Relational Aggression

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Relational Bullying

What is relational aggression?

* Relational aggression (RA) is a term used to describe the use of relationships to hurt or harass peers.
* The process of using relationships to hurt another involves an aggressor (the bully), a victim (the target) and bystanders (individuals who are present during attacks but decide not to get involved or seek help).

What does RA look like?

* Bullying, harassing, victimizing, meanness, rumor-spreading, secret-divulging, alliance-building, teasing, backstabbing, ignoring, deliberately excluding another from social groups and activities, verbally insulting, and using hostile body language i.e. eye-rolling, or smirking.

Why does RA happen?

* Girls who engage in this behavior usually are experiencing some underlying fear or insecurity. Such fears may include: being worried about her ability to remain “on top” or her popularity status, fear of rejection, fear of being bullied herself, and fear that others may see her insecurities if she does not bully first.

What Research Says About RA

* This kind of bullying can be hard to detect.
* These bullies can be popular, charismatic girls who are already receiving positive attention from adults.

Because their positive reputations, these girls may be the least likely suspects; thus it can be very difficult to identify the perpetrator.
* RA behavior is evident for both sexes in all age groups from preschool through adulthood.
* Girls are likely to use RA within their own friendship circles.
Research Continued...

* RA is connected to peer rejection, decreased acts of prosocial behavior, and antisocial and borderline personality disorders.
* Bullying is strong a risk factor for future delinquency, crime, and substance abuse.
* Adolescents with well-formed identities are less likely to be perpetrators.
* RA can be linked to physical violence.
* When daughters appear angry, secretive and moody, many parents attribute these behaviors to normal hormonal changes and adolescent rebellion; however, these may be the symptoms of RA.
* Victims of RA often experience a range of difficulties: depression, anxiety, poor school performance.

Relational Aggressive Behaviors

**Covert**

* Looks (eye rolling)
* Turning your back on a girl to exclude her
* Whispering behind your hand so another girl can’t see
* Gossip and spreading rumors
* Sharing secrets you were asked to keep private
* Making plans and not including one girl as punishment or exclusion
* Pressuring a girl to do something she doesn’t want to do. (“I won’t be your friend if you hang around with her.”)

**Overt**

* Bumping into another girl or elbowing her
* Passing notes about another girl
* Posting comments about someone on a web site
* Intimidating a girl to her face. (“If you don’t stop flirting with my boyfriend, I’m going to beat you up.”)
* Name calling
* Humiliating someone in front of a crowd of people so she or he will be humiliated.

“I’ve quit school because of how horrible it was. After I moved, I became popular, but lost it all to a rumor.”

-Age 15
### Normal Conflict vs. Bullying/Relational Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal Conflict</th>
<th>Bullying/Relational Aggression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal power</td>
<td>Imbalance of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happens occasionally</td>
<td>Repeated negative and covert actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental</td>
<td>Purposeful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Serious</td>
<td>Serious with the threats of physical or emotional harm. Attempts to hurt through humiliation and/or exclusion that affect social status and relationships of victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal emotional reaction</td>
<td>Strong emotional reaction from victim, little or no reaction from bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not seeking power or attention</td>
<td>Seeks power and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not trying to get something</td>
<td>Attempts to gain power, popularity, or material things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remorse, takes responsibility</td>
<td>No remorse—blames victim. Manipulative approach may try to make victim believe what they are feeling is not real.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort to solve problem</td>
<td>No effort to solve problem; may deny there is a problem. May challenge by asking for specific examples of their behavior. Victim may not be able to articulate because of complex social dynamics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Girl Scouts-Mile High Council

Statistics show that more than 150,000 kids stay home from school every day because of bullying and most kids have been bullied at some point during their lives.

Source: www.kidspeace.org/healingMagazine/
How To Help
When you witness or learn of bullying

**Stop the harassment!** Stand between the aggressor and the target. Keep all the girls present, including witnesses. Don’t immediately try to sort out the facts.

**Name the unacceptable behavior.** Use a matter-of-fact tone of voice to state what behaviors you saw/heard. Let the girls know that bullying is unacceptable and against school rules.

**Include witnesses in the conversation.** Let them know that you noticed their inaction. Teach them how to be more active next time. (“Maybe you weren’t sure what to do. Next time, please tell the person to stop or get an adult to help if you feel you can’t work together to handle the situation.”) Tell witnesses who did act that you appreciate the way they tried to help, even if they weren’t successful.

**Do not make aggressors and targets meet and “work things out.”** Unlike conflicts, bullying is peer abuse and involve a power imbalance.

**Support the targeted child. Allow her to regain control. Keep her safe from retaliation.** Make a point to see the girl later in private if she is upset. Let her know that bullying is not her fault. Increase supervision to ensure that the bullying is not repeated and does not escalate.

**Follow up.** Do not require those involved to apologize or make amends during the heat of the moment (every should have time to cool off). All consequences should be logical and connect to the offence. Remember the following:

- **Restitution:** Make it right
- **Reconciliation:** Brainstorm with the aggressor how to make amends
- **Restoration:** Make things better

**Identifying Bullies and Victims Tips for Teachers**

- Bullies tease, taunt, intimidate and ridicule repeatedly.
- Bullies are arrogant and often display an air of superiority that masks feelings of pain or inadequacy.
- Bullies include their followers to do their “dirty work” while they keep themselves in the background; especially if a teacher has been notified.
- Victims often are alone and excluded from peer groups.
- Victims may have difficulties speaking up in class.
- Victims appear distressed, unhappy, depressed and tearful.
- Victims may try to bully less powerful students.
How Can a School Address Relational Aggression?

* **Find out what is happening below your radar screen.** Ask parents what they see happening. Gather as much information as possible. Know how your students aggress, where it happens, and who is doing it.

* **Teach students the language of relational aggression.** Teach them that RA is every bit as harmful as physical aggression. Girls have rarely been told that their behavior is actually aggression.

* **Use Role-plays to empower the girls in the middle to take positive action against relational aggression.** Take the information you have gathered from parents or students and create scenes to show the aggressor, victim, and bystanders. Examples could include; 3 way calls, email, spreading rumors, or hallway gossiping.

* **Create a classroom mission statement on how students want to be treated by other students.** This statement is a description of the new norms your school wants to infuse. The various classroom statements can be complied to create a schoolwide mission statement to be used in every classroom.

* **Intervene when you witness RA in the classroom.** Watch and record incidences of RA; make an appointment with the guidance counselor, parents, school principal, bully and victim.
  ~Determine what happened, emphasizing the hurt it caused the victim
  ~Determine the aggressor’s willingness to recognize and change behavior
  ~Develop an agreed-upon plan of action signed by the aggressor
  ~Monitor the aggressor’s behavior in the classroom with written notations

**Teach New Skills: Coping with a bully**

- **STAND UP TO THE BULLY CALMLY**
- **WALK AWAY**
- **CHANGE PROVOKING BEHAVIOR**
- **BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS TO FORM A SUPPORT SYSTEM**
Sources:

Kids Peace: National Center for Kids Overcoming Crisis
http://www.kidspeace.org/female_bullying.htm

Tips for Teachers
http://www.kzoo.edu/psych/stop_bullying/for_teachers/what_is_bullying.html

Healing Magazine
http://www.kidspeace.org/healingMagazine/NEWHealing/healing_fwo5_6.htm

Queen Bees and Wanna Bees
by: Roseland Wiseman

Girl Wars
by: Cheryl Dellasega and Charisse Nixon

Odd Girl Out
by: Rachel Simmons