

What is Relational Aggression

Relational Aggression is an “intent to do harm ...to another’s reputation, social relationships, or feelings of inclusion by the peer group” (*Putallaz, et.al, Journal of School Psychology*). “It damages what matters most to girls, which is a connection to the peer group” (*Gomes, Journal of Nursing Research & Practice*).

Research has found a connection between being a victim of relational aggression and several negative outcomes including behavior challenges, internalizing problems, academic deficits, teacher-student conflicts, lack of school engagement, and later mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, social phobia, borderline personality disorder (*Murray-Close, Journal of Developmental Psychopathology*).

Prevention

- Help your child to learn about true friendship.
- Help your child avoid or limit manipulative or coercive friendships.
- Develop your child’s faith, gifts and character.
- Be a good example by avoiding gossip and critical feedback of other people.
- Watch movies and read books about friendship and friendship problems and discuss positive ways of dealing with it.
- Be aware of the traps and pressures of popularity and encourage a variety of friendships based on trust, interests, and mutual respect.
- Monitor your child’s internet and texting communications.

Methods used in Relational Aggression

- Exclusion
- Negative gossip
- Social isolation
- Non-verbal communication
- Rolling eyes
- Glaring
- Turning away
- Pointing
- Giggling
- Using the silent treatment
- Cyberbullying

Warning Signs

- Sudden change in social group
- Change in behavior that is lasting for over a week

- Disinterest in things that were previously important to your child
- School avoidance

What to Do

- Listen
- Problem solve, letting your child take the lead
- Contact the teacher, counselor or administration

Resources

- Simmons, Rachel; *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*.
- Simmons, Rachel website with short video lessons for girls about learning to communicate respectfully in person and online: <http://www.rachelsimmons.com/blogs-and-video/>
- Dellasega, Cheryl & Nixon, Charisse; *Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying*.
- American Girl Advice Series: *A Smart Girl's Guide to Friendship Troubles*.