

Coping with Feeling Excluded

It doesn't feel good to be left out or excluded from things. Maybe you hear a classmate is having a party, and you weren't invited. Maybe they forgot, but you might wonder if they left you out on purpose. Focusing on this possibility can lead to lots of uncomfortable feelings, from sadness to anger to confusion.

Everyone experiences social rejection or exclusion at some point, and the following tips can help.

Accept how you feel. It's normal to feel upset when others exclude you, even if they didn't do it on purpose. All your emotions are valid, so don't deny them or hold them back. You may experience a mix of emotions, including hurt, disappointment, sadness, or anger. Take time to explore these feelings to process them and decide what to do next. Try:

- journaling
- grounding exercises (get centered and calm)
- exercising, playing a game, or doing an athletic activity
- deep breathing exercises
- going for a walk

Example: Miguel wasn't invited to a classmate's party. He found out about it because some of his friends were talking about the day after. Miguel felt angry and hurt. He decided to take some deep breaths to calm down and invited some other friends to play basketball later that day.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Jumping to worst-case scenarios isn't unhelpful because it can increase your anxiety and make it hard to consider reasonable explanations. Stick to logical thinking by looking at the evidence. Maybe you were left out of a group text by mistake.

Example: Chris believes her friends no longer care about her because they didn't invite her to go shopping with them. She started to cry, then remembered she didn't have any proof to support that thought. She grabbed her journal and wrote down all the ways her friends and family do care. She decided they really do care about her, and there's most likely another explanation why she wasn't invited.

What signals are you sending out? When you notice that people exclude you, think about whether your actions play a role. If you want to be included, communicate that through your words, body language, and behavior. Maybe you

cross your arms during conversations, or you get absorbed in activities and lose track of what is happening around you.

Example: Melissa is sitting with friends at lunch, and she's so focused on watching TikTok that she doesn't notice they are making plans for a party. She didn't respond or offer anything to the conversation, so they assumed she wasn't interested.

Ask yourself:

- Am I shy?
- Do I try to make conversation and include others?
- Do I have a short temper when others make mistakes?
- Do I use rude language or interrupt when others are talking?

It can be hard to know how you come across, so if you're unsure, ask a family member, friend, or teacher that can offer some guidance.

Communicate your feelings. When you feel left out, talking about it can help you understand what happened. Instead of worrying about what others might think or feel, explain why you felt left out using "I" statements. Focus on your experience and mention specific instances.

Example: Instead of, "You always leave me out! No one ever invites me to anything!" you might say, "The movie nights I keep hearing about sound really fun. I feel left out because I haven't been invited. Is there some reason why? I'd like to join next time."

Look at your strengths. If you feel like you don't fit in at school, and friends forget to invite you to events and activities, you might wonder why no one wants to spend time with you. If you believe you don't belong, it can impact your confidence and self-esteem. Affirmations and positive self-talk can help. Here are some examples:

- "My friends always say how caring and kind I am. They wouldn't exclude me for no reason."
- "I'm smart and I have a great sense of humor."
- "I have fun with my friends, and I'm sure they have fun with me, too."

Feeling confident can help you to connect with others instead of waiting for an invitation.

Do something fun. You might not always understand why you were excluded. Sometimes, you must accept that others *did* exclude you, perhaps intentionally. And that's on them - it doesn't mean you did anything wrong. You may feel hurt and angry, but don't let that ruin your day. Next time you're not invited to do something, do something fun, like:

- watch a favorite movie
- hang out with loved ones or call a friend
- play with a pet
- bake cookies

Make the first move. If you often say no to invitations, people may assume you aren't interested and stop inviting you. They may leave you out of events they think you won't enjoy. If you don't like large groups, friends who know this probably won't invite you.

Example: Nathan gets nervous at large group events, and because he has skipped the last few parties, his friends stopped inviting him. Instead of getting upset, he set up a movie night with just three of his close friends.

Talk it out. When you feel rejected or excluded, talking to someone can help. They may not have solutions but talking things through can be helpful. They can also help you sort out possible explanations you might not have considered.

Who can you talk to? _____

Make some new friends. People change, and new interests and friendships sometimes go with these changes. This can be upsetting, but you can't do much other than letting your friends know you're available. You can avoid loneliness by making new friends who share your interests.

Example: Celine was friends with a group of girls since elementary school. Recently, many of the girls joined the band. Celine didn't, and she felt left out because the "band friends" attended many activities together. Celine decided to sign up for an art class, where she made a few new friends.

You want to feel like you belong, and it can feel awful when you feel ignored or excluded. But remember, they are missing out on your friendship. You can choose to spend time with people who show interest in you, instead of waiting around and feeling bad.

What to Do

Describe a time you felt left out or excluded. What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?

Do you jump to conclusions or make assumptions when you're excluded? What happens when you do?

Are you sending out signals to others that you're interested in hanging out with them? Come up with one way you can show others you're interested.

Are you communicating your feelings when you feel excluded? Why or why not?

Write down your strengths, and 2-3 affirmations you can say to yourself when you feel left out.

What are some fun activities you can do on your own?

What can you do to "make the first move?" Who will you invite? When will you do it?

What are some ways you can make some new friends?

What are some other ways you can cope with feeling excluded? Be specific.
