going to become.

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Kidproof provides proactive and preventative child and family education programs.

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