The Friendship Project®

Helping Your Teen Stay on the FIELD™

Managing Meanness:
When Friendships Turn Mean

During the teen years, friendships can sometimes include “frenemy” behaviour - when someone who is considered a friend also says or does mean or hurtful things.

Let your teen know that these situations happen and that learning how to respond is a skill. Encourage your teen to focus on their breathing to stay steady and grounded. Staying calm can be difficult, but it helps your teen feel more in control and respond with confidence.

As you learned in the webinar, having a quick, confident comeback prepared can help your teen stay calm and in control when someone says something mean. The goal is to stop the meanness without escalating the situation or making it worse.

This skill helps your teen protect their self-respect and stay on the FIELD, even when someone else steps off it.

Encourage your teen to practise these phrases so they feel natural and easier to use. You can also practise them together at home.

Calm, Quick Comebacks

- “Ouch.”
- “That’s not okay.”
- “Could you repeat that?”
- “What was your intent in saying that?”
- “I need some time and space to think about that.”

These responses help your teen stay calm, set clear boundaries, and maintain their self-respect.

Friends can make mistakes and have difficult moments. However, it is important to help your teen notice patterns of behaviour over time. Remind your teen that they deserve friendships where they feel respected, valued, and included.

With you on the FIELD,

Dr Mary
Clinical Psychologist