

We Want You to Know

Kids Talk about Bullying

DEBORAH ELLIS



INTRODUCTION

IN MY OTHER BOOKS, I have looked at the effects of global bullying on people around the world—people who are the victims of war or poverty, and people who’ve experienced the fallout from war and poverty, such as AIDS, the illegal drug trade, and prison.

This book is about bullying on a more personal level.

The Name It 2 Change It Campaign was initiated by a community anti-bullying committee as a means to respond to the increasing amount of bullying and its effects in Haldimand, Norfolk, and neighboring communities in Southern Ontario. Through my association with the campaign and my job as a community organizer for them, I interviewed kids from the ages of nine to nineteen, and I asked them to talk about their experiences.

In this book, you’ll meet kids who have been bullied, kids who have bullied others, and kids who have found the strength within themselves to rise above their situations and to endure.

There is more than one side to every story. Many kids talked about how teachers in their school seem to do nothing to stop their tormentors. I know that teachers do a lot, but rules of confidentiality prevent them from sharing information about all their efforts. But somehow we must find a way to show the victims of bullying that they are being heard.

All the kids interviewed in this book come from my little corner of Southern Ontario. This is a lovely part of a lovely country, and if bullying is happening here, then it’s happening everywhere. Some kids chose to use their real first name and photo. Some kids chose to tell their story under a pseudonym without a photo. All kids made these decisions with the participation and permission of their parents. These are kids who responded to a call I put out, or who were referred to me by teachers and colleagues.

Although I asked some standard questions, such as, “What happened to you,” “How did you respond,” and “How did you





feel,” most of the interviews were directed by the kids themselves. When they told me things they later asked me to delete, I respected their wishes.

These kids spoke quite candidly about what they’ve gone through and what they have learned from their experiences. They’ve

shown courage in speaking out, and I honor them.

The additional comments from kids around the world are excerpts from essays they wrote about bullying. Their words show that this is an issue that does not stop at national borders.



PART ONE

YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH

THOSE WHO BULLY OTHERS often provide excuses for their behavior, excuses that give them permission, in their own minds, to treat someone else badly.

All of us are excluded from some groups, and sometimes for valid reasons. If a group forms a chess club, it makes sense to exclude kids who can't or won't learn to play chess. If you want to join an orchestra, you're required to play an instrument. If you want to join a hockey team, you'll have to know how to play the game.

Some groups are designed to exclude others for no particular reason at all. They are formed in order to make their members feel superior to others. They have no special abilities or interests. And their definition of "good enough" always changes.

The kids interviewed in this section have been excluded because someone else or a group has decided they don't measure up.



KATIE, 16



I'VE LIVED IN THIS AREA ALL MY LIFE. I now live a little ways out in the country, between two small towns.

I was homeschooled until grade seven. My mother started homeschooling with my brother, and it went really well, so she kept it up with me. We got courses from an American Christian correspondence school, and that's what we learned from. You have to be self-disciplined for homeschooling to work well.

When it was time for me to start grade seven, I wanted to go to a regular school, to see what it was like. Also, my mom was running a day-care center at our house, and I wanted a break from all the little

kids. My parents took some convincing—they were happy with the way things were—but they finally relented because I wouldn't stop bugging them.

I started classes a week after the school year began, going to a middle school that was only grade seven and eight. I was excited to be there, even though I didn't know anyone.

I wanted so badly to make friends. That's supposed to be the fun part of school, isn't it? But the other girls wouldn't include me. They'd all known each other forever, and they didn't need me or try to get to know me.

There was one girl I thought was becoming friends with me, and I gave her a friendship charm. Two days later, she gave it back to me with a note that said she had enough friends and didn't need me. It was a mean note. It surprised me, because I hadn't been mean to her. I went home and cried.

The whole year would have been easier if they'd just included me, but that never happened. Instead, they started actively excluding me. They'd go out of their way to let me know they didn't want me around.

They'd hide my gym bag when it was time for gym so that I'd get into trouble with the teacher. Afterward I'd hear them laughing about it. Or they'd stop talking when I walked by them, then laugh at my back as I walked away. A girl I sat on the school bus with had a

birthday party. She made a big show of handing out party invitations to all the girls in the class—except me. In the change room one time, a girl slapped me on the head—out of the blue, for no reason—then just laughed and went back to changing her clothes. I remember how badly my ear burned where she hit me. I thought I was going to go deaf, the pain was so bad. But, of course, I never tattled.

I stayed all year at the school, but it never got any better. I thought that once I stopped being new and they got used to me, they'd calm down, get to know and accept me. But that never happened. One girl would pretend to like me when she was fighting with her real friends. But when they made up, she'd go back to trashing me again.

I went back to being homeschooled in grade eight. I didn't want to go through another year of being shut out. I didn't want to be around those people anymore. And they certainly didn't want me around, so they got their wish. It was such a relief the day after Labor Day that year, when everyone else went back to school and I got to stay home. I thought about all those girls looking for me, thinking up new ways to make me unhappy—and me not being there. I hope they were disappointed.

My parents wanted me to go back to regular school for high school. They wanted me to have access to more courses, and to a Canadian curriculum,

which, of course, is different from the American curriculum I'd been studying through correspondence. They told me high school would be better than grade seven; and so far, it is. There are more kids and it's easier to stay away from someone you want to avoid. Plus, we're all getting older and hopefully more mature.

I can't say I actually like high school, but there are some good things about it. Mrs. Douglas, our Food and Nutrition teacher, has a part of her class time she calls Community Circle, where we all just talk about things. She starts us off talking about easy things—like our favorite foods. It's surprising how often an easy topic will help us feel comfortable talking about harder things, like life and relationships.

I'm still not popular, but it doesn't bother me. I have a few friends—other misfits!—and I work at the public library. I love old movies, especially musicals. I hope to be a film historian one day.

I think I've learned from this experience to give a newcomer a chance. Just because you've hung out with the same people forever doesn't mean that someone new coming along won't also add to your life. But you'll never know unless you give them a chance and find out who they are.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Are there ways parents can help to prepare their children for the social challenges they might face at school?
 - How could the other students have made Katie feel more welcome?
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If you and other people in your class are bullied, you can help each other out. You will get more friends and feel better. This is my advice. You don't have to listen to it, but I think you should.

-BIRGIT SALOMONSEN DYGARD,
GRADE FIVE, MADAGASCAR

CARL, 13



I HAVE ONE CAT here at my mom's, and one cat and two dogs at my dad's. I'm a big animal person.

Bullying started to become part of my life in grade six and grew worse in grade seven. Kids started making fun of my height, my laugh, how I did things, what I did. Before grade six, it didn't happen.

New people came into the school, and I think they chose to try to fit in by making other kids feel on the outside. These new kids changed the behavior of the kids I'd always gone to school with. Some of these kids were my good friends.

My friends made friends with the new kids and picked up from the new kids that I wasn't wanted. So,

bit by bit, they started treating me the way the new kids were treating me. They started picking on me, too.

I was kind of surprised by that. No one had really picked on me before. I wasn't really a person to pick on, so it wasn't something I'd had to deal with before.

I didn't respond to a lot of it. Sometimes I did, but that didn't make it stop. I didn't really know what to do.

It started in the middle of grade six. At first, it seemed like good-natured teasing, the sort of things kids do. But it changed into something else. It got bigger and bigger. They knew I didn't like it because I told them, and that just made them do it more. I felt mad and sad, and I didn't know what to do.

I told my mom about a few things, but not very much. I didn't say anything to the teachers because I thought if I told them, they wouldn't do anything. Maybe they'd say one or two things just to be able to say they'd done something, but they wouldn't really do anything.

One teacher at my school didn't overly like me. I'd raise my hand and she'd ignore me. It happened a lot, and I guessed it was because she didn't like me. I don't know why. I thought if they didn't overly like me, then they wouldn't want to believe me, and things would just get worse.

My old friends might have seen on their own that their new friends were bullying me, but if they did, they didn't show any signs of it. Most of the bullying didn't happen in front of them.

Generally it happened outside during recess. The bullies would go to other people and point at me and laugh and say bad stuff about me. They'd say these things loud enough so I could hear them. I guess they didn't care what I thought, but in some ways, they did, because they wanted me to feel bad. I've experienced that bullies want to see anger coming out of you. They want to see you frustrated, and they want you to feel lower. I tried not to let them make me feel bad, but I just really couldn't.

One reason those hurtful messages got into my head was I felt the teachers wouldn't understand. I thought they might even suspend me or something. I didn't think the teachers were on my side, so I felt very lonely and very alone. I didn't know what to do.

I didn't have anyone to turn to. Then my parents got divorced, and I moved with my dad and went to a new school. This was a grade seven and eight school. I was in grade seven. I had friends for the first couple of days, and then I guess they lost interest in me and shut me out.

Then they heard me laughing at something one day and said my laugh was weird and stupid. They said it over and over again, on and on, even when I asked them not to. Why make fun of my laugh?

They started with my laugh, and then moved on to my height, what I did, and how I did it. I wasn't doing anything particularly strange, but they always found

something to criticize about me. It was all to tell me that I wasn't worth as much as them, that I wasn't as good as they were.

I spoke to my French teacher about it. She spoke to the kids who were going after me, but it didn't change anything.

I don't know how I found the strength to keep going to school every day. I just focused on my schoolwork and tried not to let things get to me.

Schoolwork has always been a struggle for me, but I found that when I concentrate, I can get through it. All this stuff going on at school made it really hard to concentrate. I never knew when the next assault would come.

I really like art, especially drawing cartoons. I draw little characters and faces. It brightens me up to do this. It's comical. It's funny. I've learned that work is a good thing to focus on when life gets hard.

This year is better because I have a new friend. We hang out all the time. We both like video games and art. He does cartooning as well, and some other kinds of drawing.

When my old friends teamed up with the guys who were bullying me, I felt really betrayed. I felt lonely.

It kind of added to my stress at the time that my parents were going through a divorce, but it kind of didn't at the same time. There are lots of kids whose

parents are divorced. I tried to do what they did, because they didn't seem to get picked on. The other things that are going on in my life shouldn't affect the way people are treating me.

Like, some days I felt sad because my dad wasn't around. Some days I went to school slouchy and stuff, and then people would comment on that, and I wouldn't say anything because I didn't want to talk about it. Then they'd keep on bugging me and bugging me. They wouldn't give me my space and respect. They'd just use it as another reason to go after me.

Through all this, I've learned a lot about what I need to be happy. I've also learned a bit about how to get that for myself no matter what else is going on around me. I've learned that I'm someone who likes to have at least one close friend, not someone who needs to have a whole lot of friends. And I've learned that art is something that I'll always have, and no kids being jerks can take that from me.

About other people, I've learned that bullies are often people who haven't been treated nicely in the past. They find someone who used to be happy, the same way they used to be, and they pick on them until everybody feels bad and down.

I can stand up for myself better now because I have at least one friend who will never turn on me the way my old friends did. Even when he goes to make new friends, he won't turn on me. We have lots of fun, lots

of things in common. He's just one of those friends that you know you'll never have to worry about.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Carl uses his talent as an artist to build himself up when others try to make him feel bad. What do you use?
 - Through his experience with bullying, Carl has learned what he needs to do to be happy. What do you need to be happy? What about the others in your family—what do they need?
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EMILY, 13

I CAN'T CONNECT with my friends anymore. It's such a small school and everyone hangs around in groups, and I just can't connect with them.

They've changed, and I've changed. They like pop music, and I like rock and roll. I like to draw, and they don't.

The school is so small there are only nine girls in my class. Five of them have always been in a group of their own, a group that I've never belonged to. The other four of us used to be friends.

Now I'm on my own. That would be okay if the teacher didn't keep putting us in groups for projects. She means well, but it's very awkward for me now. If I say something to her, she might let me work on my own. That would be easier. It's lonelier, but sometimes being lonely is the better way to go.

We were all pretty close in grade seven, but at the start of grade eight it seemed like they'd changed. It got worse over time. They'd leave me out of conversations.

I'm just naturally quiet, and I've learned to keep to myself. It helps that I'm close to my brother. He's eighteen, and after a rotten day at school I can come home and play video games with him and feel better.

He tells me I'll meet a lot of new people in high school, and I shouldn't let the girls in grade eight bother me. After all, he says, grade eight doesn't last forever.

All of this has changed my feelings about school. I used to like it. Now I've got half the year still to go, and I don't know how I'll get through it. It just feels so lonely.

Sometimes my mom lets me stay home. She says, "You can stay home today if you really need a break, but the problem will still be there waiting for you tomorrow." Sometimes it's nice to have a break. It doesn't fix anything, but it lets you catch your breath.

One of the girls is really good at getting everyone else to go along with her opinions. So when you get on the bad side of her, it's very, very difficult. She

becomes very whiney if she doesn't get her way.

I don't think the teachers see this as bullying. The principal says she doesn't want to take sides when I try to tell her about it, and my teacher thinks everyone is getting along just fine.

It takes me a long time to make friends, so when I fell out of the group, I felt I had no place to go. I'm alone there.

My older sister had a good experience at her school. The teacher and the principal took bullying very seriously. They even brought in the police. My sister was cyber-bullied. That's why the police were brought in, because it's illegal to use the Internet to bully someone.

My sister has a close friend who's a girl. So some girls decided my sister and her friend were lesbians and put that up on the Internet. It got around everywhere.

My sister and her friend ignored it for as long as they could. There's nothing wrong with being a lesbian—some people are; some people aren't. My sister and her friend didn't want to make a big deal out of it. They hoped it would all go away, but it didn't, and it kept building. So they went to their principal. The principal called the police, and they said to the kids who started it, "This stops now or we will charge you."

Now she's friends with those girls again. The ones who spread the rumor apologized and listened to her tell them how she felt about what they did. And they

repaired the damage they had done to their friendship. So it had a good ending. But while it was happening, she cried all the time and never got a full night's sleep.

I'd find going to school easier if my old friends weren't there. I can't get away from them. I need to go out into the bigger world and meet new people, but I'm stuck in this school until the end of grade eight.

I'm the sort of person who holds a lot in. For the longest time I didn't tell my parents what was going on. Then one day I was all ready for school, got to the door, and started crying. And that's when we started talking about it.

Probably the only way I'll get through the next few months is to focus on the things I enjoy, like drawing. I'll draw and do my work, and wait for the year to pass.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Is there something the teachers can do in Emily's case, or should they leave the girls to sort it out on their own?
 - What do you think of Emily's strategy to keep to herself and wait for grade nine for things to change? What are the pros and cons of that strategy?
-

ADAM, 10



I'VE BEEN PUSHED, shoved, hit, and called names. It's been going on for two years. I hate going to school now.

When I was in grade three, I got glasses, and kids started teasing me by calling me "four eyes." That wasn't nice, but I could handle it. I mean, it hurt my feelings, but it got worse in the older grades. It got physical.

There're five guys who beat me up all the time. They are in the same grade as I am. It usually happens at recess when the teacher isn't looking. There are only two teachers on yard duty when all the kids are out there, and they can't see everything.

They go after me because they think I'm weak.

Since I have glasses, they think they are tougher than I am.

When they attack me, it happens out of the blue. We're not in an argument. They just see me and decide to pound or push me.

Sometimes they threaten me. One of them said, "I'm going to bring a knife to school tomorrow and cut you up." Another time, they said, "We've all decided to beat you up after school today, so get ready to be hurt."

Two days ago, it was Sunday. I was sitting beside my mom in church. This one kid from the gang was sitting two rows in front of us. He turned around and swore at me and made swear words with his hands. When we were walking down to Sunday school, he got beside me and called me names and said that on Monday they were all going to beat me up at school.

I told the principal on Monday, and she said, "Many times you have lied, Adam, so why should I believe you now?"

I tell the teachers and the principal, but nothing gets better. Sometimes someone in the gang gets suspended, but they just laugh and say, "Holiday!"

Sometimes the teachers tell me, "If you don't want to get beat up, stay inside for recess."

At least my parents believe me, and I have a couple of friends who see it happen. We stand together, but it isn't always enough. The gang just likes bullying! They

like to get people to show emotion. If they make somebody cry, they laugh and say, “I just won!”

My mom tries to help. She calls the school and she calls the principal, but the principal doesn’t believe her, even! The principal will say, “You can’t prove Adam was hurt on school property, so there’s nothing we can do about it.”

I have bruises a lot. One time I was shoved so hard to the ground they thought my nose was broken.

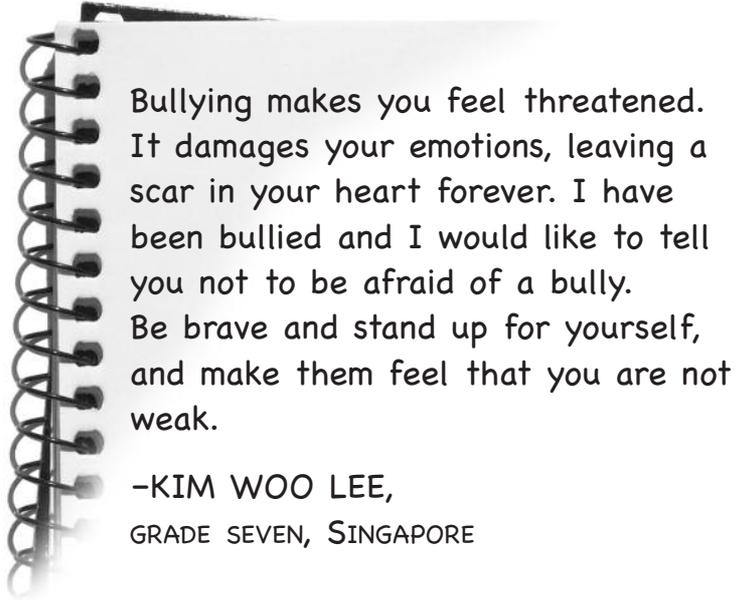
I’m really tired of it. I want to feel safe at school. I want to just do my work sheets and get good marks on them again. When I sit at my desk I always worry that one of the gang will call me names when the teacher isn’t paying attention, so I think about that instead of my work. My grades are not so good anymore.

I come home from school and I feel angry and can’t relax. My mom knows when I’ve had a bad day because she says I take my anger out on my sister and I look really sad.

The way I make myself happy again is to look forward to growing up, to getting my driver’s license, and buying a farm. I’m going to be a farmer. That makes me happy.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What is making it difficult for the teachers to be sympathetic to Adam?
 - If you were in Adam’s situation, what could you do to get the teachers’ attention? If they can’t help, what else can you do?
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Bullying makes you feel threatened. It damages your emotions, leaving a scar in your heart forever. I have been bullied and I would like to tell you not to be afraid of a bully. Be brave and stand up for yourself, and make them feel that you are not weak.

-KIM WOO LEE,
GRADE SEVEN, SINGAPORE

MILLIE, 14

I'm not sure when the bullying started—grade three or four, maybe. It was mostly in grade four and five, and it went on into secondary school, on and off.

I was excluded from my friends. They'd be talking and I'd come up and they'd go quiet. They'd tease me. At first it was joking-teasing, but then it got more serious and they wouldn't stop, even when I asked them to.

They'd be talking about me behind my back, telling little jokes about me. They'd do this to a few people.

It was a weird sort of a game they were playing. Like, a whole recess would go by and no one would talk to me. These girls were all my friends, and sometimes they'd be friendly and include me. Other times, all of a sudden, no one would talk to me and I'd be left standing alone on the playground. I never knew from recess to recess what would happen. It felt out of my control, and I'd dread recess.

Sometimes I'd go and hang out with other girls, girls I hadn't really hung out with before, but that felt awkward. I felt like they knew I was being shunned by my friends and were only talking to me out of pity. I don't know if that was true or not, but that's what I felt.

It was around this time that I really got into reading. I'd take a book out to recess and find a place to sit by myself.

When I look back on it, I think it was deliberate. I'd go out for recess, look for my friends, see them, and

head toward them. They'd see me, then they'd turn and walk away. Or they'd start running around and completely ignore me.

When they'd tease me, it was about my appearance. I hit puberty early and had bad acne when no one else did. I got my period in grade four, and the whole thing was really new to me. My mom told me what to expect, of course, but you don't really know until you go through it. So I went to the teacher when no one else was in the classroom and told him I had my period and might have to go to the bathroom more than I normally would. He said, okay, no problem, you don't even have to ask, just go.

But apparently someone was walking by and overheard, and they twisted it completely and spread it all over the school. So that was another reason I wanted to keep to myself.

I try not to think about those days too much. I don't know why they behaved like that since we'd been really good friends up until then. I tried to talk to them about it a couple of times, but they just said, "Oh, we were just teasing—can't you take a joke?"

People can change, though. Kids who used to tease me became my friends. A lot of them came to my thirteenth birthday. My mom and I talk a lot about how we don't always know what we're doing when we're young, and when we get older, we make better decisions. So you should never give up hope. If you're in a terrible situation now, it can change and get better.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What could Millie say or do when her friends are friendly one day and unfriendly the next?
 - Do you agree with Millie and her mom that we don't always know what we're doing when we're young?
-

When I was in grade one I got bullied by two girls in my class. They picked on me because I was French and they weren't and because I had no friends. I didn't know anything. I was crying all the time because they were slapping, teasing, and hurting me. My sister consoled me.

When my friend got bullied she was crying and I consoled her. Before that, she wasn't my friend, but that is why we are friends now.

-Beryl Dabezies,
GRADE FIVE, MADAGASCAR

MEGAN, 12



I've always gone to the same school. It's a small country school. My town is more country than town.

It's generally a good school, but things started to change with the girls when I got into grade six.

Some girls formed the Blonde Girls Club. It started with four blondes, but then another one came, and that's when they formed their club. They do things together and don't include the Brunettes.

We formed the Brunette Club so that we can fight back because they are always so rude to us. I have four friends. Three are brunettes and one is a blonde. She went over to the Blonde Club and started being mean to us. They'd gossip about us and wouldn't let us play

with them. They'd tell us our clothes were ugly and our shoes were terrible.

I told them they weren't being nice. There's a saying: What you say is what you are. So if you say someone else's shoes are ugly, really you're saying your shoes are ugly.

They were kind of speechless when I said that. I guess they didn't expect anyone to stand up to them, so they didn't know what to say.

The Blonde Club thinks that having blonde hair makes them special. They got this idea from a new girl who came and wanted to take over things. Some kids seem to need another kid to lead them, so when a stronger kid comes and says they should do bad things, they'll fall in line because that makes them feel stronger and important, too.

The Blonde Club made me unhappy because it felt like people were changing, and not in good ways. We are a small school, so small changes feel like something really big. So when my friends stopped being my friends because they started to believe that blonde hair is better, it really hurt my feelings. The color of your hair doesn't say anything about who you are. That comes from your brain and your heart.

It wasn't fair that the Blondes wouldn't let the Brunettes play with them. The Blondes thought they'd be less cool if they played with the Brunettes.

I never believed I wasn't cool because I'm a

brunette. Everybody's cool, really, in their own way. Sometimes the Blondes would put me down or ignore me, and that would really hurt because I wasn't doing anything to them. My parents would try to cheer me up, but I couldn't just go to them all the time. I have to learn to take care of my own problems and stand up for myself.

I guess I did let what they said bother me and get under my skin. It bothered my friends, too.

Sometimes the Blondes would bother us too much. They'd tease us and bug us and laugh at our hair, over and over and over again. They would take it right to the limit, where we would start thinking that we should move somewhere else to get away from them.

When I started trusting myself and believing in my friends, everything changed. I started standing up for myself. My friends were by my side and it helped me to gain more confidence. If one of my friends was in trouble, I'd stand up for her, and that made me feel good, too.

If a kid is having mother-and-father problems, it's harder for her to stand up for herself because she is so worried. Like, if she has a sick parent, or if her parents are always fighting or getting divorced, the kid has to spend so much energy worrying about them that she has no energy left to stand up for herself. And that's when some kids will swoop down and really start to bully her because they know she won't fight back.

I'm very lucky to have good friends. We help each other get through things. And I have good parents.

We have a religious grotto at our school, out by the back forty. My friends and I like to hang out there at recess because it's such a nice place. It's sort of our space, but we don't keep anyone out.

When the Blonde Club was going on, the teachers got all the girls involved to have a Girl Talk, to talk about what was going on, and to try to find solutions. The Blonde Club got mad that we had told on them, but I think it was good to talk about it and get it out in the open.

I think the Blondes still bug us sometimes because they are bored. They can't think of anything else to do.

Generally, it's a really nice school, and people treat each other well. I think we will be able to put all this club stuff behind us, and just get to know each other as kids. The girls in the Blonde Club have a lot of good qualities, and one day, we'll get to be friends.

I don't know what I want to do with my life. Mostly I don't want anything really bad to happen. And I'd like to be a dress designer. I like drawing designs for new dresses.

My parents help a lot by encouraging me and helping me come up with solutions to my problems.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Why do you think the blonde girls formed the Blonde Club?
 - What do you think of Megan and her friends' idea to form their own club? What might be the positive and negative sides to that idea?
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SERENA, 12

I started being bullied at the end of grade five, and now it's gotten to the point where it's, like, crazy.

There is one girl at school who is behind it. She's cyber-bullied me—written bad stuff about me on the Internet, about kicking me out of her group—and she gossips about me. I hear from the other girls about all the bad things she says about me.

I met her in kindergarten. We were best friends in grade four and five. At the end of grade five she said she didn't want to be my friend anymore. But when we were in soccer together, she sort of forgot about us not being friends. Then, after soccer was over, she said again that we were done being friends, and that's when the bullying started.

I'm not the only one she targets. She wrote nasty comments on one boy's Facebook page, and everyone

I talk to about her says, "Oh, she's so mean!" It's lots of little things that don't seem like big deals when I try to talk about them, but they add up. Like, when we're in choir and she says hi to all the others but not to me.

We had to do a project in math class where we made envelopes (we were studying angles) and I needed tape, which was on her desk. It was the classroom tape, not her personal tape. I went over and said to her, "Okay, I need this." But she got up, took the tape, and carried it to the other side of the classroom.

Another time, we were in the change room getting dressed after gym class. She had a bottle of body spray, like a perfume, and all the other girls wanted to try it, so she gave everyone a spray except me.

She's nice to other people sometimes, and she'll exclude me, really making a point of keeping me out.

She's the kind of person others will follow because she has lots of confidence. Some people aren't so confident, so they'll latch onto people who are strong because it's easier for them to follow than to be on their own. Also, people will try hard to stay her friend so she doesn't get mad at them, because if she gets mad, she'll start bullying. People don't want to stand up to her. When she gets mad, she'll turn everyone else against the one person she specifically gets mad at.

It's nothing physical or verbal. It's nothing you can go to a teacher and say, "This is what she did to me," because her way of bullying isn't exactly break-

ing any rules. Well, except for the cyber-bullying.

I told my parents about it. They said, at first, "Oh, you'll be best friends again by next week." Well, we weren't. And I'm not expecting to be best friends again because, seeing the other side of her, I know she's not someone I'd want to be best friends with.

One day I was sitting at my desk at lunchtime. Everyone else was hanging around her desk. My teacher came up to me and asked, "Are you feeling okay?" and I said, "Yeah." Then she asked, "Are you having friend problems?" I said, "Yeah," so she asked me to come out into the hall and talk with her. I did, and in the hall I started crying and told her what was happening.

She brought us together at recess to discuss it. I appreciate that she did that. She took it seriously and she tried to help. It didn't really change anything, but I felt better knowing that I was heard. It was also nice of her to come up and ask me what was wrong, rather than wait for me to say something.

I know a girl who had to change schools because of this girl. If you're not strong, it can make you feel very alone, and it can make you doubt yourself. You start to wonder if anyone will ever like you again, and you start to wonder what's wrong with you that you're being treated this way.

It made me feel uncomfortable to go to school because I was worried I'd say something that would make this girl get mad and bully me worse.

My mom phoned her mom and said, “Okay, your daughter’s getting really mean to mine.” Her mom talked to her, then this girl came to school angry at me because I’d gotten her mom on her back.

It all really bothered me. I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night because I was so worried. I’d be angry all the time at home and pick fights with my brother and sister. I stayed away from any activity where this girl might be—at church and at school.

I used to be afraid of her becoming angry at me, but I’m not anymore. It’s like she has no more power over me. It’s a good feeling. She used to bother me so much that it affected my schoolwork; I couldn’t concentrate properly. But things are much better now.

I feel bad that we’re not friends anymore, but it’s also a relief that I don’t have to come to school every day and try to make someone feel like they’re the queen. When I look back on our friendship now, I was often worried that I’d do something to upset her. It wasn’t relaxing, the way friendship is supposed to be. So now I feel free.

I suppose she could still hurt me, but I don’t care anymore whether she likes me or not, so she won’t be able to hurt me too much. And not being friends with her anymore has left me with time to get to know other kids, and I’m friends now with some really nice girls.

It still makes me mad that she’s bullied other kids for such a long time. Maybe she’ll grow out of it. I’ve

got two more years at this school with her, but I can handle it. If it keeps happening, my parents will take it to the school board. We’ve also been told by the police that bullying should be taken seriously.

At the last meeting we had to resolve this, the principal made us write on little pieces of paper how we’ll move forward. And then we’re going to go back to her office this week and burn the pieces of paper. She said, “Once we burn these, it’s going to become a part of us.” I don’t really get it, but what the heck, maybe it will help. I try to have an open mind. She’s suggested other things that are great, like she gave me a set of faith cards to read, one each day, and I know that I am a special gift from God. And she asked me to help with the Beatitudes Banner that we’re going to hang up in the library.

I try to keep myself well and happy and strong no matter what this girl does. Like, I stopped eating lunch in the classroom. I go and volunteer in the kindergarten room to get away from her, and that makes me happier.

I don’t know what this girl is thinking. Maybe she’s lonely. Her mom says she has come home from school crying, too, because people don’t want to be her friends. So maybe she tries to control people because she thinks they won’t hang out with her by their own choice. I don’t know. It’s not my problem to solve.

I have lots of great things in my life, and the great things outnumber the difficult things.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Why was Serena so hurt even though she was not the only person to be bullied by this girl?
 - Do you agree with Serena when she says, “It’s not my problem to solve”? Whose problem is it?
-

Talking About

YOU’RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH

The kids in this section talked about being excluded—left out of groups or shut out of friendships. This makes them feel sad, lonely, and stressed, and they start to believe they are not worth as much as the others. The kids who get excluded seem to be chosen randomly. Any kid could be the next one to be excluded.

- How easy is it for new kids to fit in at your school?
- How have you changed as you’ve gotten older? How have your friendships changed? Has this been easy to manage, or awkward?
- Have you ever felt excluded? How did you deal with it?
- Have you ever excluded someone from a group you belong to?
- How did you feel when you were excluded and when you excluded others? What did you learn from that experience?
- What can you do if you see people being excluded at your school?
- What is the difference between excluding someone and simply wanting to hang out with your best friends?