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My team is divided into cliques who only hang out with each other. Now two groups are fighting. We are supposed to be a team! What can I do about this?

Groups can be scary to a lone individual, so people often try to make friendships with others to protect themselves within a larger group. High school is an especially hard time for many teens, so it's not surprising that they form friendly alliances with people who will accept and appreciate them. But groups degrade to become cliques when they shut people out and become instruments of criticism and cruelty. When cliques infect a team, they can break down team unity and lead to division and conflict. So, what can you do about it?

Proactively reach out to those who are not part of your group. Extend yourself beyond your group of friends. Start conversations with individual teammates you don't know well. Often, you can get to know someone best in a one-on-one situation. Ask different teammates to do something together – going to a movie or a restaurant or your home. Being on a team is great for getting to know people you'd never know otherwise. Don't miss a chance to make new friends and unite your team to prevent cliques from forming.

If you are excluded from a clique, understand it is not about you. People who put others down are mostly insecure about themselves. Don't think less of yourself because you are excluded.

Bring conflict or problems out into the open. When teams are divided, talking things through in the open can help. If you have an issue with another athlete, address it head on, face to face, usually in private. If a coach can help with this, ask him. But don't ignore problems or make things worse by talking down your teammates behind their backs.

Look for opportunities. Sometimes things happen that give you the chance to reach out to a teammate you don't know well, such as filling her E-Tank. If you remain open and look for opportunities to bring the team together, you are likely to find them. Pick your spots and stay positive.



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