

# Girls struggle with feelings once they reach adolescence

**W**hy do girls have a harder time in the teenage years than boys do? Research has shown that teenage girls get depressed more often, cope less well with stress, and have more eating disorders, than boys.

Psychologist Carol Gilligan of Harvard University attributes the difficulties of teenage girls to what she calls a "crisis of connection." Her research followed hundreds of girls from childhood to adolescence, and found some interesting trends.

Eight-year-old girls speak their mind honestly. They talk openly about what they feel and what they think of others. They see conflict as a sign of a healthy relationship, a natural way of resolving disputes. They talk openly about anger, and take disagreement and difference for granted.

When these same girls enter adolescence, however, they struggle with images of perfection and idealized relationships. They think to care for themselves is "selfish" or "wrong." They come up against enormous pressures to be perfect girls - quiet, calm and kind. At stake are praise, attention, love and popularity - both at home and at school. Paradoxically, in their search for closer relationships, they are taught to remove part of themselves from the relationship, by not expressing their real feelings, especially anger.

Healthy development, involving self-expression and allowing your true feelings, puts the girls into conflict in the world they live in. These conflicts were found not only in the research setting, but in real life. When Tanya was eight years old, they asked



**FAMILY MATTERS**  
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about the Aesop's fable where a family of moles naively invite a porcupine to live with them during the winter. Tanya said it was dumb, "a real bad combination." She thought they "should make the cave bigger so they could all have their own paths." When she was 11 years old, however, her answer had changed; she thought it was right because "you should always be nice to a neighbor." She completely denied her own wishes for the idea of being nice and kind.

Nor surprisingly, Tanya became quite popular with other girls... but she became involved in an increasingly complicated and futile attempt to be always nice and kind, never mean or rude. In the eighth grade, for example, and unpopular girl started following her around. Tanya was totally unable to confront her. Tanya became deceptive - making plans and not showing up, eavesdropping on phone conversations to find out what the other girl was feeling or where she was going. She admitted to the interviewer that "I hate her, but I don't know how to act because I have to be nice". Interestingly, in a letter to the interviewer after the experiment,

Tanya talked at length about "the tyranny in her life of the image of the perfect girl".

Surely boys have pressures to be perfect too. But the idealized notion of a boy typically includes a more assertive, independent and aggressive style. There is more emphasis for boys on "what are you going to do with your life," and this makes some aggressiveness and independence necessary in order to make their way in the world. It allows the boys to behave more honestly, express their true feelings, have relationships that are based on the real person rather than something they're pretending or want to be. It enables boys to handle conflicts more directly and openly.

The world is changing rapidly. Women are entering the work force en masse, out of necessity as well as by choice. If we are to prepare our children for the world that lies ahead, it is important to encourage independence, honesty, even some aggressiveness in all our children. We should not be teaching girls to think they have to be nice to everyone, at all costs.

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12-2 pm. Help us decorate our store windows for Halloween. We'll be making witches, pumpkins, goblins, and other scary things in our play area today. Join us for spooky fun - and your chance to win a frightful book of ghost stories.

### Saturday, October 15 - BLASTS FROM THE PAST

12-4 pm. We love the classics and we're going to prove it to you! Enjoy a 20% discount all day on selected kids classics series. Classic movies: Jane Eyre, Secret Garden and more, will be playing. Enter our contest to win a gift edition of Little Women. We'll have the first line of some children's classics, you'll have to provide the correct titles. - No Hints!

### Sunday, October 16 - ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

12-3 pm: Are you a fan of Anne Shirley? If you are, visit our play area today for activities based on this popular Canadian classic. Play with Anne paper dolls, a carousel house, and sample Anne's favorite dishes. - Also, a very special visitor will make an appearance.

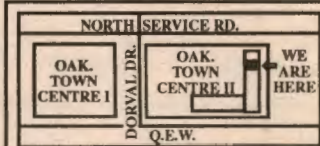
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## Child Find conference

The issue of missing children continues to be a serious one. Child Find Ontario will host its 5th Annual Conference, on Saturday, Oct. 22nd, at the Burlington Holiday Inn to discuss issues related to missing children in an effort to provide important information to those in law enforcement and other agencies dealing with this issue.

Infant abduction, profiles of producers, a native perspective of children at risk, the Intelligence Services of Metro Toronto Police on the transient criminal, and a parent sharing her story and how she has turned her grief into assisting the youth of today are the topics that will be shared with all who attend.

In a special award presentation - Child Find Ontario - will honor police forces and airline companies that have played a vital role in the recovery of missing children.

Registration is \$95. Phone 1-800-662-6047 for more information.

Child Find Ontario is a non-profit, registered charitable, volunteer-based organization established in November 1983 and incorporated in June 1984. Since Child Find is primarily a volunteer-based organization, all volunteers undergo stringent security checks by the local police department and the Children's Aid Society. For further information regarding volunteer needs, contact Child Find at (905) 292-5353.

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