

Taking Down the Green-Eyed Monster

By Margie Markarian

Understanding jealous feelings and how to handle them

Everyone feels twinges of jealousy sometimes. It can happen when a friend is wearing that really cool jacket you saw at the mall, sits with other friends at lunch, or gets picked for the all-star team and you don't.

"Jealousy is feeling bad when a friend does better than you or has something you want," says Sylvia Rimm, a child psychologist at the Family Achievement Clinic in Cleveland. Although jealousy is a common human emotion, it's important to learn how to handle it. "It's not a good idea to go through life constantly comparing yourself to others," adds Rimm.

Why Do We Feel This Way?

Being jealous about the time a friend spends with other people instead of you is a common form of jealousy. "Maybe your friend has to practice with a team every day after school instead of hanging out like you used to," says Annie Fox. She's a former teacher and author of the Middle School Confidential books. "Maybe your friend goes to a different school and is meeting new kids, or has a boyfriend or girlfriend for the first time."

Other times, jealousy stems from feelings that a friend, sibling, or classmate is smarter, better looking, more popular, or more athletic than you. It's hard not to be jealous of all the attention and recognition the other person receives. That type of thinking turns everything into a competition. "I've worked with kids and teens who have said, 'I just can't be friends with that person—they are so successful at everything, and it makes me feel bad,' " says Rimm.

Possessions can lead to jealousy among friends too. There's nothing unusual about wanting the hottest fashions, the newest gaming system, the best birthday parties, and trips to Walt Disney World on school vacations. But the truth is, there are always going to be people who have more than you.

So what can you do to feel better when jealous feelings get in the way of a friendship? Here are some ideas:

When you're jealous about the time a friend spends with other people or other activities...

Talk about it. Tell your friend how you feel. Let him or her know that you miss talking or spending time together. But try not to make the other person feel guilty, Fox says. And then be sure to listen with an open mind.

Be understanding. Your friend may not have even realized you two were drifting apart. He or she may have just gotten too busy with other activities. At the same time, you may have to be more accepting of your friend's hectic schedule or expanding social circle.

Accept change. If your friend really is pulling back on the friendship, you have to accept that, as hard as it may be. Friendships evolve and change over time. Sometimes the person you played tag with in third grade doesn't want to shoot baskets with you in sixth grade, and it's not because of anything you did. Even the best of friends can grow apart. "Maybe you will come back together as friends down the road," says Fox, "but for right now, you deserve to have friends who want to be with you as much as you want to be with them."

When you're jealous of a friend's successes...

Be your best. Instead of trying to outperform your friend, simply focus on being the best you can be. "If you did your best at a tryout but didn't make the team or get the part, it's out of your control anyway," says Patti Criswell, a clinical social worker at Child & Family Psychological Services in Kalamazoo, Mich. Remind yourself of other things that you do well.

Do unto others. Ask yourself, "If the roles were reversed, what would I want a friend to do?" "You'd want your friend to congratulate you, cheer you on, and accept the decision graciously, not put you down or be mad at you," says Criswell, who is the author of *A Smart Girl's Guide to Friendship Troubles*.

When you're jealous of a friend's possessions or circumstances...

Note the ups, not the downs. Try keeping a gratitude journal or creating lists about the things in your life that you would never change. Writing can give you a new perspective. You may not have as many trendy outfits or video games as the kids next door. But maybe you have a great relationship with your brother and sister, and your parents are always around for dinner and family time on weekends.

"If you can teach yourself to be thankful for a moment, a person, an experience, and what you do have," says Criswell, "then you get in the habit of recognizing the goodness in your life instead of the things that don't go exactly your way."

For those times when you do feel a green-eyed monster stirring within you, you can fight it off. Try pausing a moment. Take a deep breath and repeat something positive to yourself such as "All is well" or "I am fine." It's calming and reassuring, and it can help you get through a wave of jealousy.

What Is the “Green-Eyed Monster”?

It's just a fancy way of saying “jealousy.” People have used that phrase for at least 400 years. People also say they are “green with envy”—it means almost the same thing. Nobody's sure exactly why the color green is linked to jealousy.

Jealous No More

It's OK to be proud and happy when you win a class election, receive tickets to a big play-off game for your birthday, or get all A's on your report card (again!). But it's also a good idea to be aware that your successes can bring up feelings of jealousy in friends, classmates, brothers, and sisters. Here are some tips on being a gracious winner and a good friend:

Avoid over-the-top bragging.

A round of high-fives with your teammates is fine. So is telling your friends the news about an upcoming vacation. But don't show off with comments such as “I'm the best!” “In your face!” or “Our vacation is going to be so amazing! We're staying at the most expensive resort on the island, and I'm going to have \$100 a day to spend on whatever I want.”

Share the luck.

If you got that new BMX bike you and your buddy were both hoping for, invite him or her to take it for a spin around the block. If you have a special talent for certain ballet moves or jazz steps, share some tips or ask a friend to practice with you after dance class.

Find new ways to stay in touch.

Do you have less time to spend with an old friend because of new friends and activities? Then keep in touch in other ways. That's what IM, text messaging, cell phones, and social networking sites are all about.

Be humble and show interest.

When you spend time with friends, make sure the conversation flows back and forth. Avoid getting stuck on the things happening in your life. Ask about what's going on in your friends' lives, and take note of their activities and accomplishments. Friendship should be a two-way street.