

Nichole Rued

# A Smart Girl's Guide to Boys<sup>1</sup> (A Found Essay)

For Ages 10 and Up

Dear Reader,

Boys. You've grown up with them. They've been teammates and classmates, neighbors and pals. Boys are different from girls in a lot of ways. Of course, you've got questions. You want to feel good. You want to be part of the fun without losing your pride or your brain or your heart.

We hope this will make it easier for you to do that. Here, you'll find advice from girls like you and even boys themselves.

## On crushes:

You might have a crush on a rock star. You might have a crush on ~~a teacher or your cousin or your friend's big brother~~. These kinds of crushes can make you feel *wonderful* because:

1. You have excited, ~~happy~~ feelings
2. You have ~~wonderful~~ daydreams
3. You ~~can~~ feel romantic about someone without the risk that that person might hurt your ~~feelings~~ (**it's safe**)

What's caused all this drama?

Hormones. They change the way girls and boys look at one another.

That difference can lead to confusion and disappointment.

Chances are that, for years, you've had certain ideas about the [your cousin]. Is that boy a [cousin] or a "boyfriend"?

All of a sudden, you may not be quite sure.

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1 Holyoke, Nancy and Bonnie Timmons. *A smart girl's guide to boys: surviving crushes, staying true to yourself, & other stuff*. American Girl Library, Pleasant Company: 2001. Print.

1. Grab a Pencil. Look for common interests:
  - a. Baseball
  - b. Football, and football: 500
  - c. Tony Hawk ProSkater
  - d. Go-carts
  - e. Motorcycles
  - f. ExciteBike 64
  - g. 4-wheelers
  - h. .22's
  - i. Duck Hunt
  - j. Swimming
  - k. Fishing
  - l. Wrestling
  - m. Hockey
  - n. G.I. Joe
  - o. Super Mario Brothers
  - p. Trucks
  - q. Tubing, but not too fast
  - r. Paddle boats
  - s. Turtles
  - t. Power Rangers
  - u. Dogs
  - v. Fishing lures
  - w. Yo-yo tricks
  - x. Getting lost in the woods
  - y. Jumping off the dock
  - z. Running away
  
2. Ask some questions. See what you share:
  - a. Road rage
  - b. How we pronounce words with *th* in the middle
  - c. Camp Luther summer trips
  - d. Facial shapes, nose, skin tone
  - e. What it sounds like when we laugh
  - f. What it sounds like when we say *sonofabitch*, *cock-sucker*, *shit*, *fuck*, *goddammit*, and *please*
  - g. Where we hide from parents, in kick the can, in hide-and seek
  - h. A love for reading
  - i. Ears, finger shape, toes
  - j. Where the corners land when we smile
  - k. How dirt looks under our nails

3. Show you're interested. Do something fun together. You'll know you have a crush on [him] if being near him feels like the flu:
  - a. Hot, blushing face
  - b. All wuzzy inside (Dear Pleasant: does wuzzy feel like the flu? —NR)
  - c. Sweaty palms  
→ Not the flu

Uh-oh. Oh-no. What if? SCARIEST OF ALL. You start acting, well, weird.

Weird-O-Meter Rating: 4/4

### What boys want:

It shouldn't require much effort. Someone who is nice. Fun to be around. ~~Not scared to talk to me.~~ A good sense of humor.

Ask yourself this: "Is this going to make me happier to be me?"

Take some time to read a boy's signs before you **speak up**. Most boys will give some pretty obvious signals about how they feel by the way they behave. Funny looks. Maybe he'll grin or blush. Kidding around. Maybe he teases you. Makes a big point of unfreezing you in tag.

### What's he thinking? Q&A<sup>2</sup>:

Reader: I have a boy problem and don't know what to do.  
—Mixed Message

Pleasant Company: To question him again and again will only embarrass him. Nobody wants to get hurt. Nobody wants to be embarrassed.

NR: I'm still uncertain. He says please.

PC: This boy is shy. This boy wants to be nice, friendly, and respectful. But if he learns he can trust you, that might change.

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2 Found questions by readers labeled R, Pleasant Company PC, added questions NR.

## How to tell him you like him:

It's peculiar when you think about it. Shouldn't you be able to talk to him yourself?

You don't need a big declaration to let [him] know how you feel. It's going to be perfectly clear that you like him because you're being so friendly. MISTAKE O' THE DAY

You're in charge of your feelings, but you're not in charge of his. Don't cry and plead. He'll resent the pressure it puts on him. And you simply don't want to look that desperate.

What you *don't* want to do is:

- Try to persuade [your cousin] to change his mind.
- Get mad, write nasty letters or e-mails, and treat him like an enemy.
- Get your friends involved. You want to talk to them, sure. But you don't want them running around carrying messages from this person to that, blowing things up into a major drama.
- Let people drag you into big discussions about how miserable you must feel. It will make you more miserable yet.
- Ask this boy if he's changed his mind.

What you need to *do* though, is:

- Act as if it's no big deal.
- Smile and say, "Oh, well. That's O.K."
- Get busy with something else: schoolwork, talking to a friend, eating lunch. Diving into some activity will take your mind off your feelings and help hide your hurt.
- If you feel like crying, find a private place where you can do it without the whole world watching.
- Crack a joke. It's a way of telling other people you're not going to collapse ~~just because of one guy~~ — and a way of telling yourself that, too.

## Turning down a boy, Q&A:

R: I don't want to hurt his feelings. I don't know what to do. —SCARED TO SAY NO.

PC: Use your manners. You owe a boy respect. Keep the business as private as you can. He's putting himself on the line by telling you he likes you — talking him down in any way is a rotten thing to do.

## POP QUIZ: Are you feeling rushed?

1. A boy ~~tells you he likes~~ [touches] you. You don't dislike him, but ~~you don't like him either—at least not like that~~. You're so uncomfortable, you could die.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. You've had a crush or two. But when you think about getting teased, ~~getting dumped~~, and having a boy touch you, you think: *boys aren't worth it*.
  1. Yes
  2. No

\*If you answered mostly *yes*, you don't feel ready. That's okay, too.

NR: Dear Pleasant, what do you do if you're not ready?

PC:

## So, what are the rules?

R: At what age is it O.K. for a girl to have a boyfriend?

PC: Your parents set the rules on this one. The answer will depend on their beliefs, on your age, and what you mean by "boyfriend."

NR: What if your boyfriend is your cousin?

PC:

## On talking to parents:

Don't make [this] age-old mistake. If you hear yourself making accusations, pull back. Silence can be better than saying something you'll regret. There's a lot of future stretching out ahead of you and your family.

## Life in the Fishbowl: Secrets

- Don't tell anyone to begin with. The only secrets you control are the ones you keep to yourself.
- The fun of telling a secret only lasts a moment. The trouble it can cause may last for days, weeks—some-

times, forever. Ask yourself, “is it worth it?”

- Remind yourself how you felt when somebody broke a promise and told a secret of yours.
- What kind of person do you want to be? The kind you can trust or the kind you can’t? Your pick.

### **On teasing and harassment:**

Some teasing is a sign of affection. When kids begin entering puberty, lots of teasing takes a new, more sexual turn. It’s usually light and fun, and everybody [he] walks away feeling good. A girl may get teased for having big breasts or small ones. Occasionally, a boy will touch a girl in a sexual way without her permission. How you should handle harassment if it happens to you depends on how serious it is.

NR: Dear Pleasant, is it really teasing if it’s a compliment?

PC:

NR: Dear Pleasant, what if it’s a game and you’ve given him permission?

PC:

If what you’re hearing is vile and scary, then you need to get help right away. Parents can be a big, big help in situations like this.

NR: Dear Pleasant, what constitutes vile? He seems polite enough.

PC:

NR: Dear Pleasant, all parents are not big helps. What if his parents hurt him?

PC:

### **On touching:**

There’s something wonderful about touching a person you care for. There may come a time you will enjoy a physical relationship with a boy, too. Boy-girl touching usually begins with holding hands, a first dance, or a first kiss. Sometimes, a first kiss is magical and wonderful. Sometimes it’s: funny, sad, disappointing,

goofy, embarrassing, sweet. Some people totally forget their first kiss when they're older. Others remember everything about it.

From Harriet:

—I was 14. The boy I had a crush on took me to his mother's wedding. After the ceremony, we took a walk and he kissed me behind a tree. I floated all the way home.

From Deb:

—I was 14. I was watching a movie outdoors at the day camp where I worked, and I was kissed by this boy I'd had a crush on for months. I was so euphoric I didn't eat for three days, and my mom took me to the doctor.

### Kissing Basics

1. Keep it private. A kiss is meant for two people, not 20. Keep it that way.
2. If you kiss a boy, it should be because you want to, not because he talked you into it. That goes for all other touching, too.

Dear Pleasant, From Me:

—I was not 14, but I did stop eating. How do you know what counts as the first kiss? We touched lips when I was four or five but French-kissed in third grade. It was my cousin and his eyes were closed and his lips were cold. *What is getting talked into it?* How do you know if you want to do it? Do you get redos, on first kisses? I didn't kiss anyone again until I was in 9th grade, when I kissed a man 10 years older than me in his truck. We said it was a secret and I still don't know if he talked me into it.

### **Closing thoughts: how are you doing?**

If you're like most girls, you're feeling a little *chicken*. Could you go to Antarctica? Or, what if you pretended you have amnesia and don't know who he is? Maybe if your friends all said you died. Is there *nothing* that will save you from having to face him?

No. You can run but you can't hide. Keep it private. This is between you and ~~this boy~~ [your cousin]. Keep his friends and your friends out of it.

**POP QUIZ:** *Has the world of who likes who changed the way you think?*

1. You've started making lists in your head of all the things that are wrong with you:

- I'm fat
- I'm silly
- I'm stupid
- I'm dumb

Added Notes: disgusting, awful, sinful, gross, pushover, ugly, dorky, clumsy, revolting:

- That's me
- That's not me

2. No ~~boy~~ [one] will ever like you. You're too ugly. [His game] fill[s] you with feelings you don't ~~even~~ [ever] want to discuss.

- That's me
- That's not me

## Answers

If you said "that's me," here's what you need to know:

- Judge yourself on character, not boyfriends. (Dear Pleasant: you still haven't talked about cousins. —NR)
- Don't get stupid. Never give ~~up~~ your own point of view.
- Be patient. He'll be there. And he'll be in love with you.

## Closing thoughts: Q&A

NR: Dear Pleasant, why does it feel wrong, to have someone in love with you?

PC:

Nichole Rued is a scholar of African-American literature and a copywriter. Her works have appeared in *Hobart*, *Paper Darts*, and *Hypertext Magazine*. When not teaching or writing, she enjoys hanging out with her three-legged dog, Boris.