

## Scenario 4

Julia was in 6th grade and had been at her school since kindergarten. Her two best friends were Wendy and Erin. Erin was the most popular girl in the class and all the girls saw her as the leader. One morning Julia arrived at school and Erin was acting weird. When Julia said hi to her, she didn't respond. She just looked away and smiled at a group of girls in the corner of the classroom.

It didn't take long for Julia to figure out that Erin had turned most of the girls against her. But, she didn't know why! She went to Wendy and asked her why Erin was mad at her. Wendy acted nervous and said that all she knew was that Erin told her that if she hung out with Julia, none of the rest of the girls would talk to her anymore.

The rest of that day lasted forever. Whenever the teacher was looking everyone was nice to Julia. But, when her back was to the class, Erin or another girl would throw pieces of paper toward Julia or whisper to each other and look in her direction. Julia thought Wendy would help her but Wendy just pretended nothing was happening.

That night Julia talked to her parents and they told her to wait and see if tomorrow was better. If not, they said, perhaps they could help Julia talk to Erin and work through the problem. Julia felt like that would make her look stupid if everyone found out that her mom and dad had to get involved. She knew that sometimes the class would pick on someone, but she never thought her friends would turn against her and do the same thing to her. She felt like she didn't have any friends and nobody liked her.

The next day was even worse. No one wanted to hang out with her at recess and she had to sit by herself at lunch. At the end of lunch she went into the girls' bathroom. While she was there, a girl from her class came in and said that Erin had sent her in and that Julia had to take off her shoes and send them back to Erin or no one would talk to her tomorrow. Julia just wanted to go home. She didn't want to cry but she was confused and hurt and scared. She gave the girl her shoes.

Now she was late for class and was in the bathroom with no shoes. She headed to class and walked in quietly with her head down. Before she could get to her chair, the teacher asked her why she was late and where her shoes were.

Here was her dilemma. What should she do now? Everyone was watching her. If she told the teacher about Erin and the girls ganging up on her she would look like a snitch, and who knows what the kids would do to her after that. But, if she didn't say anything or lied to the teacher, she would get into trouble.

NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

(this is for you)

Cliques and social trauma are rampant in upper elementary and middle school. We all know that, and even as adults we can conjure up memories of being the object of peer cruelty. That fact can help when we talk with students about issues like this one. There is nothing more important than social relationships at this age. To underestimate or minimize conflicts that students have around this issue is a sure way to lose connection with them. Even the teacher's act of questioning Julia in front of the class escalated her dilemma rather than diminished it.

I like to use this case because of the way students respond to it. Many students will read this and feel sorry for Julia, but will also say that nothing THAT bad happens at their school. It is easy for them to relate and empathize with Julia's case and connect it to their own experiences, yet they feel safely distant because it is such a blatant case of bullying. However, after a few minutes of discussion students often begin to challenge the idea that cliques and bullying are not a serious issue at their school. They begin to recognize that Julia's situation is more common than they like to think, even if the bullying and cruelty come out in different ways.

I also like this case because it gets students talking about the differences of how boys and girls act toward one another. The indirect assault that girls use is fairly alien to the full frontal attack that boys seem to prefer. It is helpful to have a case like this which gives both genders permission to talk frankly about why and how this phenomenon plays out in their social lives.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(also, debate topics, writing assignments, etc.)

- What do you think Julia should do now?
- Why do you think Wendy didn't stick up for Julia?
- Has this sort of thing happen ever happened to you or to someone you know?
- Have you ever been in Wendy's position? Erin's?
- How do you think this situation would be different if the case involved boys instead of girls?
- Why do you think people pick on others, and why do others join in?

- What do you do when you see or hear someone in your class making fun of someone? Do you join in? Speak up for the person? Say nothing? Why do you think you react that way?
- Have you ever felt that a good friend turned his or her back on you? What happened and what did it feel like?