

# Know what makes girls tick

By Michael Grose

Girls can be a mystery to some parents, particularly when they reach the tween and teen years. Following are some key principles to help you better understand, empower and parent the girls in your life.



## Girls crave connection and contribution

Connection is at the core of working effectively with girls. Girls need to know if you like them. When you like her, then a connection exists and she can begin contributing to that relationship. Girls who have a sense that you like them and are interested in them will do anything to collaborate with you. Girls crave the feeling of contributing to an order that is greater than themselves, and they are driven to find purposeful relationships with others. Girls generally like teachers and adults who like them. They do their absolute best to give and receive attention from others. Disconnection is devastating for girls.

## Being accepted is their #1 priority

Girls are very concerned about what others think of them. Girls need to be liked. What they desire most is acceptance and emotional security. The journey towards adolescence reinforces group approval, as most girls do not want to be seen as unique or different. As girls move through their developmental journey, they become increasingly concerned with being accepted and fitting into acceptable parameters. Being accepted by a frenemy is regarded as better than not being accepted at all.

## Girls are challenged to find their true self

“Who am I?” is the proverbial girl question. Girls learn early about the costs and rewards of social approval. Their sense of personal power tends to be based on being liked and pleasing others. This can create confusion as they struggle with differentiating what they know to be true versus what others expect from them. Girls tend to morph their identities into what is expected of them. Finding their authentic identity can be a challenge.

## Girls conceal their worth

Easily holding back from owning accomplishments, girls need help to embrace and acknowledge their strengths. By downplaying their strengths

girls keep themselves safe from others expectations. Girls are more likely than boys to feel like they need to validate their achievements, providing a justification for their successes. Provide girls with opportunities to frequently assess their capabilities. Teach them to genuinely accept a compliment.

### Girls feel immense pressure to conform

From an early age girls tend to have an easier time regulating their physical energy which makes them more familiar to hearing that they are good and pleasing to adults. Girls are more likely to surrender to the pressures of direct and indirect messages; they are more sensitive to being able to please. Adults and society generally treat this gender in a way that reinforces the 'good girl' image. Be careful that you are not doing things for girls to help them avoid failure. Setting up an expectation that 'you must be perfect' can inhibit resilience. Girls feel compelled to adhere to the 'good girl' image.

### Girls often feel misunderstood

Many girls come to the conclusion that there isn't a soul on earth who thinks or feels the same way she does. The inner workings of her mind are complex, and she fears that her thoughts and feelings may be misunderstood. Girls are desperate to be understood, even if it is just by one person.

### Girls need other girls and women

The sisterhood helps girls to feel connected. Friendships are essential to life as they know it, and they will be their greatest sense of pleasure as well as their most intense source of pain. As girls move into adolescence and beyond, their exposure to strong women of substance needs to expand to fit their needs. Other girls and women are a protective factor for girls in a society driven by media messages. Exposure to other women and belonging to different friendship groups allow girls to be valued for their unique contribution.

### Girls need to discover their passion and purpose

Discovering what is most important for them also helps girls discover their true self and their true source of happiness. The discovery of a girl's 'spark' helps her connect to her values, her identity and to like-minded souls. A connection to her passion and purpose increases a girl's willingness to take risks and experience healthy relationships.