



Teens & Dating Stress

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Q: Dear Susie, I'm so stressed over trying to get a girlfriend. Why do girls say I am too young for them? They say "*I don't want to lead you on.*" I tell them, "*I like to be led on.*" How can I get less nervous around girls?

A: I am so sorry you're having a rough time. The whole boy-girl dynamic has been a mystery since time began. Since my work is mind-body stress management, you might also want to touch base with a guidance counselor or a trusted adult who can offer more specific relationship advice.

Somewhere in your heart of hearts, you probably already know some of the things I am going to suggest, but it never hurts to be reminded:

1. If girls are saying you are too young for them, perhaps you are. Or they may just be a bit more sophisticated at this point. As you know, girls grow up faster than guys in some ways, until eventually, most guys catch up in their late teens or early twenties. If a girl says something like that to you, however, perhaps she's not someone you really want to date.

2. In the meantime, why not make friends with girls a year younger than you are. They might see you as an "older guy." You might also find those great girls your own age that aren't into making boys feel bad. What a drag to have to try to be "enough." You *are* enough - for someone who can see you for all the great things you are. I have a friend who says "*If you want better self-esteem, quit hanging out with people who don't like you!*"

3. Hint: Every girl wants to feel like she's talking to a genuinely kind, fun, honest boy who likes her because she's smart, pretty and fun to be with. The very best relationships often begin by being friends first, so that girls can really get to know you and you can get to know them without all of the stuff that gets in the way when you're trying to attract more romantic attention.

4. Always look for girls who make you laugh, who have nice friends, and who are genuinely kind people. (Note: Women can be "babes".... and also be really nice people.)

5. Spend time doing things you genuinely enjoy. Play sports, join school clubs, and "she" just might be there enjoying the same things! Maybe she goes to another school, so try community activities that include kids from other schools.

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6. You say that you told her that you "like being led on." Please reconsider, and see if that's really true. Being misled or trifled with feels terrible. There are fabulous kids out there who'll make you feel great about who you are! Review your mental checklist of qualities you're looking for in a girlfriend, and see if they are really what will make you happy. Maybe revise the list.

7. In all relationships with family and friends, think about what it is you bring to the relationship and what you can do to make others feel great about *themselves*, rather than only what's in it for you. You'll never go wrong, and you will get much, much more out of your relationship!

You've heard it a million times, "*Just be yourself.*" But remember to be your *best* self. Hang in there. She may be just around the next corner...

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