

INTRODUCTION

Girls Inc. is pleased to partner with Paramount Pictures for the January 2024 release of *Mean Girls*. As part of the cinematic debut of the hit musical, we aim to engage young people in dialogue about allyship, bullying, and creating safe spaces in schools; and spotlight the connection between these themes and Girls Inc.'s mission to inspire all girls to be **strong, smart, and bold**.

This guide was developed for trusted adults who are looking for ideas about discussing themes and topics from the film with their teens. More resources may be found after the questions. ***If your teen is a member of Girls Inc. and you'd like additional guidance, please reach out to the Program Leader at your local Girls Inc. affiliate.***

Mean Girls is rated PG-13. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) defines a PG-13 rating as "Parents Strongly Cautioned: Parents are urged to be cautious. Some material may be inappropriate for pre-teenagers." The MPAA rating system is explained at [filmratings.com](https://www.filmratings.com), which also suggests that trusted adults "*Reinforce the positive values of a movie by sitting down with your children after the show and discussing what they saw. Use the movie as an educational aid, clearing up any misunderstandings and sharing new ideas.*"

TIPS FOR TRUSTED ADULTS

- **Watch the movie with her.** If possible, make it a special evening. Sure, she might see it later with friends, but knowing that you took the time to see it with her is meaningful.
- **If possible, choose a time and place free of distractions and interruptions.** Your talk could happen in the car on the way home after the movie, over coffee or laundry, or on a walk.
- **No screens.** Your teen will know that you take her seriously and are focused on her input, but only if you aren't checking your phone. Conversely, you deserve the same attention from her during important conversations. You may want to ask if it's a good time for her to talk.
- **Ask broad questions and take time to process the answers before you respond.** The goal is to learn and discover more about each other and to allow for an honest, respectful exchange. Taking the time to unpack her words before you respond may help avoid judgments that could stifle the conversation.
- **She really does care what you think.** Research shows that even when teens tell us we are "cringy," trusted adults have a strong influence on behavior and future decision-making.
- **Keep your personal examples broad, at least at first.** You may have experienced cliques and bullies when you were in high school and you may not be comfortable sharing – that's okay. Detailing the specifics could move the focus of the conversation away from her. One technique is to start out sharing your history in broad terms. For example, "I once had a friend share my secrets and it really hurt. It ended our friendship. Has something like that ever happened to you?" That way the focus remains on your teen and preserves your privacy.

THE MEAN GIRLS MYTH

PARENT DISCUSSION GUIDE

- **Agree on language.** Do you both agree on the definition of bullying? As a rule, bullying is hurtful, intentional, ongoing, and teens often have a hard time making it stop. This is different from a typical disagreement or conflict. Is she talking about emotional, cyber, or physical bullying?
- **There are excellent resources for talking to your teen about bullying.** You may wish to look up tips for adults on YouTube, for example. Girls Inc. and your teen's school can help!
- **Quality conversations come from trust.** Building trust can take time and may not happen immediately after seeing the film.
- **Listening to understand is always the key.**

IDEAS FOR CONVERSATION STARTERS AFTER THE FILM

- What did you think of the movie?
- Any character(s) you could identify with?
- What did you think of the music?
- What did you like most about the movie?
- What surprised you?
- What parts were funny?
- How have your friends changed from elementary/middle school? How have others changed?
- Do you know anyone who has gone through what Cady went through?
- How would a smart person like Cady be treated at your school as a new student?
- What did you think of the characters who were teachers? Anyone like that in your school?
- What was up with the parents in the movie?
- Why is it always the girls who get labeled as mean?
- How do you stay strong under pressure to be like everyone else?
- Are you worried about anyone you know?
- How do your friends support each other?
- Have you or your friends ever experienced someone betraying your trust?
- What do you think happens to people who are bullies in high school?
- How can students change the culture of their school if they don't like it?
- Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Any way I can help or support you or your friends?
- How would you respond to [part of the film] if it happened to you?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES THAT MAY BE HELPFUL INCLUDE:

- [girlsinc.org Resources](https://girlsinc.org/resources)
- Rosalind Wiseman's book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, 3rd edition
- *The Ophelia Project – It Has A Name Middle School* curriculum
- Understood.org
- The National Children's Advocacy Center - <https://www.nationalcac.org/internet-safety-tips/>
- <https://cybersmileeducation.org/urbandecay/>
- 988lifeline.org or call 988 for mental health assistance