

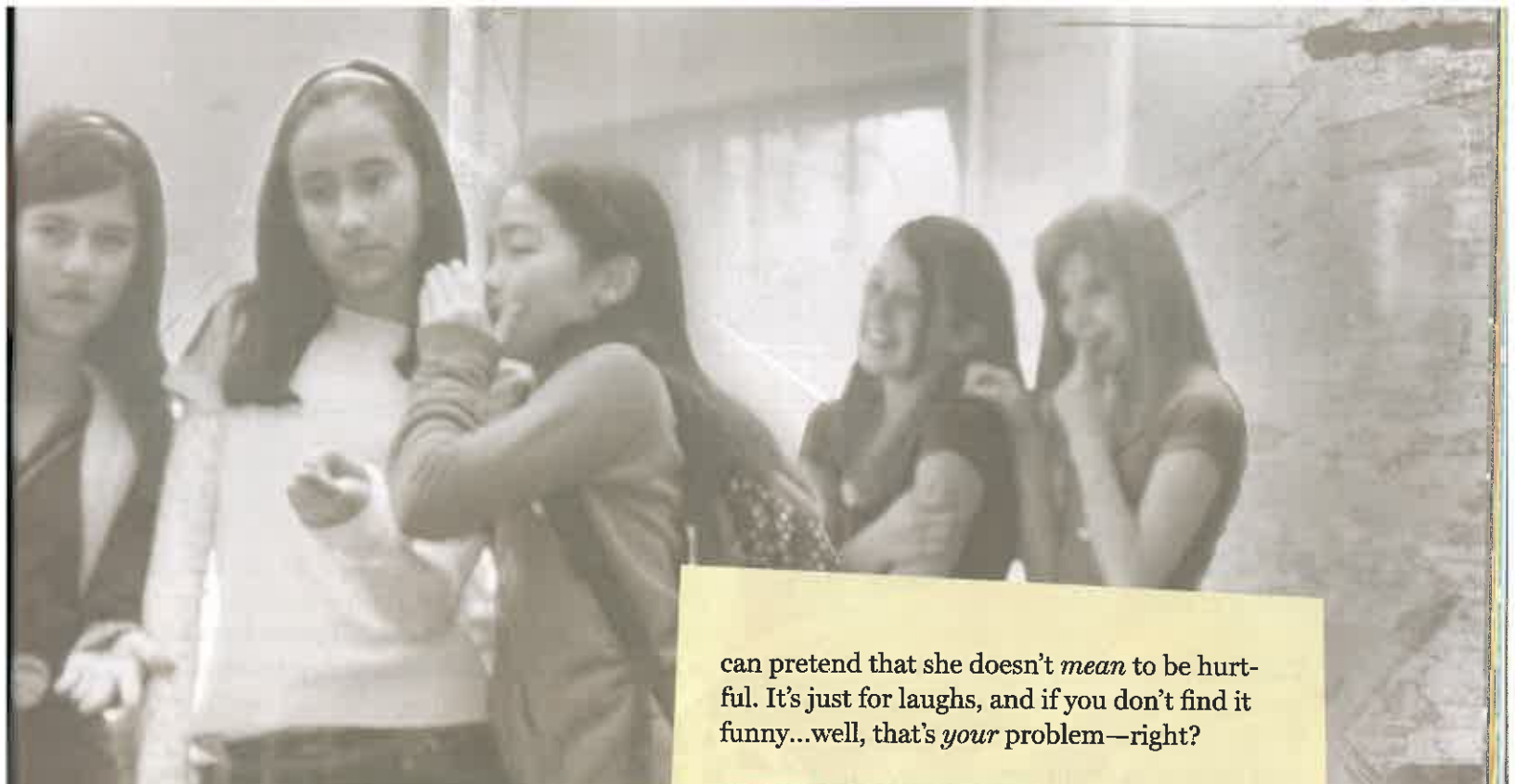
♥ *Special Feature*

Hidden

By Marta Lyons

MEANNESS

WHY GIRLS DO IT...AND HOW TO STOP THE HURT



"My friend Bella does it all the time. She says something super hurtful, then adds a 'JK' [just kidding] to the end of it. It's like she thinks that makes it funny..."

— Maddie, age 11, GA

But Maddie's not laughing. Bella's comments hurt and embarrass her, especially when Bella does it in front of their other friends. The teasing even hurts their friendship. "I never want to be honest with her or tell her anything bad about me because I'm afraid she'll make fun of it," Maddie admits.

This kind of joking around happens a lot, even among close friends. "You are the worst singer, JK!" or "No offense, but did you remember to brush your teeth this morning?" When your friend adds "JK" to the end of a mean comment or resorts to sarcastic comments, she

can pretend that she doesn't *mean* to be hurtful. It's just for laughs, and if you don't find it funny...well, that's *your* problem—right?

WHY DO GIRLS ACT THIS WAY?

Have you ever noticed how when boys get mad at you, they'll usually just tell you? You might not like what they say (or how they say it!) but at least you know where you stand with them. Girls (and women, too) are more likely to feel like they can't confront someone who has upset them. We feel like we have to be nice *all the time*.

That can put a girl in a tight spot emotionally. She might be thinking, "I'm so jealous that you made the premier soccer team," or "It's so unfair that you and your new friend are always shutting me out," but it's scary to actually *say* those things out loud. The cost feels too high. She feels like she might lose all her friends, or that

82%
of girls have been hurt
BY TEASING COMMENTS
from friends.

"I've done performances with my friends and at the end they'll be like, 'YOU DID REALLY BAD...JK!' And I'm like, 'That hurt.' You get over the shock and you're like—it's not just kidding."

- Gracie, age 10, GA

people won't like her anymore. Of course, that's not true. (Would *you* ever give up on a friend just because she admitted she was angry or jealous?) But it feels that way, so many girls hide their negative feelings like deep, dark secrets.

Emotions, though, have a funny way of getting out, whether we want them to or not. If a girl is afraid to say "I'm so jealous of your clothes," it might come out as, "I think my grandma has that same sweater...JK!" The little dig in her comment helps her let out some of those negative feelings that are building up inside her. But by wrapping it up in humor, she also gets to hang on to her image as someone who's "nice." Her target may feel the sting, but she's still seen as sweet because she was just making a little joke.

Whether your friend was "just kidding" or not, your hurt feelings are very real.

Maybe you've been in this situation before and come back with an honest reaction: "Ouch—that wasn't funny," or even, "That really hurt my feelings." Chances are, you got a response like, "You're so sensitive today!" or the ever-popular "Can't you take a joke?" And at that point, you probably backed off.

Maybe you even thought, "I guess I *am* too sensitive. She said she was just kidding."


Here's what's wrong with this picture:

Whether she was kidding or not, your hurt feelings are very real. It doesn't matter whether you *should* feel hurt or not—you do. And if you feel like your friend was trying to hurt you, there's a good chance you're right. Trust your intuition on this one.

CONFRONTING JK

What's the best way to deal with JK and other mean-funny comments? If you ever *have* said, "That really hurt my feelings" in response, you were on the right track. The best way to put a stop to JK is to confront it, and that means being brave enough to bring what's *really* happening out in the open.

Okay, we'll admit that's a super-hard thing to do. When you're honest about your feelings, you're opening yourself to criticism—including "Can't you take a joke?"—and possibly even more hurt. Making yourself vulnerable is never easy for anyone. But if you want to put an end



**“There’s truth behind every
‘just kidding.’”**

– Isabella, age 12, CA

to JK and other mean jokes, talking about how you feel is the best place to start.

So what do you say when your friend comes back with “Can’t you take a joke?” Don’t give up. Try something like, “Maybe you were trying to be funny, but it really did hurt my feelings. It feels like you’re mad at me. If I did something to upset you, I’d really like to talk about it.”

Your friend might need more reassurance before she’s willing to talk openly about her feelings. Help her out: “I know this is hard to talk about. It’s hard for me too, but I value our friendship, so I want to know if something is wrong. I wish you’d tell me how you feel.”

Hopefully, you’ll finally be able to talk about what’s really going on between you and solve whatever the problem is. There’s a pretty good chance your friend’s negative feelings will shrivel up and blow away once they’re out in the open. But even if you have a bigger problem, you’ll be able to deal with it if you can talk it through. And then, you might just find something wonderful happening: a friendship that’s deeper, stronger, and more honest than ever before.

Remember: Saying “JK” doesn’t erase the mean words that came before it. 🍷

“My friend kept saying things like ‘You’re stupid,’ or ‘I hate your hair,’ and then she’d say, ‘JK!’ and laugh like it was so funny. Finally I asked her to stop because it hurt my feelings. She was like, ‘Sor-ree! It’s just a joke!’ but then later she said she really was sorry, and now she doesn’t do it anymore.”

– Anonymous, age 12, OH