

TEEN TALK (an original column from The Daily Record)

April 10, 2005

We love your letters—keep 'em coming! Put "Teentalk" in the subject and email us: teentalk@the-daily-record.com

YOU: What can I do? There are some people at school who always gossip about me. They are ruining my reputation. None of what they are saying is true, but everyone believes them. It's a total nightmare! Why would they talk about me? Please tell me what to do!

TEENTALK: Ouch—it *hurts* when other people talk about you behind your back! The heart of your problem, of course, is that you can't *make* other people behave the way you want them to. In other words, we don't have some magic phrase that will make the gossipers stop their vicious talk and set the record straight. You say that "everyone" believes the gossip, but we bet there are some people who don't: your friends. Your best bet is to make sure they know the truth, and that can only happen if you talk to them about what's going on. True friends will stand up for you when the gossipers start: "Nancy is a great friend, and I'm not going to listen to these lies." (If you're not getting that kind of support from your friends, you may want to reconsider who you're giving your valuable friendship to. You deserve better!) Beyond that, ignore the rude remarks (much easier said than done, we know), hold your head up, and take the high road—*don't* retaliate with gossip of your own (no matter how much they may deserve it!). You know what the truth is, and your refusal to be intimidated by the gossipers will say more about you than anything they can dream up. And remember—the only good thing about gossip is that it has to be new to be interesting, so before you know it, you'll be old news. Hang in there, and let us know how it's going.

YOU: This is kind of a weird thing to ask...but I really want to be a good friend. Really. And I'm not. I mean I don't do anything that's wrong or anything—I just don't think I'm very good at being a friend. I want to make new friends, too, and I never know what to do. I just want to be special, you know?

TEENTALK: What a good question, and what a worthy goal, too. We often think that being a friend is something that should just come naturally (albeit more naturally to some of us than others!). But you really can *learn* to be a better friend. Just remember these guidelines:

- Be nice: It may sound trite and silly, but remember the golden rule—really! Whenever you're in doubt, treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Be forgiving: If a friend acts in a way that you find annoying, try this: Remind yourself that a person is generally doing the best that he or she knows how at that moment. (Reread that a few times until it really sinks in and makes sense—it will help you through a *ton* of difficult situations.)
- Be trustworthy: Guard your friends' secrets and follow through on promises. (Never cancel plans with one friend because you found something "better" to do.)
- Be fun...and funny: Have a good attitude about life! Endless whining and complaining do *not* make for a good friend. And while we can't all be Robin Williams, we can make sure we share a joke, look on the lighter side, and *laugh* often!
- Be interested. Your t-shirt may say "But it *is* all about me," but in a friendship, it definitely isn't! Ask your friends about *their* lives!