

Relational Aggression

Bullying is a subject that our school district has focused heavily on during recent years. Sometimes this subject can be overwhelming. Research shows that one of the best ways to significantly reduce the rate of these incidents is for adults to reach a consensus on what bullying is.

Bullying can take many forms. The most typical forms of bullying would be either physical or verbal aggression. The third form is referred to as relational aggression.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, relational aggression is “harm within relationships that is caused by covert bullying or manipulating behavior.”

Covert bullying:

- Not allowing someone to join a group
- Refusing to share friends
- Embarrassing someone in front of friends

Manipulating Behaviors:

- Giving someone the silent treatment
- Trying to stop two people from becoming friends
- Relaying gossip or rumors to the target of the gossip

Because it is less obvious than physical or verbal bullying, it requires careful observation. Parents may be unclear about how to help their children handle these situations. The Ophelia Project outlines “The Essential Seven”, which are tips for parents to deal with relational aggression.

1. Do **listen attentively** to your child’s stories and ask questions. Don’t rush the conversation or make light of the situation.
2. Do **teach kindness** and try to model it in your home. Don’t teach your child to get even or take revenge.
3. Do **focus on empathy** by asking questions like ‘how would you feel?’ Try role-playing. Don’t allow your child to believe that his or her feelings are the only ones that matter.
4. Do talk to your child about relational aggression. **Name it.** Don’t hesitate to confront your child about his or her behavior.
5. Do model **positive interpersonal relationships** in your home. Don’t inadvertently model relational aggression in your own friendship circle.
6. Do everything possible to make sure your child has **friends outside the school’s social scene.** Encourage outside activities. Don’t make popularity the goal in your family

7. Do talk daily with your child. Encourage discussion; **ask open ended questions** about friends and social interactions. Don't ask yes/no or general questions like 'did you have a good day?'

Awareness is the key. If parents and children speak with each other openly and honestly about friendship issues and concerns, situations such as relational aggression can be recognized and be handled in a proactive and effective manner.

Visit these resources to learn more:

www.opheliaproject.org

www.stopbullyingnow.com

www.awaythrough.com

www.thebullyproject.com

www.olweus.org

www.cyberbullying.us/