

T A K E M Y A D V I C E

Teasing can be hurtful, but there is something you can do.

Q: I was shopping with my family at the mall recently. I overheard some younger children giggling behind me and my cousin, who also is adopted from China. They were saying something about "slanty eyes" and they were pulling on the skin around their eyes and making funny faces. It hurt my feelings.

- Hope

A: Dear Hope,

Your story is like many others I've heard from Asian children and teenagers (including myself!) who experienced the racism of people around them. Sadly, this will most likely not be your only experience with mean and ignorant people. Although we know racism and bigotry still exist, we're often surprised when we face it firsthand. We're also often scared, angry,



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embarrassed and even ashamed when people say or do hurtful things, and that can make us feel bad and keep things to ourselves. Sometimes, we don't tell anyone when we experience racism because we are ashamed or afraid that parents will over-react; other times we might tell parents and they might not know what to do or how to help. They might have trouble believing it,

or explain our concerns away ("they didn't mean anything by it...").

So what do we do? And how do we keep from feeling bad about ourselves?

To start, parents need to begin to "get it" and know that racism does occur. Lots of times parents don't know how often racism occurs. Maybe they aren't aware it's happening at all! This might be because they haven't experienced it and also because they hope that painful and unfair things won't happen to their kids. Parents might even be so close to you and feel like you are so much a part of their family that they forget that you look different and others might see you as different. To begin coping with racism, you need to start talking about it. Tell a parent or an adult so they can help support you and so that they learn about your experiences and the pain. Even though you're smart enough to know that words and gestures don't physically hurt you, we know that these things still hurt. Having someone to talk to about your feelings can be helpful. Your parents or other supportive people can help you decide whether you,



your parents, or someone else will or should speak with the people who are being mean and hurtful.

Although we can't keep people from being insensitive, mean or ignorant, we can learn to feel good about ourselves, get support, and learn how to start erasing ignorance. Lots of times people make fun of things they don't understand or that they fear. For example, the children at the mall probably didn't even know that many Asian people have epicanthic eye folds that can make Asian eyes look different, even though the eyes work the same and differ only in appearance (color of the iris, shape of the eye). In fact, they may have learned to be mean from family members or other people who also don't know these things. Regardless of where their ignorance comes from, we must always know and believe that Asian eyes are beautiful. Beauty doesn't mean that we have to look a certain way or that we have to have hair and eyes like Barbie dolls or fashion models.

Beautiful people come in all shapes, sizes, colors and tones. Look for the beauty in yourself and find it. Your confidence and security will outshine the ignorance of those who fear differences.

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