

# The Teen Survival Guide to Dating & Relating

**Real-World Advice on Guys, Girls, Growing Up, and Getting Along**

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## CHAPTER 1



# Me, Myself, and I

**T**his book is about the relationships in your life and how to make and keep them healthy. But before you start thinking about how you relate to others, it makes sense first to understand your relationship with *yourself*. The way you feel about yourself affects nearly every choice you make. This includes your behavior, your attitude, and your goals, as well as the people you choose to hang out with and get close to.

So what kind of relationship do you have with yourself? How well do you even know yourself? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Are you aware of your own feelings and how to express them in healthy ways? Are you comfortable in new situations? When dealing with people you don't agree with, do you stand up for yourself and your beliefs?

Not sure of all the answers yet? That's okay. Life's for learning, and learning about yourself is an excellent place to start. The better you know yourself and what's right for you, the easier it is to make wise choices. And wise choices are the ones that keep you moving in a positive direction.

## WHAT'S UP WITH PEER PRESSURE?

As a teen, you deal with all kinds of peer pressure every day—even from people you consider friends. This probably isn't news to you, because you know that your peers (whether they're friends or not) heavily influence how you dress, act, feel about things, and deal with those feelings.

So what's it like when you're with your friends? Do you do things *their* way or your own? Which one's the "right" way? And how do you know?

If your way feels right and you go with that, you may worry about losing your friends. But doing what you believe in strengthens your self-respect. (And that counts for a lot!) On the flip side, if you ignore what feels right and do something so people will think you're "cool," you may feel as if you've betrayed yourself. And that's not a good feeling at all. Nearly everyone wants to be liked, but how much of yourself and what you believe in do you have to give up to be popular? Whenever you're faced with a heavy-duty decision or a simple choice, take a moment to ask yourself, "What should I do?" The answer will come from your *inner voice* (some people call it a *conscience*). This voice or gut feeling tells you, on a very personal level, what's right for you.

Maybe you didn't even know that you had an inner voice, so you're not exactly sure what it sounds like. To find out, imagine yourself in the following situation and pay attention to what you hear inside your head.



You're grounded because you told your parents that you were at a friend's house, and they found out you were really at a party they had said you couldn't go to. Now it's Saturday night, and you're home alone. Your parents are out and won't be back until late. Your best friend calls and invites you to a movie that you both really want to see. Your friend knows you're grounded but guarantees you'll be back long before your parents return. Should you go to the movie or not?

In this situation, your friend is pressuring you to break your parents' rules (again!). Obviously, it would be fun to see the movie, but you could get caught—and you're already in trouble. Part of you is probably scared and doesn't want to risk it, but another part may feel angry that you were punished

in the first place. On the one hand, it might be exciting to try to get away with breaking the rules again; but on the other hand, would you be able to enjoy the movie worrying about what would happen if your parents came home before you got back?

With so many conflicting feelings, it's a challenge to hear your inner voice. This is why it's important to quiet things down inside your head, so you can really listen to your inner voice's advice. Start thinking about the choices (going to the movie or staying home) and what you might gain and lose with each one.

Picture yourself going to the movie: How do you feel seeing your friend? Standing in line? Watching the movie? What's it like when you get home? Imagine that you return before your parents do. How do you feel? Imagine them coming into your room later to say good night. How do you feel then? Imagine that your parents arrive home early. How do they feel when they realize you're not there? What happens when you get home?

Now picture yourself saying no to the movie and staying home. What do you do to keep from being bored? How do you feel while you're doing it? How do you feel when you think about your friend at the movies with someone else? How do you feel when your parents get home?

Which choice creates more positive feelings? Which choice creates more negative ones? Which one feels "right"? When you hear the answer to that question inside your head, that's your inner voice talking to you. Listen to it. Trust it. Your inner voice will help you feel good about yourself and the decisions you make.

**Kids bug me because I'm different**

Send

**Hey Terra,**

I've never been like anyone else I know. I'm not sure why, and I don't really care. My problem is I'm sick of people making all kinds of judgments about me just because I act different. How can I get the kids in my school to stop pressuring me and just leave me alone?

Boppin' Unique

**Dear Boppin' Unique,**

The best way to avoid the pressure and judgments is to keep listening to your inner voice. This voice is telling you that you don't need to be like everyone else.

Being unique can be lonely, so look around for allies. Who are the kids at your school who aren't afraid to be themselves? Which ones are most accepting of differences and would appreciate you for who you are? Reach out to them in friendship and forget about the rest. If there's no one like this at your school, look for friends elsewhere. Let your interests (sports, music, art, a hobby) guide your out-of-school activities. Get out there and find people you can relate to.

It might help to read the biographies of interesting people who found their unique paths in life. Remember, unique people are one of a kind because they dare to be different, and they help change the way all of us think about the world. If everybody looked and acted like the next person, life would be very dull. Stay true to yourself!

In friendship,  
Terra

**If I stand up for someone, other people  
might not like me anymore**

**Hey Terra,**

A guy I've known and liked from a distance is coming to my school! We both play clarinet in the orchestra, so I'm sure we'll get to know each other lots better. This is fine with me, except I just found out there's a group of kids in my school who know him and hate him. If I start being friendly toward him, they're probably going to hate me, too. Which is more important: to be friends with this guy or to make sure these other kids like me?

Friend

**Dear Friend,**

Chances are, there will always be people who disapprove of something about the way you live your life. Maybe it's the music you like, how you dress, the way you vote, or the people you choose as friends. As the saying goes, "You can't please all of the people all of the time." So you might as well please yourself and do what *you* know is right.

You expect your friends to stand up for you, in spite of what others say, right? That's just an unwritten rule of friendship. Try being that kind of friend to this guy. Maybe you can find out why the other kids dislike him. Their opinions might be based on assumptions and lies. If this guy knew what was being said about him behind his back, he could try to set the record straight or apologize. Either way, knowing what's going on could help him get along with people in his new school. Be a friend and do what you can to help! I wish you well.

In friendship,  
Terra

**Why should people care if the girl  
I like is only a sophomore?**

Send

**Hey Terra,**

There's a girl I would really like to go out with, and I think she likes me, too, but she's only a sophomore. I'm a senior and that could present some problems. I'm getting all kinds of opinions. What do you think I should do?

Older Guy

**Dear Older Guy,**

A senior going out with a sophomore seems fine to me. This isn't a significant age difference, though if you said you wanted to go out with a girl who's in seventh grade, I'd say no way!

Generally speaking, a two-year age difference between high-school students isn't a problem. However, some people in your school might give you a hard time. They may tease you about not being able to find a girlfriend your own age. They might even try to pressure you to forget the idea altogether.

But none of this has anything to do with your wanting to get to know this girl better. What matters is doing what's right for you. You don't need anyone else's approval. Follow your heart!

In friendship,  
Terra

## RIDING EMOTIONAL WAVES

Emotions (feelings) come and go like waves. Sometimes you feel intensely angry, sad, or scared. Other times, you feel intensely happy, embarrassed, or confused. This is true for everyone, but especially for teens, whose emotional swings can be frequent and dramatic.

What can you do about emotional waves? Learn to understand them. Emotions are triggered, in part, by hormones and events in your life. You don't necessarily choose your emotions, and you can't prevent them. Emotions happen; that's what makes us human.

It helps to understand that you and your emotions are separate. You *have* feelings (and they may be powerful), but your feelings aren't *you*. You are your thoughts, dreams, talents, skills, goals, memories, experiences, and *much* more.

So when emotional waves wash over you, make a conscious choice to express these feelings in healthy ways. You can talk to someone, write in a journal, or go for a walk or run. Once you're seeing things more clearly (instead of through waves of emotion), start working on what's bothering you and find a positive solution.

Here's another way of thinking about your emotions: you can't control the waves, but you can learn to ride them, stay afloat, and not get dragged down by the undertow. It isn't easy, but learning to identify, accept, and express your feelings in healthy ways is an important part of growing up.

## Anger

The world presents plenty of things to get angry about: war, injustice, poverty, environmental abuse, and so on. But it doesn't do you (or the world) any good

to direct your anger at other people or to turn it inward where it eats away at you. Instead, you can choose to deal with anger in *positive* ways. If, for example, you're outraged about an animal-rights issue, channel your anger into speaking out, organizing letter-writing campaigns, or volunteering at an animal shelter. This way, you're doing something productive with the extra energy that anger produces in your body.

Sometimes it's not a situation but a person who sparks your anger. Depending on your mood, it may not take much to make you mad. Suppose someone jokes about the way your hair looks today. While the person may not have meant anything by it, you might get angry or even feel as if your day is ruined. Something that wasn't supposed to be a big deal has just become one. Other times, the cause of your anger really *is* a big deal, like when a friend betrays your trust. You may feel so angry and hurt that you wonder if you'll ever get over it.

No matter what causes your anger, bottling it up inside won't help. You have to let it out. This is the best way to deal with it.

For many people, releasing anger means yelling, swearing, plotting revenge, or using physical violence. How do *you* handle anger? If you're upset with a friend, do you say mean things or bring up hurt feelings from the past? Maybe you stop talking to the person altogether, and the friendship ends. How about when you get mad at your brother or sister? Do you scream and threaten? Hit? Throw things? Do you storm into your room and slam the door, silently hating everyone and everything?

If any of this sounds familiar, you already know that dealing with anger in these ways doesn't feel good. But did you know that these behaviors aren't healthy? Acting out or holding in anger doesn't solve anything. In fact, it often makes the situation worse.

The good news is you can learn to express your anger without being violent or hurtful. Whenever you're mad at someone, take some time to calm down before you react. Then follow these steps to help yourself get a grip:

**1. Get away from the person you're angry with.** Before you and the other person can resolve the conflict, you have to gain control of yourself. Explain that you need some time alone, and then find a quiet place to think.

**2. Take some slow, deep breaths.** Deep breathing will slow down your racing heart and help you clear your mind. Count to twenty-five in your



head—slowly. This is a chance for you to calm down and get some perspective on what happened.

**3. Think about the situation.** It takes at least two people to create a conflict. What was your part in this one? Ask yourself the following questions and think carefully about your answers: What did I do that added to the conflict? What did I forget to do that added to it? What do I wish I'd said or done instead of what I actually said or did? What could I do differently next time?

**4. Look at the conflict from the other person's point of view.** Imagine how he/she feels about what happened between you. If you were that person, how would *you* have acted or reacted?

**5. Write down exactly what you'd like to say to this person.** A journal is a good place for this type of writing. You don't have to show it to anyone, so don't hold back. Keep writing until you get a lot of the anger out of your system.

**6. Read aloud whatever you wrote.** (You're alone, so make the reading as dramatic as you want.) Do you feel better after getting out some of that anger? Is there any left? If so, write more things you'd like to say to the person. Then read the whole thing aloud again.

Once you feel calm, think about what you're actually going to say to the person. Of course, you may never want to talk to him/her again, but if the relationship is worth saving, you'll need to have an honest, heartfelt conversation.

Wondering what to say? Or how the other person will react to your words? In Chapter 9, "Conflict Resolution Tool Kit," you'll find advice about sharing your feelings and listening to others with openness and respect.

## I get mad about everything

A circular button with a white arrow pointing to the right and the word "Send" written inside.

**Hey Terra,**

My problem is that I get so mad about EVERYTHING!!! My parents aren't all that strict, but whenever they tell me I can't do something, I feel like punching them out. I've never actually hit anyone, but I really feel like it a lot of the time. If my younger sister forgets to give me a phone message or something, I completely lose control and chew her out. Then she starts crying and I feel bad, but I don't know what to do. Sometimes I yell so much that my throat gets sore.

Also, my good buddy has started getting on my nerves. He doesn't have a girlfriend, and sometimes he says bad stuff about mine, like how he saw her flirting with this other guy. I got really mad at my girlfriend, but it turned out it wasn't even true that she was flirting, so she got mad at me, and we broke up even though I still like her. Then I got really mad at my friend for telling me a lie in the first place! Is there something I can do to not get so angry about everything?

MAD!!

**Dear MAD,**

It sounds like when you get angry, you stop thinking straight. Then you jump to conclusions and say things that hurt other people's feelings—which ends up hurting you, too.

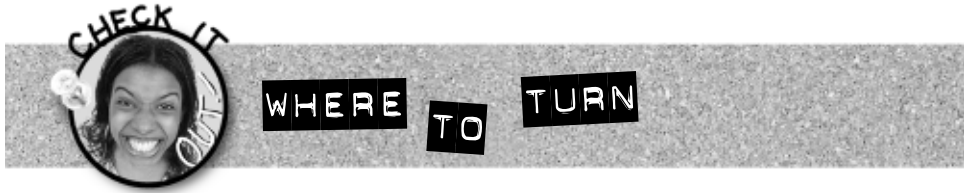
Many people have trouble coping with their anger. It's good that you realize you have a problem dealing with anger and you want to change. This issue may be best handled with the help of an adult you trust. Is there a teacher or school counselor you can talk to? A youth-group leader? A parent?

Help yourself by becoming more aware of the warning signs that you're about to explode. Your heart may start pounding. Blood may rush to your head. You may even get the feeling that you're "seeing red." When you experience these physical reactions, *remove yourself from the situation*. If you can't physically leave (because you're in a car or classroom), take slow, deep breaths until you calm down. Think "relax."

Once you're calm enough to talk without screaming, cursing, or saying something hurtful, let the person know how you feel about what happened. Then give him/her a chance to tell the other side of the story. Conflicts are a lot easier to resolve when people talk to each other with respect and a willingness to listen.

One last thing: Be patient with yourself. Don't expect to change overnight. It takes practice to learn how to handle anger in positive ways, but it's definitely worth the effort. You can do it!

In friendship,  
Terra



*Cage Your Rage for Teens: A Guide to Anger Control* by Murray C. Cullen and Joan Wright (Lanham, MD: American Correctional Association, 1996). Using their years of experience dealing with prison inmates (a very angry population), the authors present a guide to anger management designed especially for teens.

*Straight Talk About Anger* by Christine Dentemaro and Rachel Kranz (New York: Facts On File, 1995). This book gives teens information and advice on what the authors call "the misunderstood emotion." You'll find tips on keeping an anger log, talking to other people, and coping with anger in healthy, productive ways.

*Winning! How Teens (and Other Humans) Can Beat Anger and Depression* by Lew Hamburger, Ph.D. (New York: Vantage Press, 1997). Written especially for teens, this practical, helpful book talks about the causes and treatments of anger and depression.

#### **"Fires Within," The InSite**

[www.theinsite.org](http://www.theinsite.org)

Click on "Me, Myself, and I" to find this section of The InSite, which deals with overwhelming feelings like anger and aggression. "Been There" stories by teens who have struggled with anger, rage, and depression describe the valuable life lessons these young people learned during tough times.

## Embarrassment

Have you ever wished you could vanish from the planet because of something you said or did? Everyone has embarrassed themselves at one time or another (yes, even the coolest people you know). No one's perfect, and we all make mistakes. It's called being human.

When you do something embarrassing, like knocking over a soda, missing a foul shot, or asking a question that the teacher says he *just* answered, give yourself a break. At these moments, it may feel as if *everyone* is staring at you, laughing, and thinking that you're a complete idiot. But this just isn't true! Most people are much too concerned about their own mistakes to focus on yours.

If you think you've made a fool of yourself and don't know what to do next, follow these tips on dealing with embarrassment:

**1. Admit that you're feeling embarrassed.** Don't get defensive or try to hide your feelings. You might even laugh and say, "Whoa! Am I embarrassed!" The feelings will pass more quickly if you don't try to cover them up or pretend they don't exist.

**2. Forgive yourself.** You made a mistake. It happens. Stop beating yourself up. If you've hurt or embarrassed someone else, apologize. Sometimes this is the hardest part, but it's important to say you're sorry, because it will make both you and the other person feel better.

**3. Move on.** Put the embarrassing moment where it belongs: *in the past*. Push yourself if you have to but get on with your life. If someone kids you about what happened, say, "Oh, yeah! That was pretty embarrassing." Laugh and show that you can handle the teasing. Other people will soon forget about the embarrassing moment—and you will, too.

**4. Think before you act or speak.** Remembering this will save you from some embarrassing moments. There's no guarantee that it will prevent *all* embarrassments, but it can help reduce them. And when you slip up, repeat tips 1–3 to recover more quickly.

**I always make a fool of myself**

Send 

**Hey Terra,**

No one knows this, but I'm really afraid of getting into situations that will embarrass me. It happens all the time, no matter how careful I am. It's gotten so bad lately that I don't even raise my hand in class because I'm afraid of saying something stupid. I don't want to hang out with other people because I just know I'm going to end up saying something embarrassing. You're probably thinking, "Like what?" I could give you a whole long list, but it's too embarrassing! I'm probably missing out on a lot of fun because of this. I need help!

Embarrassed Guy

**Dear Embarrassed Guy,**

What's your fear of embarrassment based on? What specific things have you done in the past that embarrassed you? Write down a few of these memories and recall what happened each time you messed up. How did other people react? After you felt embarrassed, what happened?

No matter how many embarrassing moments we have (and believe me, we all have them), we survive and life goes on. Even though people say, "I could have died of embarrassment," no one really dies from this feeling. Each time the fear of embarrassment stops you from doing something, repeat to yourself, "No one ever died of embarrassment, and neither will I."

If this doesn't help, talk to a school counselor or another trusted adult about your problem. It's important not to let fear stop you from socializing and having fun. And remember, one of the biggest mistakes a person can make is to always be afraid of making one! Good luck!

In friendship,  
Terra

## Insecurity

Have you ever felt as if you're really two people in one? Maybe one side of you is cool, outgoing, and funny. But these qualities are hidden by your shy, awkward, and not-so-cool side. Or maybe on the *outside* you're popular and social, but on the *inside*, you're unsure of yourself. Perhaps, like many people, you worry that you wouldn't be accepted if everybody knew the *real* you.

There are times when everyone—even famous athletes, actors, and pop stars—feels trapped in a prison of self-doubt. The prison walls can become so thick that it's nearly impossible to break out, try new things, and enjoy life.

When you're a teen, your interests, attitudes, and feelings about yourself change often—sometimes daily. With so much change, it can be difficult to feel confident, especially in new situations. People who are unsure of themselves and their ability to succeed can get stuck in an insecurity trap. If you're in this trap, you might hold yourself back and miss out on wonderful opportunities.

How can you escape from the trap? One of the best ways is to figure out what you're good at. By focusing on your strengths (talents, abilities, positive traits), you'll start feeling more secure about yourself. Here's how to begin:

**1. Make a list of your strengths.** You might include things like "People know they can count on me" or "I'm a good listener." Or you could list any special skills you have like telling jokes, drawing, singing, playing soccer, or being a good student.

**2. Make a list of your weaknesses.** What traits are preventing you from being happy or self-assured? We're not talking about looks! Focus on personality traits that need work or skills you might improve on. For example, "I put off things until the last minute" or "I don't always tell the truth about how I feel."

**3. Keep both lists the same size.** If you think of five weaknesses, come up with five strengths. If you have a hard time identifying your strengths, ask a parent or friend for suggestions.

**4. Review your strengths.** How do you feel about them? Does the list include things you don't usually give yourself credit for? If so, give yourself credit now. And think about how you can use these strengths more than you already do. Write down your ideas, so you can turn them into goals.

**5. Review your weaknesses.** Identify the weaknesses you can live with for now and think about the ones you want to work on. Don't tackle everything at once. Instead, choose one weakness and develop a plan of action. For example, if you want to stop putting things off until the last minute, think of ways to get more organized about deadlines. Maybe you can break down a long-term assignment into several small steps. This way, you'll be more likely to make steady progress toward your main goal. When you successfully complete one long-term assignment, you'll feel more motivated to start the next one without procrastinating. Soon, "I'm organized" might be one of your strengths!

**I don't think I'm good enough**

Send 

**Hey Terra,**

I'm just your average teen (maybe below average in looks). But all of the other average kids seem to have a lot more fun than I do. I do okay in school, but there's got to be more to life than getting good grades.

It would be so cool to have a bunch of friends to hang out with or to have a girlfriend, but I don't think I'm good enough for any girl to want to go out with me. Whenever I get the idea to call up someone, I stop myself because I'm sure no one would want to spend time with me. So I end up just staying home because the last thing I want to hear is somebody telling me they don't want to be with me. Even though they'd probably make up some polite excuse like, "Sorry, I'm busy," I'd know what they really meant.

Why Bother?

**Dear Why Bother,**

It's normal to feel insecure at times, especially when you're going through a lot of changes (like puberty). But it sounds like you spend too much time putting yourself down. If you're always thinking, "I'm not good enough" and "Nobody wants to be with me," these put-downs become a habit, and it becomes hard to enjoy social situations—or life in general. Once you're aware of any bad habit, you can start gaining control of it.

Each time a negative thought about yourself pops into your head, notice it—but don't agree with it or get angry with yourself for thinking it. Instead, ask yourself what triggered the thought (a certain person, event, or situation, for example). Then come up with a positive thought to tip the scale in the other direction. If your automatic negative thought is, "Nobody likes me," replace it with something like, "My friends care about me." The goal is to get out of the habit of putting yourself down.

You can also raise your self-esteem by focusing on your strengths instead of your weaknesses. You said that you're a good student. Why not get involved in an academic club or volunteer to tutor other students who need help? These are ways to meet new people who are likely to respect and even admire you.

Insecurity can lead you to build a wall between yourself and the rest of the world, rather than risk being rejected. The wall keeps other people out, making it hard for them to get to know you (and vice versa). If you're ready for a change, break down the wall and reach out to others. Try starting a conversation with someone you don't know that well. Not everyone you meet will automatically become a friend, but some will, and that's worth a lot!

In friendship,  
Terra

## Loneliness

There's a big difference between being *alone* and being *lonely*. *Alone* means by yourself, on your own. It's not a bad thing; in fact, most of us need some alone time occasionally. Being by ourselves can be fun, because it allows us to pursue special interests or hobbies. And it gives us a chance to get in touch with our deepest thoughts and our dreams of the future.

Being on your own is also about exploring your independence out in the world. Part of growing up is learning to be comfortable on your own and enjoying the freedom to decide what's right for you. Activities that don't involve your family give you a way to define yourself as an individual.

*Loneliness*, on the other hand, is about feeling left out, invisible, or disconnected from others. You can feel lonely all by yourself or in a room full of people. Either way, being lonely is never fun and can be very painful.

You might feel lonely if your best friend moves away or if the two of you drift apart. Or if you break up with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Or if you go to a new school and don't know anyone yet. Or if you're on a family vacation and



miss having your friends around. Sometimes you might feel lonely if you don't believe that anyone really understands you.

If you feel lonely, it's normal to want to retreat from the world, but this never helps. Instead, make the effort to reach out to someone (even though it may be scary for you to do that). As the saying goes, "If something isn't scary, then it doesn't take real courage to do it." So be brave and go for it!

To get started, talk to someone in your class who seems friendly and invite this person to do something with you outside of school. Call a friend you've lost touch with. Volunteer at a child-care center or at a home for senior citizens. Or visit the teen chat rooms at The InSite ([www.theinsite.org](http://www.theinsite.org)). There are plenty of ways to reach out—maybe you can think of a few more.

Connecting with others will help lessen the loneliness. At first, it might feel awkward to talk to other people, but try it anyway. Developing social skills takes practice, so don't worry if things don't go smoothly right away. If you still feel uncertain and you want to talk to someone about your loneliness, go to an adult you trust (a parent, teacher, school counselor, or religious leader, for example). Find someone who will be understanding and helpful.

**On weekends, it's like I  
live on a deserted island**



**Hey Terra,**

Sometimes I feel like I live on a deserted island when I'm not in school. The thing is, nobody ever wants to hang out with me on weekends or during vacations. What should I do?

Lonely

**Dear Lonely,**

Do you call other people and invite them over, or do you wait for them to call you? Maybe all you need to do is make the first move. Have a party or invite someone over to watch videos. Or, on a Friday afternoon, ask some people what their plans are for the weekend. If they mention a group activity and seem open to inviting others, ask if you can join them.

If you're not comfortable with either of these ideas, extend your school day by getting involved in extracurricular activities like sports, theater, dance, or community service. That way, you'll be doing things that interest you, as well as filling your lonely hours. These new activities will lead to new friends. Best of luck!

In friendship,  
Terra

## Sadness

Sadness can creep up slowly like fog or knock you over like a sudden explosion. When you're sad, you may feel teary, vulnerable, empty, or lost. You may want to be alone to cry, take a shower, spend time with your pet, write in your journal, or lie on your bed and listen to music. You might want to call up a friend, send an email, or seek comfort from your family.

There's no "right" way to deal with sadness. Different people cope with emotions in different ways. But if you're feeling sad, here are five steps you can take to help yourself feel better:

**1. Figure out why you're sad.** Sadness is usually the result of a loss of some sort. For example, if your parents separate or get divorced, you lose the family life you've always known. If you move to a new neighborhood, you lose people and places you care about. Even a change like the end of the school year—something you probably look forward to—can cause feelings of sadness as you leave behind favorite teachers, classes, and classmates. Disappointment can lead to sadness, too. To pinpoint the cause of your sadness, ask yourself these questions: Who or what have I lost? What changes have taken place in my life, and what have I lost as a result? Who has disappointed me? Have I disappointed myself?

**2. Talk to someone you trust.** You don't need someone to try to fix things for you, because you can do that yourself once you've figured out what's going on. But it does help to talk with someone you trust. When you're sad, it's comforting to share your feelings with someone who cares enough to listen.

**3. Write down your feelings.** Writing allows you to express your emotions, instead of keeping them trapped inside. It also helps you see your problems

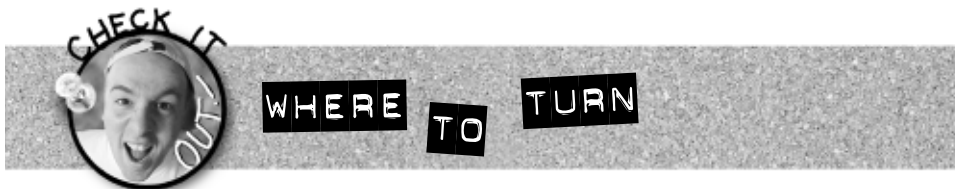
from a new perspective, which might lead to solutions. If your sadness is due to the loss of a relationship, write a letter to the person you've lost—the letter is for you to keep and *not to send*. As you write, notice how you feel. Read your writing aloud when you're done. How do you feel afterward?

**4. Check in with your body.** How do you feel physically? Are you hungry, thirsty, tired, or premenstrual? Overactive hormones or a lack of food, water, exercise, fresh air, or sleep can intensify your emotions. If you're feeling sad, pay attention to your physical needs and take care of your body. This will help you feel better physically *and* emotionally.

**5. Try a change of scenery.** Sometimes staring at the same four walls makes you feel stuck in your sadness. Getting outdoors and breathing fresh air helps. Make plans with someone you enjoy spending time with. Seeing new sights or having something to look forward to may raise your spirits.

Sometimes sadness is really more than sadness. When the feelings are very deep and hard to shake, they may be a symptom of depression. Depression hangs over you like a dark cloud that won't go away, and you may feel hopeless and unmotivated—as though you'll never be happy again. You may have trouble sleeping or feel as if you can't get up to face a new day. You may even have thoughts of hurting yourself or committing suicide.

If you feel depressed or suicidal, *get help right away*. Talk to a trusted adult immediately. You don't have to face this alone! There are people who care and want to help you feel better. Remember, you deserve to be happy, and you can be.



*When Nothing Matters Anymore: A Survival Guide for Depressed Teens* by Bev Cobain, R.N.,C. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1998). Are you feeling helpless, sad, lonely, angry, or unhappy? This book can help you figure out if you're depressed. First-person stories of young people with depression let you know you're not alone and you can find the help you need.

**Covenant House Nineline**

1-800-999-9999

[www.covenanthouse.org](http://www.covenanthouse.org)

The nineline offers immediate support and referrals for young people who need help. Their crisis intervention hotline is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

**Youth Work Links and Ideas**[www.youthwork.com](http://www.youthwork.com)

This site lists many toll-free crisis hotlines, both nationwide and worldwide. No matter where you are, you can talk to someone who cares and is trained to help.

**My grandma died, and I feel lost  
without her**A circular button with a white arrow pointing to the right and the word "Send" written inside in a bold, sans-serif font.**Hey Terra,**

My grandmother died last week. She had been sick for about a year and was having a lot of trouble breathing. So, in a way, it's better for her because she's not in pain anymore, but I still miss her! She had a great smile and would always listen to me no matter what I talked to her about.

The last time I saw her, she joked around, and even though she was very weak and had all these tubes stuck in her, she asked me how I was doing! I think she was the only person who really understood me. Now that she's gone, I feel really lost.

I used to write poems to her for her birthday, and she really liked them. I recently wrote a poem for her, but she died before I got to read it to her. I feel empty inside, and I don't want to talk to anyone.

Empty

**Dear Empty,**

I'm so sorry to hear about your grandma. Even though you know she isn't suffering anymore, you still miss her, of course. She really cared about you, and you made her life brighter, too. You gave each other something wonderful, and nothing can ever take that from you.

People deal with grief and loss in their own way and in their own time. Right now, you're feeling sad and lost and empty. This is normal, and so is feeling like you don't want to talk to anybody. But talk anyway, because it will help you feel better.

Who else in your family felt especially close to your grandma? Maybe you and that person can comfort each other by sharing your feelings, talking about her, and remembering the good times. If you can't talk to anyone at home, get in touch with your school counselor or another caring adult. If you lock your feelings inside, they'll keep hurting more and more.

I would also encourage you to continue writing poetry, which is a wonderful way to express yourself. Or write a letter to your grandma, saying all of the things you're feeling; this will make you feel closer to her. Keep this letter to yourself, if you want, or share it with someone else.

Because I believe that people who love us are always with us inside, I feel strongly that your grandma is there for you in your heart. If you ever need her advice, just find a quiet place and "talk" to her inside your head (you could even read your poems to her). Her love and wisdom are still there for you and always will be. Take care.

In friendship,  
Terra

## HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR LOOKS

Many teens spend a lot of time agonizing about their looks. Are you one of them? Maybe you love the way you look and wouldn't change a thing. It's great when you feel that way. But maybe you think you're not good-looking enough, muscular enough, tall enough, thin enough, "perfect" enough . . . Well, *enough already!* If you constantly compare yourself to other people or to images in magazines, movies, and on TV, you'll probably feel inadequate. You need to know that "good-looking" comes in all different sizes, shapes, and colors. Instead of reminding yourself (and everyone else) about your so-called flaws, focus on your good points. This is the first step to building a healthier relationship with your body.

Whenever you have a negative thought about your looks (“My rear end is too big,” “My shoulders aren’t broad enough,” or “I hate my hair,” for example), STOP. Don’t put yourself down. Instead, practice replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. Find at least one thing that you like about your body or looks (“I have nice eyes,” “My legs are strong,” or “I like my smile,” for example). Every time you have the urge to be self-critical, remember your good points instead.

Most people don’t know this, but negative body thoughts often have more to do with how you *feel* than how you *look*. Consider how you typically deal with your emotions—do you express them in healthy ways, or do you hide them, ignore them, or shove them aside? If you don’t express your feelings, where do you think they end up? Lots of times they get buried inside you and become more intense.

Because unexpressed feelings stick around for so long, it’s easy to forget what originally caused them and to lash out at the closest target: your body. You may criticize yourself, diet too much, eat too much, work out excessively, or try other unhealthy ways of coping. If this sounds familiar, get in touch with what you’re *really* feeling (because feeling “fat,” for example, isn’t an actual emotion). Here are four steps for improving your relationship with your body:

**1. Wake up to media madness.** Contrary to what advertisers want you to believe, people do *not* have perfect bodies, hair, teeth, skin, clothes, and so on. Don’t buy into the hype. Be aware that models and celebrities who look “perfect” are often so thin that their health is in danger. Also, to achieve their glamorous image, they have to rely on lighting experts, hair and makeup artists, plastic surgeons, and computer wizards to make them look more beautiful. Think about it, how many people do you know who really look “perfect”?

**2. Don’t strive for perfection—it doesn’t exist.** Going after perfection wastes your time and creative energy. If you set impossible standards for your appearance, you’ll always feel as if you don’t measure up. No human being is perfect. The people who really love us accept the imperfect parts of us. To love yourself, you need to do the same thing.

**3. What’s behind the negative thinking?** Every time you have a negative thought about your body, ask yourself, “What am I feeling right now?” Suppose you’re getting ready to go to a dance. You look in the mirror and think

something like, “No one would ever want to dance with someone who has such a big nose!” Stop and ask yourself what you’re *really* feeling. Perhaps you’re nervous about asking someone to dance with you, or you’re worried that the person you like won’t show up. See how it works? Most of the time, what you’re feeling has nothing to do with your body.

**4. Spread the word.** Talk with your friends about the “perfect body” myth that the media is selling. Help them understand that when they criticize their bodies or obsess about their appearance, it’s a sign that they’re feeling something they haven’t expressed yet. Be a role model by not criticizing yourself or comparing yourself to others. Make a point of talking to your friends about their feelings and complimenting them on their positive personality traits. Shifting the focus from looks to feelings and personal qualities will improve your relationship with your body, yourself, and others.

**I want to look like the models  
in the fashion magazines**

Send 

**Hey Terra,**

Okay, so I’m not great looking like the girls in the fashion mags. It’s not like I don’t try! What’s wrong with me? Maybe I just like food too much to be thin and beautiful like my best chum who never eats anything. I’d like to be sexy like her, but I just can’t, so it’s no wonder no guys fancy me.

British Fat Girl

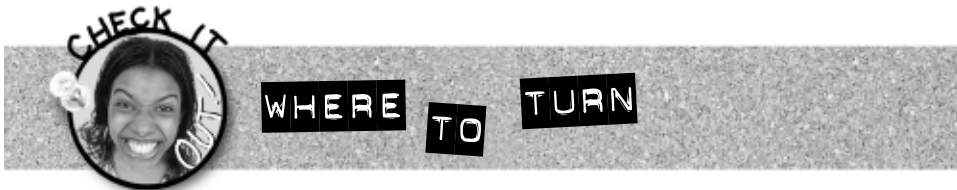
**Dear British Girl,**

First, stop thinking of yourself as “fat.” Many girls and women are obsessed with their weight, and this isn’t healthy. Good physical and emotional health is what it’s really all about (not the number on the bathroom scale or the size of your jeans). Make an appointment with your doctor and have a checkup. Talk to him/her about the foods you eat, your activity level, and your family’s health history. That way, you’ll find out whether you need to make some changes in how you eat and exercise. The goal is to maintain good health.

Bodies come in different sizes. You may not be the same size as your friend or the fashion models, but this doesn't mean there's something "wrong" with you. In fact, you may be healthier than your friend, because we all need to eat food to be healthy and, as you say, *you* actually eat and she doesn't! (Is there a chance that your friend has an eating disorder? If so, she needs help. Talk to her or a trusted adult about the situation.)

Do yourself a favor: put away the fashion magazines and pick up a book about body image and health. This will help you understand your relationship with your body and feel more positive about who you are. When you feel good about yourself, your confidence increases and people want to get to know you. Learning to accept yourself and showing others what you have to offer is definitely a worthwhile goal. Thanks for writing.

In friendship,  
Terra



*The Invisible Woman* by W. Charisse Goodman (Carlsbad, CA: Gurze Books, 1995). The author explores cultural discrimination against fat women. She shatters stereotypes, raises awareness about fat phobia and harassment, and states that no one has the right to discriminate against anyone based on their size and shape.

*The Right Moves: A Girl's Guide to Getting Fit and Feeling Good* by Tina Schwager, P.T.A., A.T.,C., and Michele Schuerger (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1998). This book covers what teen girls need to know about eating right, exercising safely and effectively, and feeling good about themselves.

*When Women Stop Hating Their Bodies: Freeing Yourself from Food and Weight Obsession* by Jane R. Hirschmann and Carol H. Munter (New York: Fawcett Books, 1997). The authors explain how "bad body thoughts" are clues to your emotions, plus how to accept your body and treat it well.



**About-Face**

[www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)

Here's help for losing a negative body image. This Web site educates girls and guys about the way the media has influenced views about what's "beautiful" and made so many people unhappy with their appearance.

**"Problems with Food," The InSite**

[www.theinsite.org](http://www.theinsite.org)

Click on "Me, Myself, and I," then on "Some Body," then on "Health" to find this section of The InSite, which explores anorexia, bulimia, and compulsive overeating. A special feature includes "Been There" stories by young people who have struggled with eating disorders and won their battles.

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**My breasts are too big!**

A circular button with a white arrow pointing to the right and the word "Send" written inside in a bold, sans-serif font.**Hey Terra,**

I have large breasts, and I hate them. I'm so sick of guys who look at my breasts instead of at me! It also really bugs me that guys think that because I'm big I'm automatically a slut. I can't help it if I'm big, and it doesn't make me a slut!

Screaming

**Dear Screaming,**

I don't blame you for your anger and frustration. Any guy who looks at your breasts instead of your face isn't treating you with respect and needs to be told, "Hey! I'm up here!" If the guys you encounter hear this often enough, they'll get the message.

Why do some guys act this way? It might have to do with media messages. Images of breasts are everywhere—on TV and billboards, and in movies, magazines, and arcade games. The message is that large breasts are attractive, sexy, and alluring. Some guys get the message and think it's acceptable to gawk at a girl's chest (an extremely rude thing to do). Girls get these messages, too, and may (wrongly) come to believe that their breast size determines their value.

You say that you hate your breasts because they're too big. Breast size is determined by heredity, and there's not much you can do about it (aside from plastic surgery, which I don't recommend, except to correct medical conditions). It's important for you to love and accept your body and to realize that you're much more than just a physical being. Your talents and goals count for a whole lot more than your breast size! Take care.

In friendship,  
Terra

**Would a popular girl ever like  
a chunky guy?**

Send

**Hey Terra,**

There's this girl I think I'm in love with. She's really pretty, and she's friendly to everyone, especially guys, but she's also friendly to me. She sits next to me in Spanish, and she always says hi and asks me how I did on tests and stuff. When I see her in the hall, she smiles at me and waves. This is really amazing because I'm not good-looking or anything. In fact, I'm kind of chunky, and girls don't ever pay attention to me (except to make fun of me). Anyway, I'm thinking of buying her something special for Valentine's Day, but I'm not sure what she'll say.

Is She the One?

**Dear Is She the One,**

I understand that this girl's attention makes you feel good, but do you really know her well enough to be in love with her? What do you know about her personality and interests? It's normal to like someone who's friendly and pays attention to you, especially when you're feeling insecure about yourself. But if the girl in your Spanish class acts toward you the way she does toward a lot of other guys, it might just mean that she's outgoing. I suggest that you try to learn more about her before confessing your feelings.

For Valentine's Day, just give her a friendly card (not the romantic kind) and see what happens. If she's still friendly, talk with her and get to know her better. Let her see all of your positive qualities, and don't focus so much on your looks and your weight. If you're worried about

your weight, you could talk to your doctor about it. Find out if you need to make some changes in the way you eat or in your activity level. But to answer your question, my guess is that a girl *would* go out with a “chunky” guy if she liked him for who he was.

There’s one thing you need to know: the better you feel about yourself, the more likely it is that you’ll find a girl to have a healthy relationship with. I wish you well.

In friendship,  
Terra

## MAKING DECISIONS

As you get older, you get to make more decisions about everything—what you wear, what classes you take, who you spend time with, who you date (if you date), where you go on weekends, what you do there, and more. Being responsible for your own decisions can be a mixed blessing. It’s very satisfying to have more control over your life. But when life gets complicated and choices are hard, you might miss the days when your mom or dad decided everything for you.

When faced with a decision, do you tend to overanalyze everything and have a difficult time choosing? Or do you jump into things without considering the consequences first? Maybe you’re somewhere in between? Or maybe you decide things differently depending on the situation. Whatever your usual decision-making style is, here’s an exercise that can help you improve:



You’ve been offered two summer jobs—one as a server at a fast-food restaurant and one as a counselor at a children’s day camp. You have to decide by the end of the week, or you lose both opportunities. Which choice is right for you?

Decision-making can be difficult, but in this situation, as with any decision, you can start by writing down the pros and cons of each choice. For example:

## FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT

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### Pros

- free shakes
- decent pay
- flexible work schedule
- lots of teens around

### Cons

- being inside
- being on my feet all day
- being around greasy food

## CAMP

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### Pros

- working with little kids
- being outdoors
- swimming on the job
- will look good on résumé

### Cons

- lower pay
- little kids can be challenging
- not as many other teens around

When you review your lists, don't just compare the number of items in each column. Instead, consider how important each pro or con is to you. Maybe you love being outside, which you'll get plenty of at the camp. Notice that one of the cons of working at the fast-food place is that you're inside all day. This might push you in the direction of the camp job. On the other hand, maybe you're saving money for college, in which case better pay could steer you in the direction of the fast-food job. Weigh the pros and cons until the right choice becomes clear.

What happens if you're still not sure what to do? Talk to people you trust, find out if they've ever faced a similar decision, and ask for their advice—they may offer ideas you hadn't considered. Although it's your decision, it's sometimes helpful to hear other opinions and get a different point of view. In the end, you may have to listen to your inner voice or follow your gut feeling about which choice is right for you.

If you still can't decide, try one of these strategies:

- **Be tough with yourself.** Set a deadline for making the decision and stick to it. For example, tell yourself you've got only one day to decide. Think about the decision as much as you want that day. When your deadline arrives, keep your promise to decide and follow through no matter what.

• **Sleep on it.** Before you go to bed, say to yourself, “I will wake up tomorrow knowing what to do.” This way, your mind can work on the problem while you’re asleep. You might even have a dream that helps you decide. (Write down the dream the moment you wake up, so you don’t forget it. Then think about what the dream might be telling you.)

Maybe you’re afraid of making a poor choice. If so, ask yourself what’s the worst that can happen. Sometimes making the “wrong” choice isn’t a big deal. (You’re out to eat and choose the salad instead of the sandwich, and you don’t enjoy your meal—not a major catastrophe.) But sometimes a wrong decision is a big deal. (You decide you don’t want to play soccer anymore, so you quit the team. Halfway through the season, you’re bored and you miss the game and your teammates. *Now* what do you do?) If you’re worried about not making the right decision, remember:

**1. Things don’t always turn out as planned.** That’s part of life and not necessarily a bad thing. Life’s surprises can prove very interesting!

**2. Every experience is a learning opportunity.** Mistakes offer great opportunities for learning, even if it’s only to learn what *not* to do next time.

**3. Accept what is and make the best of the situation.** There’s no use getting upset about the things you can’t change. Realizing that there’s an “up” side to almost everything makes life easier and helps you move on to your next learning opportunity.

Isn’t it MY decision?

Send 

Hey Terra,

In the past, I’ve had some problems with low self-esteem and stuff. I couldn’t talk to my parents about what was going on, and they got all worried and wanted me to talk to the school counselor. Well, I did talk to her, and she turned out to be really cool! So after a few months of going to her every week, I started feeling much better about myself.

But here's the problem—my family is moving next month, and I'm going to another school. My parents want me to meet regularly with the counselor at the new school, but I don't really think I need a counselor anymore. (I probably wouldn't even like him.) I feel like it's my decision, but my parents are really pressuring me. What should I do?

Cured

### Dear Cured,

It's great that you don't think you need counseling anymore. Sounds like you're feeling much better about yourself! I agree that it needs to be your decision whether to talk to a counselor. But before you decide, make sure you have all of the facts. Have you met the new school counselor yet? If not, you can't really say whether you'd like him or not.

Also, keep in mind that going to a new school could be stressful at first. Until you find new friends, some of your old feelings of low self-esteem might return. If that happens, it would help to have someone to talk to—someone who really knows how to listen.

My advice is to talk to your current counselor and get her opinion, and then see how you feel when you get to the new school. It can't hurt to pop in and say hi to the new counselor. That way, if it turns out you do need to talk sometime, you'll already know who he is and he'll know you. Good luck!

In friendship,

Terra

**How far should I go for a friend?**

Send 

### Hey Terra,

I have a friend I've gotten pretty close to over the past year. He's cool, and we have a good time playing video games and hanging out. We're also on the same soccer team. The thing is, he's not that great of a student and I am. Lately, especially in math and science, he's been asking me to give him the answers to homework and tests. We're in the same science class, but I have math before lunch and he has it right afterward. The math teacher always gives the same exact tests and assignments to each class, which is one reason my friend wants to get my answers.

The first time he asked me for the answers, I didn't want to give them to him, but instead of telling him no, I pretended I didn't remember any of the questions. The next time, he really begged me, so I just kind of gave him part of the answer to one question.

We're having a big math test on Friday, and my friend wants me to write down all of the questions and give them to him right after my class finishes taking the test. I really don't want to do this, but I'm pretty sure if I don't, it's going to hurt our friendship. I don't know what to do!

Good Student

### **Dear Good Student,**

Sometimes it's hard to stand up for what you believe in and act against a friend's wishes. I think you know exactly what the right thing to do is, but it's normal to have mixed feelings in this situation. Your friend knows he's asking you to cheat: what kind of friend would put you at risk like this? If he gets caught, you'll both be in trouble. Even if you don't get caught this time, he may keep asking you to cheat.

Although you don't want to risk your friendship, I suggest that you tell your friend how you honestly feel about the cheating. Let him know what your values are and why you want to stick to them. Offer to help him study, so he can get better grades on his own. If he doesn't want to be your friend after you tell him you won't cheat, that's his choice. He may actually be a "friend" you're better off without. You may feel hurt at first, but imagine how you'll feel if you don't do what you know is right. Setting aside your own values to please someone else won't lead to a healthy relationship—with your friend or with yourself. Best of luck!

In friendship,  
Terra