

Relational Aggression

**A guide
for parents and teachers**





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Introduction

What is Relational Aggression?

Until recently, the word “bully” often conjured up images of sullen, physically aggressive boys with social problems and low self-esteem. While this type of bully does exist, reality is much more complicated. Many bullies resort to hidden, indirect social aggression to harm others. They often have well-developed social skills, high self-esteem, and are masters at manipulating adults in order to appear innocent. As Rachel Simmons puts it in her book *Odd Girl Out*, “Covert aggression isn’t just about not getting caught; half of it is looking like you’d never mistreat someone in the first place,” (2002, 23). This type of behaviour is called relational aggression, and it is more commonly attributed to females than males.

Relational aggression is psychological (social or emotional) aggression between people in relationships, whereby “the group” is used as a weapon to hurt others. This can take the form of gossip, rumours, social exclusion, manipulative friendships, and even negative body language. Relational aggression is devastating to a victim’s self-image because it undermines some of the most significant personal needs and goals of youth: the need for social inclusion, a positive sense of esteem and identity, and the development of meaningful friendships.

This booklet includes scenarios that highlight the impact of relational aggression on children and youth, an overview of its causes and effects, tips on how to identify when it is happening, and a summary of strategies that can be used to address it. The booklet is designed for teachers, parents, and anyone who is concerned about this problem. Relational aggression isn’t just “girls being girls,” and it isn’t a normal part of growing up. It can happen in classrooms and playgrounds, at home or on the Internet. It starts at an early age, but it is by no means limited to youth and can occur among adults and in the workplace. As such, relational aggression is everyone’s problem. Let’s learn how to deal with it.

Sarah's Birthday

Scenario One

It was Friday morning, and Mrs. Palmer's third grade class was settling in after the morning bell. It was the second week in October, and by now the students knew the routine: put on their indoor shoes, listen to the morning announcements, and wait for Mrs. Palmer to talk about the plans for the day. Fridays were a little different, however.

Mrs. Palmer was a new teacher, and she worked hard to make her students feel special. With this in mind, she set aside ten minutes every Friday morning to let her students make their own announcements to the class. These announcements were generally about special things that were happening in their lives: an upcoming family event, the birth of a baby brother or sister, or an after school club meeting.

When the school announcements had finished and Mrs. Palmer asked her class if anyone had a special announcement, Sarah's hand immediately shot up. Mrs. Palmer invited Sarah to come to the front of the class and share her news.

"On Sunday it's my birthday...well, actually it's next week, but Sunday is my party," Sarah blurted excitedly. "I have a bunch of special invitations my mom made, and we're going to have my party at a movie theatre in a special party room, and we're all going to see a movie too!" Sarah proudly walked around the room handing her invitations out to the other students.

All except one.

When Sarah reached Eric's desk, she looked at him briefly, narrowed her eyes, and walked by without handing him an invitation. Immediately the other students began whispering, and Eric's face turned bright red.

Mrs. Palmer was momentarily speechless. Eric was a quiet student who seemed to have a difficult time making friends. His family had recently moved from another city, and Eric had joined the class two weeks into the school year. Mrs. Palmer had assumed he was just taking time to adjust to a new environment, but in reality he was being secretly taunted by his classmates.

Mrs. Palmer caught Eric's eyes, and he looked as if he were about to cry. She quickly stammered, "Okay, let's...um, let's open up our math books to where we left off. Chapter two, part three..."

For Reflection:

1. What could Mrs. Palmer have done differently?
2. What could Sarah's mother have done differently?
3. Would you consider what Sarah did to be bullying?
4. Is it common for girls to bully boys?
5. What could Mrs. Palmer do to ensure this doesn't happen again?



Developmental Theories of Female Aggression

Learned Gender Roles

Bullying is a form of aggression that almost always involves an imbalance of power. Victims have difficulty defending themselves from their aggressors (Olweus 1991), and there is little or no retaliation (Moultapa et al. 2004). In general, males and females display aggression in different ways. While boys tend to inflict bodily harm through physical forms of bullying or direct verbal aggression, girls most often (though not exclusively) display aggression through indirect means. In the story *Sarah's Birthday*, Sarah doesn't bully Eric directly. There is no physical harm and no verbal attack; in fact, Sarah doesn't even speak to Eric. Nonetheless, what she does is bullying because there is a calculated intent to harm Eric by publicly excluding and embarrassing him, and he lacks the ability to retaliate.

Developmental theories have attempted to explain these apparent differences; in Western cultures, boys and men are socialized to be domineering and to exhibit overt physical and verbal aggression. Research has shown that "parents positively reward verbal and physical aggression in sons and positively reward interpersonal and social skills in daughters" (Wood 2007, 164–165). In contrast, women are socialized to be nurturing and to focus their energies on creating and sustaining relationships, which is the cultural and social opposite of aggressive behaviour. Since both males and females have aggressive impulses, girls learn to hide their intent to hurt others and deliver their aggression in culturally approved, covert ways (Lagerspetz, Björkvist & Peltonen 1988).

Girl Play

The games that girls play generally require cooperation and talk, which provides a developmental basis for their style of aggression. Observe a group of girls playing "house," and note how the game requires complex roles that give the girls an opportunity to experiment with gender roles

and mimic social interaction. This type of game “occurs in private places and often involves mimicking primary human relationships,” which helps to develop “delicate socio-emotional skills” (Lever, 1976).

The girls in a study conducted by J. Lever claimed to feel the most discomfort in groups of four or more, medium discomfort in groups of three, and most comfortable playing in pairs. Lever emphasized that “most girls interviewed said they had a single “best” friend with whom they played nearly every day. They learned to know that person and her moods so well that, through non-verbal cues alone, a girl understands whether her playmate is hurt, sad, happy, bored, and so on” (Lever 1976, 484). Intimate friendships among young girls are subject to emotions such as jealousy and possessiveness, traits more commonly associated with dating relationships, and these feelings are often the reason these friendships “break up.”

Wood (2007) suggests that gender differences between boys and girls are not biological in origin, but are socially constructed and learned by children as they grow up. Human emotions are internalized as appropriate or inappropriate for each gender. Because girls are discouraged from direct, overt aggression yet still feel aggressive at times, “they develop other, less direct ways of expressing aggression” (Wood 2007, 165).

The Alphas

Scenario Two

Richard finally caved in. For weeks, his daughter Rachel had been hounding him to buy an outfit from Alpha, a shop that sold fashionable, high-end athletic clothing. Rachel had never been particularly interested in fashion until entering grade seven, and her father was bewildered by the sudden and drastic change. Clothing from Alpha wasn't cheap, and Richard was a single father on a limited budget. However, his daughter was a hardworking student who rarely asked for anything, so Richard decided she deserved a treat and took her to Alpha one Saturday afternoon.

After spending an hour trying on various outfits, Rachel settled on a pair of black pants and a hoodie. As she walked out of the store, Rachel was beaming. “Thanks dad, you’re awesome,” she said.

“You deserve it, Rach,” her dad replied. “Seriously though, I can’t believe I just spent almost \$200 on a pair of pants and a sweater.... this is a one-time thing, okay?”

“Okay, dad,” Rachel agreed.

On the ride home, Richard’s curiosity overcame him and he asked his daughter what was so special about Alpha clothing.

“All of the other girls in my class wear Alpha clothes and I’m the only one who doesn’t...they even have a club called ‘the Alphas,’ and you can only be in the club if you have the clothes.”

Richard struggled to process what he had just heard. His first impulse was to yell, “You mean I just spent \$200 to please a group of stuck-up junior high girls?” but he held his tongue. His daughter looked so happy, so he said nothing.

The next day, Richard came home from work and was shocked to find the Alpha hoodie in the garbage. He grabbed it, rushed up the stairs to Rachel’s room, and knocked on her door.

“Rachel, what’s going on? I spent a lot of money on this sweater, so you’d better have a good explanation for this.”

He waited for a response, and heard the sound of Rachel softly crying. Richard was dumbfounded. He stared at the sweater, trying to figure out what was happening. That’s when he noticed that someone had torn the Alpha logo off the back of the sweater. Written in black marker where the logo had been was the word “bitch.”



He slumped against the wall, listening to his daughter crying behind the closed door and not knowing how to help her. “What’s going on at that school?” he thought to himself.

For Reflection

1. Have you ever noticed students identifying group membership by wearing particular types or brands of clothing?
2. Has your child ever pressured you to buy clothing because it was trendy or popular? If so, how did you respond?
3. What would you do if you were Rachel’s father?
4. If you were the parent of one of the “Alphas” in this story and you found out your daughter had bullied another student, what would you do?
5. What would you do if you were a teacher in the school where Rachel was being bullied?

Female Aggression in 'Tweens'

The Instability of Young Girls' Friendships

Relational aggression has been shown to occur between girls of all ages, but it is most prominent during adolescence (Owens et al. 2000). Adolescence is a critical period in the psychosocial development of youth. This time is marked by an increase in peer interaction, the growing importance of close friendships, and the beginnings of real romantic relationships. Friends become more important than parents as social referents and advisors and tend to contribute considerably toward adolescents' self-concepts and well-being (Cole & Cole 2001). In short, social acceptance becomes an extremely high priority.

In a study of the friendship bonds among a group of girls between the ages of 10 and 12, Besag (2006, 535) found that "the girls considered their friendships extremely important and nominated the breaking of a friendship as the most anxiety-provoking aspect of school life." Many of the girls in this study went through a series of "best friends" throughout childhood and adolescence, fluctuating several times between close friendship networks of two or three. By the end of the sixteenth month of study, Besag found only one original pair of "best friends" still together.

Most of the conflicts and instances of bullying among the girls stemmed from emotions related to their friendships, such as jealousy, suspicion, disappointment and anger. A commonly reported reason for the dissolution of friendships was a third girl entering (or attempting to enter) into a relationship between two "best friends." Since membership in a friendship group is exclusive, it is reserved for those who have proven themselves to be worthy of the trust and intimacy needed to develop an emotional connection (Besag 2006). However, the fickle nature of girls' friendships means that this trust is often shattered, which leads to conflict and aggression. Previously supportive friends may exclude a target girl from a group, call her names, spread gossip about her and text her with abusive messages (Owens et al. 2000; Simmons 2002). Commonly, a girl who was the "best friend" of the target girl instigates these attacks. Victims are also unable to escape the mesh of social relationships within which bullies lurk (Besag 2006), particularly

because their aggressors know all about their target due to past friendships.

Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found that members of friendship groups, or “cliques,” dominated by aggressive girls appeared to be caring and helpful toward one another. However, they also observed a higher level of intimacy and secret sharing in these groups, which put members at risk because relationally aggressive girls could use this information as a weapon. This risk was heightened by the fact that these cliques were highly exclusive; the followers would usually have few other friends to turn to if the aggressive girls rejected them. The dynamics of these groups therefore resulted in girls conforming to their behavioural standards for fear of being isolated.

Queen Bees

In the book *Queen Bees & Wannabees* (2002), Rosalind Wiseman describes in detail the various roles that can operate within female cliques, with the “Queen Bee” at the top of the hierarchy and the “Target” at the bottom. Girls can occupy various other positions within these cliques, including the “Banker” (a girl who uses secrets and gossip like currency to buy social status), the “Sidekick” (a girl who answers directly to the Queen Bee and helps her maintain her position), and the “Wannabe” (a girl who is on the fringe of the clique and will do anything to gain the Queen Bee’s favour).

The best option is to be what Wiseman calls a “Floater,” because a girl who is a Floater is “more likely to have higher self-esteem because she doesn’t base her self-worth on how well she’s accepted by one group” (2002). The Floater doesn’t exclude people, isn’t tied to a particular group of friends, and is accepted for who she is. According to Wiseman, many parents believe their daughter is a Floater, but this can sometimes be because parents “don’t like to admit to themselves that their daughters could be mean, exclusive or catty – or, on the other end of the spectrum, isolated and teased” (2002, 14). In the story *The Alphas*, Richard struggles with the realization that his daughter Rachel is a Target. Do the parents of the girls who bully Rachel know what type of girls their daughters are?

According to Wiseman, parents see their children's behaviour as a reflection of their own success or failure, and therefore can find it difficult to admit that their daughters aren't who they'd like them to be. Wiseman has advice for these parents: "It goes without saying that just because your daughter isn't a Floater doesn't mean she won't become an amazing young woman and/or you haven't done a good job raising her. But if you insist on seeing her in a way that she isn't, you won't be able to be as good a parent as she needs you to be" (2002, 31).

The Pact

Scenario 3

Chandra and Megan were best friends who had been inseparable since the third grade. They did their homework together, spent evenings chatting on-line, and had sleepovers most weekends. Every summer, Megan joined Chandra's family for their annual vacation. The girls' parents jokingly referred to them as "the twins."

Halfway through grade ten, Chandra and Megan developed a crush on the same boy, an eleventh-grader named Trent who played for the school's basketball team. Chandra and Megan confessed their feelings to one another, realized the potential threat to their friendship, and decided something had to be done. They made a pact: neither of them would act on their feelings and they would try to forget about Trent.

Oblivious to this pact, Trent approached Chandra one day after school and invited her to the mall. As usual, Megan was with her. Chandra blushed, and quickly replied, "Um, I can't... me and Megan are going to hang out."

"Oh, well...she can come too," Trent said, obviously disappointed. Chandra looked at Megan, whose eyes were cast down. She couldn't read her friend's expression. "Sorry," Chandra replied.

Trent walked back to a waiting group of friends. One of them laughed and said something Chandra couldn't make out. She turned to Megan. "So... what do you want to do?"

"I'm not feeling great, so I think I'll go home," Megan said. Chandra had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach as she watched her friend walk away. "Megan, wait!" she called, but Megan didn't turn around.

That night, Chandra waited for Megan to log onto MSN so they could chat, as they did every night. While she was waiting, Chandra got a message from "B-ball playa 22," a name she didn't recognize. "hey, sorry if i embarrassed u 2day," the message read.

"Who is this?" Chandra wondered. Suddenly, she remembered Trent's basketball jersey number was 22. "r u Trent?" she typed.

"good guess," B-ball playa 22 typed back. "r u alone or is ur friend there? she seems jealous of you or sumthing."

Chandra said she was alone, and spent the next hour chatting with B-ball playa 22. She finally confessed that she had had a crush on Trent for months but couldn't act on it because of her friendship with Megan. B-ball playa 22 wrote back, "ur so cute. meet at 730 behind school 2morrow morning?" Chandra nervously typed "ok," and logged off, feeling a mixture of guilt and excitement.

The next morning, Chandra waited behind the school until classes began, but Trent didn't show up. Her confusion quickly turned to guilt as she passed Megan in the hall on her way to class. "Hey, Megan, sorry about...."

Megan walked past Chandra without looking at her, and said, "Looks like you got stood up, slut."

All at once, Chandra realized what had happened. Megan had logged on as B-ball playa 22 and pretended to be Trent. She was testing Chandra's loyalty, and Chandra had failed the test. A group of girls quickly gathered around Megan. They glanced at Chandra, whispering and giggling.

Megan was quickly able to convince the majority of her friends that Chandra had slept with Trent, a rumour that Trent himself did nothing to contradict. The other girls in grade ten stopped speaking to Chandra, other than to whisper "slut" as they passed her in the hallway or cafeteria. She began to receive insulting and threatening text messages from unknown senders, and stopped using the Internet. When her

parents asked why Megan never visited anymore, Chandra told them to mind their own business. Her grades began to drop and she frequently stayed home from school, complaining of illnesses. Eventually, she convinced her parents to let her to transfer to another high school. Chandra and Megan never spoke again.



For Reflection

1. Have you ever had a friendship end because you and your friend had romantic feelings for the same person? Has this ever happened to your child or a student in your class?
2. Do you think competition is a common factor in female friendships? If so, how can this be addressed?
3. Do you think the situation in this story could have been prevented? If so, how?
4. Have you discussed proper use of the Internet with children or youth?
5. Do you consider cyberbullying to be a form of relational aggression?

Aggression in Teenage Girls

Environmental, Social and Developmental Changes

Numerous upheavals happen in the lives of girls during their teenage years. Changing schools from elementary to middle school leads to new friends and more challenging school work, and girls' priorities shift from wanting to spend all of their time with other girls to an emerging interest in the opposite sex (Crick & Grotpeter 1995; Duncan 2004). While friendship groups remain small and semi-exclusive, they begin to incorporate boys and girls' focus switches to "an imperative to be known in the larger school community" (Duncan 2004, 142). A close relationship with a single "best friend" can become an obstacle to social mobility at this stage.

While adolescent girls display a need to share intimate personal information with close friends, doing so can be risky because this information can be used as a weapon through the spreading of gossip and negative rumours. Anger, jealousy and negative reactions to the behaviour of others are natural and unavoidable features of all girls' experiences of adolescence, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that all teenage girls will be both aggressors and victims of relational aggression (Ponsford 2007).

Another emergent feature of girls' relationships as they move into adolescence is the significance of popularity to their self-esteem and sense of identity. In Duncan's (2004) study, there was a general consensus among high school girls that popularity was linked to heterosexual attractiveness. The study also found that "to be known as one of the popular girls implied you would be brash, aggressive and involved in rumours and fights amongst girls" (ibid: 144). This contrasts sharply with the previously discussed socialization of girls to "play nice" and cooperate in early childhood.

Because of their increased concern with social status, teenage girls become involved in rivalries with each other for popularity, and for the attention of boys. Further, some commentators have identified the competitive environment within schools—which encourages teachers, students and schools themselves to compete on the basis of grades and sports—as contributing to the rise of bullying among teenage girls. As Duncan (2004, 149) notes, "this competitive, combative culture might be heard as the echo of the national culture of competition in education."

Profile of Teenage Girl Aggressors:

It can be very difficult to spot a female bully. They may be more dominant in some friendships, or they may exhibit some behavioural problems, but for the most part they blend right in (Brinson 2005). Female bullies do their best not to be seen, because being identified as a bully contradicts the prevalent social imperative for females to be passive, cooperative, compliant with authority and “lady-like.”

In her description of the various roles girls can play in female cliques, Rosalind Wiseman (2002, 25–26) outlines numerous ways to spot a “Queen Bee,” including:

- Her friends do what she wants to do.
- She isn’t intimidated by the other girls in her class.
- Her complaints about other girls are limited to the lame things they did or said.
- She’s charming to adults.
- She won’t (or is very reluctant to) take responsibility when she hurts someone’s feelings.
- If she thinks she’s been wronged, she feels she has the right to seek revenge.

Methods of Teenage Girl Aggressors

Using covert forms of negative verbal and nonverbal communication, a teenage girl can manipulate her victim (Underwood 2003) and attack personal relationships and intimacy with others (Crick, Bigbee & Howe 1996). Although these interactions may look like squabbles or frivolous arguments, they are typically much more complex than they appear. Female bullies commonly use tactics such as rumour-spreading, malicious gossip, and the manipulation of friendships (for example, depriving another girl of her best friend). There is often a sexualized element to the bullying, including accusations of being a lesbian or heterosexual promiscuity (Duncan, 2004).

Non-verbal communication can also be a powerful factor in the aggressive behaviour of teenage girls. By rolling the eyes, glaring, ignoring, turning away, pointing, giggling, or using the “silent treatment,” an aggressor can cut her victim off and socially isolate her from former or potential friends. Another form of covert aggression has emerged along with modern communication technology: cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying

The Canadian Teachers' Federation defines cyberbullying as "the use of information and communication technology to engage in or conduct behaviour that is derogatory, defamatory, degrading, illegal and/or abusive" (Canadian Teachers' Federation 2008). E-mail, text messages, chat rooms, online discussion boards and social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace can all be used by cyberbullies to target their victims. Tactics include "flaming" (overt attacks on a person), harassment, cyber-stalking (use of the Internet to stalk, threaten or harass), denigration (put-downs), "outing" (publicizing that someone is gay), trickery and exclusion. Cyberbullying may be more damaging than face-to-face verbal assault due to its long-lasting psychological damage and the frequent inability of victims to identify and avoid the aggressors (Underwood 2003).

Cyberbullying can also have a more drastic effect than other forms of indirect aggression due to the lack of visual and auditory non-verbal cues, which may moderate the meaning of a relationally aggressive remark (Guiseppe & Galimberti 2003). This means that messages sent via electronic media are more open to interpretation, which in a bullying situation may lead the victim to interpret a message in the most hurtful way possible.

Li (2006) investigated the nature and extent of adolescents' experiences of cyberbullying, with a particular focus on gender. He found that teen boys were more likely to engage in bullying behaviour, both on-line and off-line, than teen girls. As new technology has opened up new ways for bullies to target their victims, boys have proven to be just as adept at covert bullying as females.

If you or someone you know becomes a target of cyberbullying, avoid the website where bullying has occurred. Immediately file a complaint with the offending website or cell phone network. Save evidence of cyberbullying by printing e-mails or screen shots, or saving text messages. If the cyberbullying persists or if threatening messages are sent, contact the police—some messages can be traced through the nine-digit ISP (Internet service provider) number attached to the sender's computer.

The Characteristics of a Victim

Victims of bullying generally tend to be more sensitive, unhappy, cautious, anxious, quiet and withdrawn than other children (Byrne 1993; Hoover, Oliver & Hazier 1992). They are generally insecure and non-assertive, and react by withdrawing when targeted by other students. In this sense they are vulnerable to being victimized; bullies know these students will not retaliate (Salmivalli, Karhunen & Lagerspetz, 1996).

Wiseman (2002) stresses that it is difficult for a parent to tell if a girl is a target because she may be embarrassed to admit it. She quotes a 16-year-old named Jennifer, who states: "Targets don't want to tell their parents because they don't want their parents to think they're a loser or a nobody" (2002, 35).

Relational Aggression in Popular Culture

Hollywood has dramatized relational aggression in movies like *Heathers*, *Jawbreaker* and *Mean Girls*. These films show female bullies using gossip, rumours and manipulation to gain or maintain social status. Television programs like *Gossip Girl* and *Desperate Housewives* depict females using relational aggression for similar reasons. These examples suggest that relational aggression is exclusive to females, but males can also be both perpetrators and targets of relational aggression.

"Reality television" is replete with examples of relational aggression among both genders. Richard Hatch, the winner of the first season of *Survivor*, famously manipulated his fellow "survivors" into forming secret alliances and turning against one another. *Survivor* first aired in 2000, and it set the tone for a slew of other "reality shows." Programs like *Big Brother*, *America's Next Top Model*, *The Apprentice*, *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* are similar to *Survivor* in that contestants are voted off and there is only one winner. Gossip, rumours and social exclusion are all part of the contest as participants vie for the chance to win money, employment contracts, and even love.

These programs tend to bring out the worst in people and reduce groups of adults to the level of adolescent cliques, but they attract large audiences and are renewed season after season. These examples also demonstrate that both males and females are capable of relational aggression, and the behaviour is by no means limited to youth. One has to wonder what kinds of lessons audience members, including younger viewers, are learning from these programs.

The Effects of Relational Aggression

Short-Term Impact

Frequent acts of relational aggression can cause the victim to experience loneliness, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Both bullying and victimization are associated with problems such as anxiety and depression, eating disorders, and poor academic performance. In some cases, relational aggression can result in a student refusing to attend school or seeking a transfer in order to escape the bullying. When this happens, the reasons for seeking transfers are often concealed from parents and professionals for fear of retaliation by the aggressors or because of internalized guilt and shame (Duncan 2002, 137).

Psychological or emotional abuse is more difficult to prove than physical injury and can cause doubt and self-blame, leading to even greater psychological distress (Crick & Grotpeter 1995). If a victim cannot prove that a girl has been bullying her, and if the perpetrator can hide her actions and intent, the victim often feels helpless and sees little point in trying to rectify the situation.

Long-Term Impact

The damage caused by relational aggression can last a lifetime. Victims and aggressors are both at risk of developing adjustment problems that persist into their adult lives. This can lead to difficulties with relationships, depression, and even suicide. A longitudinal study conducted by Pellegrini and Long also shows a link between childhood bullying and dating aggression, sexual and workplace harassment, and child and elder abuse (2002).

Addressing Relational Aggression

What Schools Can Do

1. Include the concept of relational aggression in the schools' definition of bullying.
2. Conduct a survey to measure the types of bullying that occur most frequently in the school.
3. Teachers, parents and students need to develop a common understanding of relational aggression, a common language to discuss the issue, and a realization that the behaviour has negative effects on individuals and the school as a whole.
4. While girls' relationships will involve a degree of instability, particularly during the middle school years, gossip should avoid intentional emotional harm to others. Create a school culture that recognizes this. Introducing, modelling and reinforcing positive social behaviour and using a restorative approach to heal damaged relationships are important aspects of creating such a culture.
5. Use various methods to teach students how to avoid or deal with instances of relational aggression. These can be incorporated into the curriculum through dramatic role-plays, art projects, small group discussions and writing workshops.
6. Discuss Internet implications, cyberbullying and online safety with students.

What Parents Can Do

1. Talk about bullying before it happens, and let your children know they can talk to you about any problems.
2. Teach your children to be compassionate and model appropriate behaviour (avoid gossip yourself—children learn what is acceptable or unacceptable by watching their parents).
3. Teach and model healthy assertiveness.
4. Do not underestimate the pain felt by bullied children.
5. Seek support from your child's school if you believe your child is being bullied or is bullying other students.
6. Encourage your child to form and maintain friendships based on mutual interests rather than social status.
7. Get to know the parents of your child's friends and form a network.

8. Don't excuse your child's bad behaviour, but don't overreact either. It is better to respond with disciplinary strategies (rather than punishment) that help your child develop the skills and capacity to become a healthy adult.
9. If necessary, seek counselling from a psychologist, school counsellor or social worker if your child is involved in bullying and the behaviour persists.
10. Celebrate your child's accomplishments; acknowledgement and praise is the best way to promote healthy, positive social behaviours.
11. Talk to your child about online safety.
12. Supervise and monitor your child's computer use.

Additional Resources

There are numerous books, websites and videos that explore the topics of relational aggression and cyberbullying and examine strategies that can be used to address them. These include the following:

Print:

- Dellasega, C. 2005. *Mean Girls Grown Up: Adult Women Who are Still Queen Bees, Middle Bees, and Afraid-to-Bees*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Kaye, R. & Bowen, A. 2007. *Mean Girls: 101 ½ Creative Strategies and Activities for Working With Relational Aggression*. Chapin SC: YouthLight Inc.
- O'Neil, S. 2008. *Relational Aggression Among Tween and Teen Girls: A Literature, Policy and Resource Review*. Kookabura Consulting, Inc. (Available on the SACSC website at www.sacsc.ca).
- Shariff, S. 2008. *Cyber-bullying: Issues and Solutions for the School, the Classroom and the Home*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Simmons, R. 2002. *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Trade Publishing.

- Willard, N. E. 2007. *Cyber-safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Willard, N.E. 2007. *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress*. Champaign: Research Press.
- Wiseman, R. 2002. *Queen Bees and Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Wiseman, R. 2006. *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads: Dealing With the Parents, Teachers, Coaches and Counselors Who Can Make—or Break—Your Child’s Future*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Websites:

- http://www.opheliaproject.org/main/relational_aggression.htm
- <http://www.relationalaggression.com>
- <http://www.overcomebullying.org>

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