MEAN GIRLS: WORKING WITH RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

From the very beginning of their lives, most girls are taught it is much prettier to be nice, sugar and spice, and to show aggression would be so ugly. As a result of these early messages, girls may become angry and resort to covert forms of aggression instead of using a direct route. The ultimate form of covert aggression in females is called Relational Aggression (RA).

First identified in the nineties by Dr. Nicki Crick, RA is defined as “emotional violence and bullying behaviors focused on damaging an individual’s social connections within the peer group.” RA can be any act that actively excludes a person from making or maintaining friendships or being integrated into the peer groups. RA has two primary components – an imbalance of power and the intent to harm. It is emotional violence.

Boys tend to use physical victimization, while girls tend to utilize relational victimization. Girls tend to be covert, boys tend to be overt.


STATISTICS:

According to a 2005 study in Quebec – 80% of a child’s Relationally Aggressive behavior is due to environmental factors, such as poor parenting and negative peer influence.

Brigham Young University study of RA in 2005 reports that RA begins in preschool.

According to Bully Beware website, 25% of students report teachers intervene in bully situations, while 71% of teachers believe they always intervene.

MSNBC reports that the number of girls ages 10 to 17 arrested for aggravated assault has doubled over the past 20 years.

The Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology reports that 70% of girls have been mistreated by their friends.

Different Types of Relational Aggression:

Relational Aggression – Behavior that is designed to harm someone by damaging or manipulating his or her relationships with others.
Covert Aggression – Indirect, hidden acts of aggression, social isolation, or excluding completed under the radar of adults.

Peer Aggression – Includes physical, verbal, relational aggression. All of these aggressions affects boys and girls.

Physical/Overt Aggression – Direct, blatant acts of aggression, can be physical or verbal. Harm through damage or threat of damage to another’s physical well being.

Verbal Aggression – Obvious as well as hidden verbal acts of aggression towards a child such as threats, put downs, and name calling.

Reactive Relational Aggression – Defensive response to provocation with intent to retaliate.

Proactive Relational Aggression – Proactive behaviors are a means of achieving a goal – for example – a girl may exclude someone to maintain her own social status.

POSSIBLE SHORT AND LONG TERM EFFECTS OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

Loneliness/Isolation – Feelings of rejection – Interrupted identity formation - Poor relational skills – Separation anxiety – Poor academic performance

Hopelessness – Feelings of powerlessness – Inability to trust

Frustration – Anger


Suicidal Ideation

*For many teenage girls, school may be more about socialization than academics. These negative effects could last a lifetime.

METHODS AND MOTIVATIONS:

Relationally aggressive girls are quite creative in their methods of behavior and their motivations drive them to always be one up on everyone else.

CYBER-BULLYING:

Cyber-bullying, or electronic bullying, is the use of the internet or other mobile devices to send or post harmful or cruel text or images to bully others. This form of bullying is quite popular as it is used anonymously, can be accessed 24/7 and reaches mass audiences. Girls are twice as likely as boys to be involved in cyber-bullying.

Examples of cyber-bullying techniques include e-mails, instant messaging, text or digital imaging messaging sent on cell phones, web pages, web logs (blogs), and chat rooms or discussion groups. Using this technology, girls are sending cruel or threatening messages, creating websites with stories, cartoons, pictures, and jokes ridiculing others, posting pictures of classmates online and asking students to rate or judge them, and taking pictures of a person in a locker room using a camera phone and sending it to others.

Cyber-Bullying Tips for Parents:

Become computer savvy – Do not allow your child to have a computer in her room or other isolated area – Be aware of the online activities of your daughter – talk to your child about cyber-bullying – its effects – talk about safety on the computer and online – inquire about filtering programs for your computer

Myspace and what it does to most teenagers by a seventeen year old junior in High School

“Now, I don’t want to say anything too insulting to Myspace or Myspace users, but I can definitely tell you that Myspace is a time guzzling website. I do admit that I had a Myspace for about a year, and I did spend about 2 hours a night using it. I thought it was helping me out socially, because I could communicate with friends that I only saw once a week or rarely saw at all. Although, I was quick to realize that Myspace was not only a website used to communicate with friends, it was a website used to create a personality one wishes they possess. Therefore, I immediately felt Myspace was sending out the wrong message not only to me, but to everyone across the country. I decided to delete my Myspace, and as pathetic as it may sound, it was probably the greatest move of my high school career. My grades have dramatically increased, I get more sleep, and believe it or not, my social life has gotten much better and much more genuine. It is very unfortunate that our generation is so highly influenced by technology that we begin to start living through our computers. I hope somehow most of us can realize what many of these websites are doing to us, and I hope we can prevent the generations to come from making the same mistakes.”

Help For Parents: Ways to Prevent Social Bullying

Is it serious? How do I know if I should STOP a situation? Differentiating between normalcy and relational aggression can be difficult. Girls will go to great lengths to hide
what they are doing. Victims try desperately to fit in and may cover for the aggressor or pretend to shrug off the problem. The STOP method helps parents to figure out when to DEFINITELY intervene.

Is the relational aggression.....

S Severe
T Traumatic
O Ongoing, or involve a
P Power Imbalance?

Communicate with your daughters. Help your child identify her strengths. Empower her with her own personal strengths. Talk about girl cliques........

Ask questions – do not preach or lecture.

Problem solve together. Brainstorm with your daughter to improve the situation and try to let her make the decisions. This is empowerment!

Teach empathy – Understanding the emotional pain of bullying has been cited as one of the most effective ways to teach bullies about the pain inflicted on their victims. Service learning and community service might help in developing empathy in your daughter.

Explore Normative Beliefs – Many girls do not have an opportunity to explore their internal value or moral system. These questions might help:

1. Is it okay to talk bad about someone and spread rumors? What if someone started it first – should you repeat the rumor?

2. Is it okay to make fun of someone and laugh at them?

3. Is it okay to do nothing and watch as someone else gets excluded or made fun of?

4. Is it okay not to let someone sit by you or join the group?

5. Is it okay to boss someone around and to say, if you don’t do it my way then I’m not going to be your friend?”

6. Is it okay to ignore someone who is your friend, just so you can be in the “popular” group?

Resources – Read a book together (check the Bibliography), watch the movie Mean Girls and let it spark conversation.
Girls need to **develop confidence** – low self esteem girls are more likely to be picked on – girls who are confident and self assured as less likely to act out or participate in bullying. Stop playing the game and get away from the clique. Have your daughter let them know in an unthreatening way she no longer wishes to participate in the relational aggression game - Get the girl involved in after school activities such as sports, girl scouts, YMCA tutors, after school clubs, music, community service, or other youth groups to help give them a feeling of accomplishment.

**Establish boundaries** with friendships – Social bullying usually escalates through peer pressure. Let your child know that if her friends are pressuring her to participate in social bullying, they are not her true friends. Teach her to stand up for what she believes in.

**Get outside help** – Consult with other parents, advisors, administration, and teachers – do not hesitate to schedule a meeting with teachers and the parties involved. Be careful if you call the parent of the bully...Bullying is a learned trait and the bully at school is usually reared by a bully in the home.

Teach your child to **accept and forgive** others’ behaviors – Once your child understands the cause of relational aggression and how to deal with it, teach her to forgive past incidents. Moving on is the best way to prevent a situation from getting worse.

**A.W.A.R.E. Life Model**

Girls need to understand their perceptions can influence their views on life and how they react to others. The first step is to become more aware of how negative thoughts can lead to negative behaviors. The next step is to realize one has the ability within to change these thoughts. Use this model below to help your daughter examine her beliefs and change how she thinks and reacts to relational aggression.

**Attitude**
If I have a healthier attitude about this I will be happier.

**Wisdom**
I need to have the wisdom to know that I have the ability within myself to make the right decision, to accept the things in this situation that I cannot change and the courage to change the things I can.

**Affirm**
I will affirm myself daily.

**Replace**
I will replace any negative thoughts with positive ones.

**Embrace**
I will embrace a world full of opportunities.
Mean Girls

The Realm of Teen Royalty

The Queen

The aggressor, who chooses to hurt or damage a relationship.

Her friends do what she wants. She isn’t intimidated by any other girl. She can out argue just about anyone including adults. She’s charming to adults.

She’s manipulatively affectionate. She defines right and wrong by the loyalty or disloyalty around her. She won’t take responsibility for hurting another’s feelings. She seeks revenge. She feels power and control over her environment. She can be arrogant, materialistic, selfish, and superficial. Her value system and self esteem are tied to what she has. She may get a “rush” from feeling superior.

The Sidekick

The sidekick is second to the Queen, but can also be a victim. She always supports the Queen because this is where her power lies. She is often a mirror image of the Queen. The two together present the impression of an impenetrable force. The sidekick has her own personal agenda in which uses relationally aggressive techniques. Several other characteristics of a side kick are: she feels the Queen is the authority figure in her life telling her how to think, dress and what to do; she allows herself to be pushed around by the Queen, and will even lie for her.

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The Gossip
Extremely secretive, gossip-Self-aggrandizing, good communicator, gives the perception of being a good listener and trustworthy. Seems to be friends with everyone, has a need to be admired and to feel important. She is rarely excluded from the group. She is more of an actress. Seemingly nice, then uses confidential information to improve her position. She seems harmless but in truth she is intimidating. This girl is the confidant that cannot be trusted. She may start a conversation with "Don’t tell anyone I told you this but..."

The Floater
She moves freely among cliques. She has protective factors that enable her freedoms, such as being pretty but not too pretty, nice but not terribly sophisticated, and she avoids conflicts. She is more likely to exhibit higher self esteem because her sense of self is not based in just one group. She has the respect of the other girls because she is not trying to rule but does have influence. She does not want to exclude other girls. She is not trying to win all conversations. She is not competitive. While this individual does have some power it does not equal that of the Queen.

The Bully
She may be defiant, outspoken and tough. She displays cruelty to weaker people. Bullying is mostly covert. For example, cursing at or about other girls, "accidentally" bumping into them or hitting. She will use physical violence more than relational aggression.
The Bystander

The girls who are not aggressors or victims but are caught somewhere in-between. She is part of a social situation as a bystander. She finds herself having to choose between friends. She is the peacemaker ("can’t we all just get along?"). She has a hard time saying no. She does not feel that she can stand up to anyone and she may want to go undetected but still have access to the popular group.

Most girls in this group

The Wannabee

The Wannabee will do anything to be a part of the inner circle of the Queen and the Sidekick. She is a gossiper and a pleaser and will go to great lengths to increase her position. She doesn’t have a personal opinion outside of what the Queen thinks. She is indecisive and reluctant to go against the group. She likes the feeling of belonging and not being a target, however she is often gossiped about and used by the Queen.

The Target

She often feels helpless to stop the other girl’s behavior. She feels excluded, like a loser or a nobody. She is more isolated. She gives a defensive stance that is designed to shut people out in order to mask her hurt. Girls within the group could become a target if they question someone of perceived higher social status, for example the Queen or the Sidekick. She feels humiliated from the rejection she feels by other girls. She feels exposed and vulnerable resulting in temptations to change herself in order to fit in.

Need to pair them with someone

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Cyber-Bullying and Girls

Girls use various methods to cyber-bully each other. Cyber-Bullying can also be referred to as online social cruelty or electronic bullying.

For example:

- e-mails
- instant messaging (IM)
- text or digital imaging messages sent on cell phones
- web pages
- web logs (blogs)
- chat rooms or discussion groups
- other information communication technologies

The most common method that children and youth reported being cyber-bullied was through Instant Messaging, as cited in a recent study of students in grades 6-8 (Kowalski et al., 2005). The use of chat rooms, e-mails, and messages posted on websites were also common.

Kowalski (2005) reports that of those who had been cyber-bullied:
- 58% were victims of IM
- 28% were bullied in a chat room
- 20% were bullied on a web site
- 19% were bullied through e-mail
- 14% were bullied through text messaging

Examples of Cyber-Bullying

- Sending cruel or threatening messages
- Creating websites that have stories, cartoons, pictures and jokes ridiculing others
- Posting pictures of classmates online and asking students to rate them
- Breaking into an e-mail account and sending vicious or embarrassing material to others
- Engaging someone in IM and tricking that person into revealing sensitive info, and forwarding it to others
- Taking a picture of a person in the locker room using a camera phone then sending that picture to others.
How Technologically Savvy are you?

Let's look at how girls communicate and with what device.

"Text Messaging" (or SMS) - Text messaging or "short text-messages" are words and symbols used to communicate from mobile phones.

"E-Mail" - Short for electronic mail, it is the transmission of messages over communication networks.

"IMing" - Short for Instant Messaging. This is a private chat session with another individual.

"Chat Rooms or Bash Boards" - Similar to "IMing", it is "real-time" communication with someone using a computer. Various symbols, codes and acronyms are used to communicate. Bash Boards are online bulletin boards used anonymously to write anything about someone that you want, true or not.

"MMS" - Short for Multimedia Messaging Service. These messages combine the use of text, sounds, images and video to send messages to mobile phones with the appropriate capabilities.

"Voting or Polling Booths" - these allow for "free voting" such as "Who is the ugliest or the fattest, etc...at school".

"Web Sites" - In this day and age of technology anyone can have their own web site. Many girls have their own web page where almost anything can be posted.
Cyber "Language"

Cyber space is full of language that truly seems "out of this world." The following are abbreviations and symbols girls may use to communicate.

Cyber Space Acronyms:

- 4GM - Forgive me
- AAMOF - As a matter of fact
- AFK - Away from keyboard
- ASL Age, sex, location?
- ASLP - Age, sex, location, picture?
- ATYS - Anything you say
- BFD - Big freakin' deal
- BF - Boyfriend
- BFN - Bye for now
- BC - Be cool
- B/C - Because
- EG - Evil grin
- EOD - End of discussion
- EOL - End of lecture
- EOR - End of rant
- F - Female
- F2F - Face to face
- FCOL - For crying out loud
- FITB - Fill in the blanks
- FOCL - Falling off the chair laughing
- FOFL - Falling on the floor laughing
- FWIW - For what it's worth
- FYA - For your amusement
- FYI - For your information
- G - Grin
- G2G - Gotta go
- GA - Good afternoon / Go ahead
- GAL - Get a life
- GF - Girlfriend
- GFN - Gone for now
- GI - Good idea
- GIWISI - Gee, I wish I said it
- GJ - Good job
- GL - Good luck
- GM - Good morning / Good move/match
- GMTA - Great minds think alike
- GN - Good night
- GR8 - Great
- H - Hug
- HB - Hug back
- H&K - Hugs and Kisses
- HAGD - Have a good day
- HCIT - How cool is that
- HF - Have fun
- HH - Ha-ha
- HHSF - Ha-ha, so funny
- HHVF - Ha-ha, very funny
- HOAS - Hold on a second
- IAC - In any case
- IAG - It's all good
- IAGW - In a good way
- IC - I see / In character
- IDGI - I don't get it
- IDNDT - I did not do that
- IIRC - If I remember correctly
- IK - I know
- IKWUM - I know what you mean
- IMAO - In my arrogant opinion
- IME - In my experience.
- IMHO - In my humble opinion
- IMNSHO - In my not so humble opinion
- INRS - It's not rocket science
- IOW - In other words
- IRL - In real life
- JBSTB - It really sucks the big one
- IS - I'm sorry
- ISWYM - I see what you mean
- JMHO - Just my humble opinion
- JTLKYK - Just to let you know
- J/K - Just kidding
- J/P - Just playing
- K - OK
KIR - Keepin' it real
KIT - Keep in touch
KWIM - Know what I mean?
L8R - Later
LMK - Let me know
LTR - Long term relationship
LYK - Let you know
LMAO - Laughing my a** off
LMBO - Laughing my butt off
LOL - Laugh out loud
LTNS - Long time no see
M - Male
MMA - Meet me at ...
MOS - Mom over Shoulder
MYOB - Mind your own business
N - In
NBD - No big deal
N2M - Not too much
N/C - Not cool
NE1 - Anyone
NM - Nevermind, Not much
NMH - Not much here
NMJC - Nothing much, just chillin'
NNITO - Not necessarily in that order
NO1 - No one
NOTOMH - Not off the top of my head
NOYB - None of your business
NP - No problem
NRN - No reply necessary
NW - No way
OIC - Oh, I see
OMG - Oh my gosh
OOC - Out of character
OT - Off topic / Other topic
PLZ - Please
PPL - People
POS - Parent over shoulder
QT - Cutie
RESQ - Rescue
RFC - Request for comment
RHIP - Rank hath its privileges
ROF - Rolling on the floor
ROTFL - Rolling on the floor laughing
RTFM - Read the flippin' manual
S2R - Send to receive
SCNR - Sorry, could not resist
SLY - Still love you
SWALK - Sweet, with all love, kisses
SWAK - Sealed with a kiss
SYSOP - System Operator
TCO - Taken care of
TOH - The other half
THX - Thanks
TNX - Thanks
TIA - Thanks in advance
TMA - Take my advice
TM1 - Too much information
TTFN - Ta ta for now
TTYL - Talk to you later
TY - Thank you
TYVM - Thank you very much
U2 - You too
UR - You are ...
VBG - Very big grin
W2F - Way too funny
W8 - Wait
W8AM - Wait a minute
WB - Welcome back OR Write back
WE - Whatever
WNDITWB - We never did it this way before
WRT - With Regard To
WTF - What the freak?
WTG - Way to go!
XOXOXO - Hugs and kisses
Y - Why?
YRG - You are good!
YW - You're welcome
>U! - Screw you!
? - Huh?
?4U - Question for you
Emoticons: (facial expressions created by using different keystrokes)

!-( Black eye
!-) Proud of black eye
#-) Wiped out, partied all night
#:o Shocked
%*} Inebriated
%+{ Got beat up
%-{ Confused
%-) Dazed or silly
%-6 Brain-dead
%-\ Hung over
%-t Ironic
%-l Worked all night
%-} Humorous or ironic
%- Hangover

>>>:<< Furious
>> Female
>> Winking devil
<< Furious
->) Devilish wink
>:) Little devil
>:> Very mischievous devil
>:<< Angry
>:< Mad
>:{( Annoyed

(< .. alienated
< )

(((:** Hugs and kisses
Lots of hugging
((0)) (initials or a name can be put in the middle of the one being hugged)
() Hugging
(:::: Left-handed smile, or smiley from the southern hemisphere

:-p Sticking tongue out
:-p~ Heavy smoker
:-Q Tongue hanging out in disgust, or a smoker
:-Q~ Smoking
:-r Sticking tongue out
:-s What?!
:-t Unsmiley
:-V Shouting
:-X My lips are sealed; or a kiss
:-x Kiss, or My lips are sealed
:-y Aside comment
:-| Unsmiling blockhead; also criticism
:-\| Sniffles
:-} Blowing a kiss
:-| Indifferent, bored or disgusted
:-| Deja vu
:-| Very angry
:-} Mischievous smile
:-) A cold
:-| A cold
:( Crying
:/ Not funny
:/i No smoking
:> What?
:@ What?
:\- Tears of happiness
:^D Happy, approving
:'( Shedding a tear
:/ Confused
= X My lips are sealed
== Snake
=^* Kisses
Angry
Bandaid, meaning comfort
Egghead
Kiss
Snuffed candle to end a flame message
Laughter
Angel
To be or not to be
Infinity
Wide-eyed, or wearing glasses
Death
Shocked
Astonished
Yuck!
Frayed nerves; overwrought
Wow!
Wide-eyed surprise
Sad
Smile
Bored, sad
Bored, sad
Loudmouth, talks all the time; or shouting
Kiss
Clowning
Returning kiss
Got punched in the nose
Crying
Male
My lips are sealed; or someone wearing braces
Tongue-tied
Smile of happiness or sarcasm
Puckered up to kiss
Very sad
Big grin
In Our Humble Opinion
See no evil
See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil
Female
Male
Starry-eyed angel
Angel
French kiss
College graduate
Hug Insert a name in the brackets of the one who is being hugged, as: [Marcia]
Hug
Giggles
High five
Raised eyebrow
Hug; the one whose name is in the brackets is being hugged Example: {{MJ}}
No comment
Sleepy (on late night email message)
Puckered up for a kiss
Sleepy, struggling to stay awake, or sleeping badly
Big laugh
Yawn
Good grief!
Asleep
Asleep
Snoring
Lit candle, indicating a flame (inflammatory message)
Begins a flame (inflammatory message)
Especially hot flame message
Net flame
Snake
Web Sites and Resources of Interest

www.hateboard.com  www.myspace.com

www.xanga.com  www.teenangels.com

※ www.schoolscandal.com  www.livejournal.com

www.transl8it.com – a website to help to translate text messages or SMS

www.webopedia.com – an online dictionary to help you navigate online terminology and acronyms

www.whatis.com – helps you define all those “techno” terms

www.urbandictionary.com – slang of teens

Cyber-bullying References


Retrieved from www.cyberbullying.ca February 8, 2006
Suggested Resources and Bibliotherapy Books on Relational Aggression and Bullying for Classrooms or Small Groups

(R= Resource  B= Bibliotherapy)

Elementary:

1. Eliminating Bullying (Grades PK-3) R
2. Seemor’s Flight to Freedom (Grades K-4) B
3. Out of This World-Tiglos VS. Secca Ma (Grades 3-12) R
4. The Bully Free Classroom (Grades K-8) R
5. How To Handle Bullies, Teasers and Other Meanies (Grades K-8) R
6. Nobody Knew What To Do (Grades K-4) R
7. Stop Picking On Me (Grades K-4) B
8. Nah! Nah! Nah! (Grades 3-5) B
9. Blue Cheese Breath and Stinky Feet (Grades K-6) B
10. Don’t Laugh At Me (Grades PK-3) B
11. My Secret Bully (Grades K-6) B
12. The Recess Queen (Grades 1-5) B
13. Emily Breaks Free (Grades K-5) B
14. Simon’s Hook by Karen Burnett (Grades K-5) B
15. Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell (Grades K-5) B
16. Hooway for Wodney Wat by Helen Lester (Grades K-5) B
17. Shrinking Violet by C. Best (Grades K-5) B
18. Bootzie Barker Ballerina by B. Bottner (Grades K-5) B
19. Just a Bully by M. Mayer (Grades K-5) B
20. “Please Stop, I Don’t Like That!” (Grades PK-5) B

Secondary:

14. Salvaging Sisterhood (Grades 5-12) R
15. The Bully, The Bullied and Beyond (Grades 5-12) R
16. Odd Girl Speaks Out (Grades 6-12) R
17. Girl Wars (Grades 6-12) R
18. No Room for Bullies (Grades 5-12) R
19. Queen Bees & Wannabes (Grades 6-12) R
20. Mean Chicks, Cliques & Dirty Tricks (Grades 6-12) R
21. Please Stop Laughing at Me (Grades 7-12) B
22. Mean Girls: 121 Creative Strategies for Working with Relational Aggression (Grades 3-12) R

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Send positive ripples.
Stop a negative ripple with a caring comment.