

Bullying and Relational Aggression

Bullying occurs when one or more persons use power or force in a willful manner, repeatedly, with the aim of hurting another individual. Bullying is when one or more people repeatedly and intentionally harm, harass, intimidate, or exclude another person. It is unfair and often one-sided. Bullying is not:

- A single act of teasing
- Play teasing or “flirtatious” teasing
- Normal conflicts of childhood
- Hurt feelings between playmates
- Retaliation with mean words after perceived mean words from a classmate
- Accidentally and occasionally bumping into a peer or touching their belongings

Relational Aggression (RA) is emotional violence and bullying behaviors intended to damage another's social connections within a peer group. It is manipulation intended to control someone else's ability to maintain or build relationships with others. It includes:

- Exclusion
- Gossip
- Rumors
- Cyberbullying
- Alliance building
- Public humiliation

Kids see relational aggression in TV, movies, music, and commercials and it has become a culturally acceptable way to handle frustration, particularly for girls. However, RA is not just a “girl thing”; boys do it, too.

Research shows RA has been observed in girls as young as 2. Relational aggression typically begins to become a problem with girls in the 4th and 5th grades and continues through middle school into high school. Girls' rates of RA typically spike in 9th grade, and begin to taper off in 10th.

For boys in 4th through 6th grade aggression is mostly physical, however from 7th to 12th grade we see their aggression become more relational.

Social Emotional Learning is very important for preventing these harmful behaviors. The five domains of Social Emotional Learning are:

Building self-awareness

Self-Management

Social Awareness

Relationship skills

Decision-Making and Pro-Social Behaviors

A useful problem solving/decision-making method:

SODAS

1. Situation – describe the situation
2. Options – name at least three options for what to do about the situation
3. Disadvantages – brainstorm the disadvantages to each option
4. Advantages – brainstorm the advantages to each option
5. Solution – pick the best solution

Kids can practice this method at school and at home by using situations and characters from books or movies.

What we can do:

- Keep the lines of communication open. Check in with kids often. Listen to them with attention. Know their friends, ask about school, and understand their concerns.
- Let them know parents, school staff, and other caring adults have a role to play in preventing bullying!
- Help kids understand bullying. Talk about what it is and how to stand up to it safely.
 - Remember the 20-80-15 rule.
- Closely monitor social media use
 - Monitor texting
 - Provide boundaries, as they often cannot yet set them for themselves.
 - You don't have to text back! "You didn't invite them to text, you're not obligated to respond"
- Teach kids to use social media responsibly
 - Remind them everything online is public, and permanent
 - "Don't write it, don't forward it." Let kids know that by passing along hurtful or inappropriate content, they are perpetuating the problem. They should also be aware that when it comes to "sexting", posting, or forwarding inappropriate pictures and messages, legal consequences are a possibility.

- Tell kids not to delete evidence. If someone is sending them inappropriate pictures or threatening messages, do not delete them!
- Have kids read their unkind or aggressive texts, tweets, and comments aloud to you. "If you wouldn't speak it, don't send it."
- Address hurtful words as we address physical violence
- Address the words being used
 - Set rules for what is expected and what is unacceptable
 - Redirect – "Instead, you could say this..."
- Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, interests and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends, and protect them from bullying behavior.
- **Model how to treat others with kindness and respect.**

Bullying and Relational Aggression are cultural issues that must be addressed by the whole community. The way adults respond to this behavior can have a very positive impact.

Some useful links:

Bullying and Relational Aggression: www.opheliaproject.org

Social Emotional Learning: www.parenttoolkit.com; www.casel.org

General Health: www.kidshealth.org

Social Media Use: www.common sense media.org

**More resources for parents and caregivers can be found in our Library, and on the Summerville Elementary School website.