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## Someone Is Spreading Rumors About Me. What Can I Do?

*There is this girl at school, and we don't really get along. She keeps spreading rumors about me and people are turning against me. What should I do?*  
- Sam\*

Some people spread rumors as a way to intimidate others and gain status or popularity. But spreading rumors as a way to turn people against someone is a form of bullying — and it can have serious consequences for the person doing it.

Spreading unkind gossip in person or online is not a decent or mature way to act. It hurts the person being talked about, and it intimidates other people.

Sadly, when other people see this kind of thing going on, they don't always stand up for what's right. They may become less friendly to the person who is being talked about because they're afraid of becoming the next target. It doesn't mean they don't care. In fact, seeing someone else getting bullied makes other people feel bad. Bullying is like meanness pollution. It affects everyone in the environment.

We don't have to be good friends with everyone — or even like everyone. **But not liking another person doesn't give someone the right to spread rumors, gossip, or putdowns.** Acting like this shows a lack of courage. It's a false way to gain popularity or status in the group.

Real popularity comes from feeling comfortable with ourselves. People who are truly well liked treat everyone with respect and fairness. They don't put other people down or try to gain power by having "followers." They're confident and sure of themselves, so they don't have to resort to this kind of behavior.

### **So what can you do if you find yourself the target of rumors and social bullying?**

**Turn to a trusted adult for support.** Talk to someone you can confide in, like a parent, teacher, school counselor, or coach. Let that person know what you're going through. Keep him or her up to date on what's going on, even as things start to get better. A trusted adult confidante can help you feel more supported and less alone. Plus, adults can take steps to put a stop to the rumors and gossip.

**Find your friends.** Find a friend or two who will stick by you and who won't listen to rumors. If you want, share how you feel with those friends. Don't dwell on the situation, though. Spend time and energy having fun with your friends and doing activities you enjoy.

**Speak up.** Consider speaking to the girl who's spreading rumors. If you can, approach her. Calmly say something like, "I know we don't get along. You don't have to like me, but you need to stop spreading rumors about me and talking behind my back." Don't be angry or mean. Avoid yelling. Just say what you want calmly, clearly, assertively, and maturely. After you've said what you want, you can simply walk away. There's no need to wait for her to say anything back. Leave her to think about what you said.

Before you try talking to the girl, though, talk with an adult about what to say and how to approach her. Every situation is different, and you want to make sure things don't turn into more meanness, yelling, or fighting. It can also help to have a friend stand with you when you talk to the girl.

**Care for yourself.** Do things that strengthen your confidence and positive feelings. Going through a situation like this can be difficult and painful. Gather your inner strength, get support from people who care, focus on positive things, and believe in yourself. These things can help you go through a difficult situation and come out stronger.

Reviewed by: D'Arcy Lyness, PhD

Date reviewed: April 2011

*\*Names have been changed to protect user privacy.*



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