

Tough Cookies

Girl Scouts launch a nationwide offensive against a spreading bully culture among young girls

BY JESSICA REAVES

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My personal experience with the Girl Scouts is, at best, limited. None of my friends was a member, so there were no uniforms to covet. Exactly once a year I became sharply aware of the Scouts' existence--during the annual cookie sale, when Thin Mints were briefly elevated to food-group status. Otherwise, I dimly (and imprudently) acknowledged them as a relic of the 1950s, caught up in dated gender roles and archaic activities.

Perhaps that's my loss. The Girl Scouts, it turns out, might have kept me from answering the siren call of the Mean Girl: Once upon a time, I was one of Them.

It wasn't a conscious thing; I didn't wake up one day and think, "Gosh, today I'd like to make another girl's life really, really miserable by saying cruel things about her shoes and then ignoring her on the playground." It just kind of happened. I wasn't looking to be mean; I was trying to maintain my tenuous grasp on my place in the social pecking order, and the only way my 9-year-old brain knew how to do that was by calling another girl, whose social standing was even more tenuous than mine, "a big nerd." And then I told her she had ugly hair and that her shoes smelled.

I wasn't the only one who made this girl's life unbearable. The 4th grade was teeming with Mean Girls, each of us more insecure than the next. And so, like carrion birds, we circled our weakest member and pecked the living daylight out of her. I can't recall this phase of my life without blushing with shame. I'm a feminist, after all, raised by feminist parents and, like a lot of girls today, carefully schooled in the philosophy of inclusion, tolerance and generally not being awful to other people. And still, I turned into a vicious little person for a full school year.

There's cold comfort in the knowledge that I'm not alone. Name-calling and sudden, inexplicable banishment to social Siberia play out across the country every day. In classrooms, at birthday parties, at summer camps, on sports teams, girls are constantly sharpening their interpersonal claws, seeking new ways to exclude and manipulate each other. Despite mounting anecdotal evidence--as well as movies, songs and books dedicated to the topic of Mean Girls--there is no scientific consensus on whether girls have actually undergone a gender-wide, biological shift toward cruelty. It's possible they are simply responding, superficially, to a less generous, faster-paced, more cutthroat society by disposing of long-standing social expectations ("sugar and spice and all things nice") and behaving more like . . . boys. Or maybe worse than boys.

Rosalind Wiseman, author of the best-selling "Queen Bees and Wannabes," is unconvinced that girls are much different today than they were 50 or even 100 years ago. "Girls have always been relationally aggressive," Wiseman says. She believes parents, many of whom are geared up to see danger or threats wherever they look, are more willing than ever to excuse hostile behavior in their children.

One thing is certain: Over the past decade, the ubiquity of e-mail, instant messaging and cell phones has made things far easier for bullies who use words and innuendo as their weapons. And even as girls make spectacular strides in academics, eclipsing their male classmates on tests and in the college-admissions game, they're surpassing boys in other ways that none of the "Reviving Ophelia" crowd could have expected, or certainly would have hoped for. Girls, according to a Clemson University study, are nearly twice as likely to bully or be bullied electronically than boys; another long-term study shows girls are responsible for 61 percent of reported in-person bullying incidents.

Making matters worse, physical violence, once the domain of boys, has thoroughly infiltrated girl culture. The U.S. Justice Department reports that between 1992 and 2003, the number of girls arrested for assault rose by 41 percent. Among boys, the increase was 4.3 percent.

Clearly, girls and the people who love them are facing a crisis. Physical, emotional or psychological injuries can end a friendship, ruin a school year or, in extreme circumstances, prompt a suicide attempt. Parents and teachers are at wits' end. What can we do to curb, or reverse, the disturbing rise of the Mean Girl? Enter the Girl Scouts.

When Juliette Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts in 1912, she envisioned an organization that would provide girls "an alternative to being either married or in the factories." One of the country's first female aviators, Low wasn't interested in promoting traditional roles for girls or women. One of the first merit badges available to a Girl Scout was not sewing or baking or any of the other "womanly arts," but for telegraphy.

Nearly a century later, Low's progressive fervor has largely been forgotten by the non-Scouting public. "We have a certain image," concedes Brooke Wiseman (no relation to Rosalind Wiseman), former CEO of the Girl Scouts of Chicago and current CEO of Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana, acknowledging the old-fashioned, goody-two-shoes stereotype that still haunts today's Scouts. "We're working hard to counteract it. We want to be recognized for what we really do. We're building girls of courage, confidence and character."

That has meant facing up to some hard truths. Though membership has held steady over the years at about 3.6 million in the U.S., many Scout leaders felt the organization was losing touch with members who needed it most and losing relevance in the eyes of potential members. The results of a two-year study completed in 2003 by the Girl Scouts Research Institute confirmed the concerns: A majority of girls said adults weren't acknowledging some of their greatest fears, and two of the top three were verbal bullying and teasing.

The numbers propelled the issue to the top of the Girl Scouts' to-do list. "Girls told us they weren't feeling physically unsafe, but emotionally unsafe, and that adult supervision was nowhere to be found," says Courtney Shore, vice president of communications for Girl Scouts of the USA. "We're trying to raise awareness among adults so they can recognize signs of bullying and step in."

The Girl Scouts, with their large national presence, are in a prime position to challenge the Mean Girl paradigm. They aren't the only ones who've noticed a surge in bad-girl behavior; scores of workshops and events, including the Empower Program at Mt. Holyoke College, created by "Odd Girl Out" author Rachel Simmons, are popping up across the country.

But as the Girl Scouts leadership sees it, their curricula have the potential to make an entire generation of girls more aware of teasing and bullying and, in theory, give them the tools to stop it from doing any more harm. For Chicago Girl Scouts, that means identifying and contending with the social habits of the 13,500 Girl Scouts who make up the area's 800 troops, the largest council in the country.

Most people remember high school as the most socially loaded years of their lives (The lunch table dramas! The sting of dateless proms! The nerds being stuffed into lockers!). But today the most aggressive ostracizing and clique-forming begins in middle school. According to the Girl Scouts Research study, pre-teen girls ages 8 to 12, or Juniors in Girl Scouts parlance, named "being teased or made fun of" as their top concern.

"Our program is age-differentiated, which is very deliberate," says Shore. "We . . . need to make sure our messages are relevant in their lives, that they're not being treated like little girls when they're in middle school." Anti-teasing and bully-prevention programs are geared to each of the

five Scout levels.

For example, programs for older Scouts (Cadettes, ages 11-14 and Seniors, 14-17) include "Take Charge," a violence-prevention program, and "Uniquely Me," which aims to bolster self-esteem and tolerance of differences. The younger Scouts (Daisies, who are 5 and 6; Brownies, ages 6-8; and Juniors, who use a combination of the curricula for older and younger girls) are steered toward "Why Tease?," a glossy, 12-page picture book produced in 2002 by four Chicago Senior Scouts. It tells the story of Mousy, whose quiet demeanor puts off the other kids, until one of them realizes they can, in fact, all play together.

Julie Piwowarczyk is one of the authors of "Why Tease?," which earned her a Gold Award, an elite designation similar to Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts. Piwowarczyk, who graduated this spring from Marquette University, remembers sitting down with her co-writers, trying to come up with a subject worth tackling.

"We were talking about school shootings, and someone mentioned that the shooters had been bullied or teased a lot," she says. "Someone very close to me was bullied by other boys for a couple of years." Eventually, the teasing got to a point that her friend had to transfer schools. "I felt really strongly about teaching kids that teasing isn't funny, that it can be really serious."

The topic proved a natural fit for the Gold Award project. "Teasing is something we'd all dealt with and could relate to," explains Piwowarczyk. Their group leader suggested they make a book and a Girl Scout patch to go with it. Patches, like badges, are a major part of the Scout experience, but unlike badges, which members earn by accomplishing specific tasks and acquiring new skills, patches are given for more subjective learning activities.

To earn the "Why Tease?" patch, girls must address a series of talking points, such as, "In the Girl Scout Law it says that you promise to be a 'sister to every Girl Scout.' Does this apply only to other Girl Scouts? What would you do to make sure that you are being a sister to everyone on the playground?" "Draw a picture of your friends. Name one person not in your picture that you will try to include during recess or free time."

The exercise is self-administered, Piwowarczyk says. "We want members to reflect on the issues and answer questions for themselves."

But tying social conduct to quantitative rewards like patches raises the question of how a leader knows if someone "gets it," or is simply parroting back "correct" responses. Unlike other patch-worthy achievements, like building a Web page, mastering the "Why Tease?" message is hard to measure. How a girl responds in real life, experts say, when they're surrounded by friends and classmates, not teachers and Scout leaders, is the only test of a program's success.

"This can't be about getting a patch. It needs to be about learning behaviors," says Rosalind Wiseman. She generally applauds the Girl Scouts' efforts, but warns against the temptation to rely on formulaic, one-size-fits-all "solutions."

Of course, whether from personal experience or watching Lindsay Lohan's hapless outsider in the film "Mean Girls" suffer humiliation at the hands of the "Plastics," or cringing as the high school in "Heathers" descends into anarchy, any girl knows that changing behaviors isn't easy when you believe your very existence depends on acting a certain way.

In reporting this story, I asked a wide variety of girls about teasing and being mean. As I listened to their stories, which ranged from horrific to merely annoying experiences, a common thread emerged: It's rare for any girl to spend her entire school career as prey or predator. Kids grow up, allegiances shift, and this year's Mean Girl is a hair's breadth away from becoming the next victim, cowed by the vicious pronouncements of the latest ruler of the Girl Realm.

Dianna Daniel, a soft-faced 19-year-old who spent 12 years in the Girl Scouts, is now a junior leader for a troop of 8-to-11-year-olds. Articulate and soft-spoken, the North Side native will begin her second year at Truman College this fall. She wears her brown hair pulled into a ponytail and her left ear is lined with jewelry; a tongue stud flashes as she speaks.

"I think the teasing starts in 3rd grade," she says. "I was guilty of bullying when I was in the 3rd grade because I looked up to my older sister, and she knew what was cool and what wasn't. So I figured I knew everything." And she let everyone know it.

By the time Daniel got to Lake View High School, the tables had turned. "I was a special-education student, so I got a lot of teasing and bullying because of that," she says. "I never felt safe, no matter how much security was there. I'm 18, I'm in college, and I still deal with people making comments and bullying." Her new defense is silence: Just ignore it, because letting it get to you is what the bullies want.

As a junior leader, Daniel does her best to pass along her hard-earned wisdom to the girls in her troop. She says she's astonished by how mean the teasing can be, even among girls as young as 8. "I don't remember there being as much teasing when I was that age," Daniel says. "Even during our meetings, some girls will tease each other, and you have to pull them aside and tell them, 'You can't do that. This is supposed to be a safe place.' "

What do the girls tease each other about? Everything and nothing, Daniel says. Everything from wardrobe choices to crayon technique is fair game. Some of it is just kids jostling for attention, she says, but some of it is "definitely meant to be mean," and some of the interactions are tinged with something more menacing than spite. "They're a lot more aggressive." Daniel says. "I remember when I was in school, someone would make fun of me in a normal-sounding voice. But now you can tell there's a lot of anger there." Daniel pauses, and shakes her head. "It's scary to me."

Daniel and others interviewed declined to elaborate on the taunts and threats they'd received or overhead. But a quick troll through several Web logs reveals a fairly universal Mean Girl language, which occasionally flirts with real viciousness or threats of violence, but usually sticks close to a prearranged script. From the message boards of YM magazine: "like i'll just be minding my own business and her and her stupid friends come up right beside me and be like omg, shes so ugly. omg, look at her clothes. omg, this. omg that. i kinda want to punch them in their faces. cause no one looks perfect every freaking day. its been going on for like 2 years now."

Thirteen-year-old Kelly Sineni could be a poster child for well-adjusted adolescence. A Girl Scout and 8th grader at Smyser School on the Northwest Side, Sineni represents a tiny sub-category of middle-school girls. Although acutely aware of Mean Girls and their methods, she seems to be remarkably unaffected by them.

"It all started in the 5th grade," she says. "Girls started saying mean things about each other, starting rumors talking about what people were wearing." While boys' fights quickly turn physical, "Girls seem to hold grudges and want to get revenge." Asked if she ever confronted bullying, Sineni pauses to think. "I used to go to day camp," she recalls. "One girl would say these really mean things to another girl, who was quiet. I just told her to stop picking on her. I stood up." Was she scared? "No, not really," says Sineni. "I knew the [mean] girl."

She also knew how to express herself without escalating the situation, a skill she says she learned from the Girl Scouts. "I'll always go to my Girl Scout leaders," when overwhelmed by an interpersonal problem, Sineni says. "They help us resolve things. Or I'd talk to my best friends, and they're all in Girl Scouts."

Demographically, the Girl Scouts organization is undergoing seismic shifts, creating a new audience for its programs and extending the organization's reach well beyond its roots in white,

middle-class suburbia. The Chicago Scouts, for example, are an impressively diverse group. According to 2005 figures, membership is 38 percent white, 38 percent black and 1 percent Asian. At least 20 percent of members did not report their race.

Within those numbers, another trend is emerging. Latina membership in the Girl Scouts surged 22 percent between 2003 and 2006. It's not surprising, then, that the Chicago Girl Scouts would find a warm welcome at Eli Whitney Elementary School. The Scouts have worked with the school, in the Little Village neighborhood, for 17 years. Whitney's student population is 99 percent Hispanic, and some of the youngest kids don't speak much English.

Four evenings a week, as many as 100 girls, ages 5 to 13, come to the school for lectures, activities and games. These meetings, like those in 23 other Chicago Public Schools, represent a partnership between local community groups and the Girl Scouts, which brings after-school programs, including Scouting, to some 900 girls in Chicago's low-income, under-served communities. Simone Alexander, a coordinator for the Little Village Community Development Corporation, oversees the scouting activities at Whitney. The impact of the program on bullying and teasing is hard to measure, she says, but she has seen progress at the grade-school level. "I'd say the program functions best for the younger girls, those in 1st to 5th grades. By the time girls are in 6th grade, they relate differently to each other."

The 100-year-old school building, which anchors a neighborhood dotted with bodegas and streets lined with neat, single-family homes, is clearly showing its age. The cheerful decorations and bright murals can't quite dispel the dreariness of the Whitney basement, the fluorescent lights and the dampness hovering over the carefully aligned lunch tables where 50 girls are seated, talking and giggling.

Some of the younger kids are drawing, carefully plucking crayons from a pile in the middle of their table. This is the Girl Scout troop for some 100 girls, all students at Eli Whitney, many of them referred to the program by their principal, Dr. Miguel Velazquez. Renee Knight, 45, has been working with the Scouts for three years and has seen every variety of bullying, teasing and name-calling.

"It starts young," she says, shaking her head. "One girl said something mean to another girl, who started crying. They were in kindergarten." Among the youngest girls, Knight says, the bullying is completely arbitrary ("She's my friend, not yours"; "You can't use that color, because that's my color."). It's an accurate predictor of the capricious, unpredictable rules of social survival that govern the middle-school years. ("You can only wear jeans on Monday"; "Ponytails are only for Thursdays.")

As Knight hurries off to secure the peace and the evening's activities continue, a few girls approach me. Some, like 12-year-old Yesenia Savanas and Stephanie Moncayo, 13, both 7th-graders at Eli Whitney, are eager to chat.

I ask them if they see bullying at their school. They both nod. "There's punching, and name-calling," Yesenia says. "The girls call each other bad names and talk about each other." What about the boys? "Boys hit each other, because they think it's an easier way to solve a problem," says Stephanie.

The girls took part in the Take Charge! program run by the Girl Scouts of Chicago and the Chicago Bar Association. Designed to promote non-violent conflict resolution, the joint venture targeted girls in middle and high schools on the city's Near West Side, Garfield Park, Lawndale and Lower West Side. Stephanie said it provided a forum for a difficult subject. "Sometimes it's hard to talk to friends about [bullying and teasing] because they don't understand."

Nine-year-old Ashley Chavez, a quiet girl who smiles from under a thick veil of dark hair, says that "when girls get mad they use bad words. And sometimes they will sit at a different lunch table

even though they were best friends." Has she ever been bullied? She nods.

"When I was in preschool," she begins in her soft voice, "there was a girl who was taller than me, and she told me I was too little to hang out with her." Ashley stops, looking up at me to make sure I'm listening. "So I told her that everyone is small sometimes, and who cares if people are big or small, they're still our friends."

Along with other 8-to-12-year-old girls, Ashley took part in the Girl Scouts' "Uniquely Me" program, which tries to promote self-esteem. The theory is that high self-esteem is a useful tool in counteracting bullying behavior and makes girls less likely to be bullies themselves.

Self-esteem is a kind of Holy Grail of Scouting and similar organizations. Which is great, up to a point, says Rosalind Wiseman, the author. "We all want strong daughters," she affirms, "but there are a lot of mean, mean girls who have incredibly high self-esteem. I tell girls I talk to that I don't care if they're friends with each other, but they have a responsibility to treat each other with dignity."

At Whitney and other schools nationwide, a now-familiar threat to civility has emerged: Cell phones, ubiquitous and, increasingly, infinitesimal, can be smuggled into just about any classroom or meeting. Set on silent mode, they're nearly impossible to ferret out. That's also bad news for teachers, who can hardly expect their lesson

plans to compete with riveting text-message discussions of Amanda's new hair color, or how hot Ben is or how, like, heinous Sara's skirt looks.

It's also bad news for girls, according to one recent study by the University of California-Davis, which found female bullies were increasingly using text messaging--more than the Internet or physical confrontations--to torment their victims.

And then there's the siren song of the incoming call. "Talking on the phone has become a real issue," Renee Knight says. "In the middle of class or a meeting, a phone will vibrate. They'll always say they 'have to' answer it but I tell them, if it's between 6 and 8 p.m. [meeting time] and it's not an emergency, they don't answer it."

Meanwhile, text-messaging has eliminated any need to answer the phone, she notes wryly. "They text the boys during the meetings," Knight shakes her head. "Just letting them know who's here and who's not."

Cyber-bullying has expanded the reach of Mean Girls exponentially, agrees Courtney Shore. "Even if phones are off while they're in a classroom, they can still be used as cameras," she says. "And it's become the norm among kids to put up fake MySpace pages to make fun of other kids."

"Odd Girl Out" author Rachel Simmons is the director of The Girls' Leadership Institute and the Empower Program, which runs workshops for girls and their mothers. Their motto: "Violence shouldn't be a rite of passage."

Simmons' expertise on the topic isn't entirely academic. When she was 8, her friends started telling lies about her and ran away from her, and she had no one to sit with at lunch.

Later, she stood on the other side of the bullying fence. "At 14, I was a total wannabe," she recalls. "I was popular but always on the margins. I hurt a friend of mine," in cahoots with another girl, "by ending our friendship. This caused her so much pain that she left the school."

She notes that before the wired age, a student could write something on the bathroom wall and perhaps 10 people would see it before it got washed off. "Today," she says, "you can spread a rumor or a picture with the press of a button. Delete buttons and cache-clearing erase all signs of

a bully's handiwork after the damage is done."

"It's this invisible force," says Courtney Shore. "Kids don't know who or what to fight back against."

The Internet also has introduced a lack of impulse control when it comes to bullying, says Simmons. "You can't see anyone's face as you're typing. So you have this immediate gratification of satisfying your instincts" without having to deal with the real-time consequences.

Rosalind Wiseman believes that cyber-bullying is sometimes exacerbated by parents' good intentions. "Parents are giving their children cell phones because they want them to be safe. They think the world is this really scary place." But rather than keep girls safe, she says, the phones provide "a way for girls to destroy or be destroyed. Girls take pictures of a girl they hate in the locker room after gym class, and text them to all her friends with these really vicious messages, like 'You're a big fat skank and everyone hates you.' "

But in some cases, blogs and online message boards are used to challenge the supremacy of Mean Girls. Message boards at call4ally.com, a blog staffed by a girl named Ally and her mother, a former marketing executive, included this post from LuckyCharm: "I was thinking . . . who put mean girls in charge? I'm so tierd [sic] of them getting what they want! Why do we let them rule? How can we stop them? What if nice girls ruled vs. mean girls? How can we make that happen? Am I dreaming? Got any ideas on how to stop mean girls?"

A response from TexasIdeas: "Sure. Surefire solutions? Not so much."

Everyone, including the Girl Scout leadership, agrees that solutions are not in the cards right now. There are too many variables at play--including race, class, age, geography--in the Mean Girl epidemic for there to be a single cure.

But there are innovative, independent programs springing up all over the country, including "Chicks and Cliques," in the D.C. suburb of Park Lawn, and Simmons' Empower Program. And that's as it should be, according to Scouts leader Shore: "We're studying this issue as we go. We're not saying we have the answers."

She'll get no argument from author and educator Wiseman, who views the Scouts' programs favorably but offers a few caveats. First, she says, it's important for the Scouts to be aware that their own leaders are susceptible to this Mean Girl behavior.

"The dynamic of the Girl Scouts makes this a particular issue. Some troops have co-leaders, which can lead to difficult power struggles, and then there are mothers who lead troops that include their daughters." That's a situation, she contends, that can lead to preferential treatment--"Queen Bee" Moms enabling their "Queen Bee" daughters--or sweeping problems under the rug.

Parents in general, she notes, want to believe that "[They] have these perfect children who are so nice and want to be friends" with everyone, and most parents will defend their children against every accusation, no matter what evidence they're presented with.

"Just as it's 100 percent predictable that parents will disbelieve other adults who talk about their kids, it's 100 percent predictable that parents will believe their children more than any claim against them."

The lesson for parents, she says, is that they have to be good models. "Otherwise, girls are going to say, 'Yeah, yeah, we're supposed to be nice to each other, but look at the way the adults are acting.' The same goes for teachers in schools." And, of course, troop leaders.

To those Girl Scout leaders, Wiseman offers this advice: Stay engaged in the day-to-day challenges, however harsh, in girls' lives. "I've worked with the Girl Scouts," she says. "I'm very challenging with them about creating substantive programs."

She worries that, despite the talk of age-appropriateness and relevancy, the Scouts, like any other large organization, run the risk of implementing programs that are too broad or not geared specifically enough to the realities of members' lives.

Meanwhile, I've resigned myself to the fact that Mean Girls will never disappear completely. Social Darwinism, which is simply a fancy term for people walking all over each other, may be, for better or worse, intrinsic to the human condition.

But that's not to say I don't think things can't get better. If the Girl Scouts, or any other organization brave enough to take on the problem, can keep one girl from teasing, taunting or picking on another, they'll have my deepest admiration.

As well as the gratitude of millions of little girls who are just now testing the social waters of elementary school, blithely unaware of the piranhas lurking just below the surface.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Whether you're worried about your daughter's behavior, or just want to keep an eye on her group's delicate social dynamics, the key is to stay involved, listen and keep the lines of communication open. But when is it time to call in professional help?

Dr. Suzanne McNeill (PhD), a clinical psychologist in Chicago with a private practice specializing in adolescents, offers parents this advice:

Q: What are some signs that my daughter is being teased or bullied?

A: If you notice your daughter starting to avoid social situations or not wanting to go to school, those are pretty clear indications that something's going on.

Also, look out for new physical complaints with no clear underlying physical problem, such as stomachaches. Also nightmares and loss of concentration. Sometimes girls who are being bullied start to tease or bully their younger siblings or start talking to their parents in bullying tones.

Q: What can I do to help her?

A: One of the difficulties in addressing bullying or teasing with your daughter is that when girls are being victimized, their sense of shame and humiliation is so enormous that they will often deny any problem. Usually by the time they volunteer any information, they're so injured and mortified that parents need to react quickly, first by reassuring their child that the bullying isn't about them--it's about the insecurities of the bully.

It often helps if parents can look back on their own experiences with bullies, especially if a mom can say, "I remember this happening to me." It can really help to know that people do get through this.

I tend to caution moms that while you feel sad and angry, and you want to show your daughter that you empathize, you don't want her to feel that she has upset you by revealing what's going on in her life.

Q: What behaviors can I chalk up as "normal," and when is it time to call in a professional, for example a psychologist or therapist?

The difference between "normal" behavior and behavior that needs to be addressed lies in whether anyone is getting hurt.

If that's the case, therapy can be helpful in that, by telling their story over and over, girls often find the words become less painful, less raw. There's a certain power in telling someone what's happening to you and having them empathize and support your reaction.

Q: Should I contact someone at my daughter's school--an administrator or teacher--if I suspect bullying is going on there?

Yes, if teasing and bullying are going on, the school should know about it. But you need to tell a counselor or administrator or a teacher who can deal with it without identifying the bully. That's just going to make the target more vulnerable.

Q: What are some signs my daughter has become a Mean Girl? How should I deal with this behavior?

Parents might hear from other parents or from the school that their daughter is bullying someone. Girls who are bullies are often socially savvy enough to behave in a certain way around adults, so you may not see anything firsthand. Often, kids who are bullies are depressed or angry, just like their targets.

If your daughter is victimizing someone, you need to be clear with her that the bullying behavior is disappointing and unacceptable, and that you're not going to tolerate her treating someone badly.