

## Gaining Peer Group Status

Although teasing and peer victimization are common among teenagers, parents may be unaware that their teen is involved. Since teasing occurs so frequently among teenagers, parents and teachers might assume that it does not have a big impact. Despite this high frequency, teasing can cause lasting difficulties in self-esteem, social competence and peer relationships. Parents need to identify when their teen is either a perpetrator or victim of teasing and to address the underlying issues.

Cognitive and emotional changes during the early adolescent years make teens extremely conscious of the opinions of their peers. To ensure that peers do not think they are inadequate, adolescents need to feel they are accepted in the peer group. **This need to belong is common to all adolescents regardless of their family background, peer status or achievements.** When teens perceive differences within the peer group, their sense of belonging may be threatened. Some teens react to this threat by teasing and rejecting a peer that is different.

Whether your teen teases others or is a victim of teasing, the underlying issues and developmental needs are similar. Parents need to validate the teen's feelings and appreciate the teen's strong, normal and healthy developmental need to belong to a peer group. Acknowledge that your teenager's desire to fit into his/her peer group is valid and important. Teens need to sense from their parents that their feelings are worthy and important, as they move towards developing a strong self-esteem.



Although it is difficult, **parents can help teenagers to feel accepted by the peer group by providing teens with the freedom and permission to dress, behave and pursue similar interests to their peers.** Once boundaries are established and agreed to, teenagers need to be given the independence to

identify with their peers. As teenagers acquire a more stable sense of self-confidence and a secure feeling of belonging to the peer group, the need to tease and reject others will diminish. Teens need to look, act and behave like others to feel accepted. Only after they feel accepted and valued by others and themselves, will teens be able to appreciate the differences among people





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## TIPS FOR TEENS

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