



CASS 9-12

Grant Application Template

I. Program Summary

The Ophelia Project

Our mission is to empower all members of a community to recognize and address relational aggression through systemic change in the social culture.

The Ophelia Project provides programs for youth from preschool through college while also educating and training teachers, administrators, parents, and other concerned adults who are committed to helping create safe social cultures that promote emotional health and academic success. Through consulting, curricula, multi-media educational packages, and training workshops for schools, community organizations, or any group looking for positive change, we provide the tools needed to initiate and sustain a culture of positive change. Beyond educational programming, The Ophelia Project firmly believes that mentorship is a powerful vehicle for change; development, training, materials, and consultation for the successful implementation of mentoring programs are also included in our offerings.

CASS: Creating a Safe School

CASS: Creating a Safe School is an intensive and comprehensive initiative led by The Ophelia Project to address relational aggression and promote the development of a safe social culture within a school. CASS unites students, faculty, staff, parents, and other local adults who want to contribute to a safer environment in a common mission of providing education, encouragement, and support. While many schools have embraced school-wide initiatives for addressing bullying or aggression, the hallmark of CASS is the creation of healthy relationships through mentorship and community events. CASS encourages members of the school community to look at student safety with more than just a physical consideration. Peer aggression also includes verbal aggression, cyber aggression, and relational aggression, which is behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating her or his relationships with others. All of these behaviors, when left unaddressed can turn into bullying – a repeated inflection of harm upon a person of lesser power.

At the high school level CASS:

- Empowers students as trained Youth Ambassadors who can mentor their classmates and model positive social interaction and courageous intervention.
- Encourages the reformation of cultural attitudes and beliefs about peer aggression that silently support hurtful, aggressive behavior.
- Builds relationships and a strong sense of community among people dedicated to creating a safe social culture.
- Leads students on a journey of self-discovery and enlightenment through a course exploring four core concepts: Knowing Yourself, Knowing Others, Knowing What's Wrong, and Knowing What's Right. This course can be integrated into the existing school curriculum as part of the Health, Family and Consumer Sciences, Social Sciences, or Language Arts curricula.

II. Problem Summary

Relational aggression consists of behaviors that are intended to hurt someone by harming his or her relationships with others, social roles, and/or social standing (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Such behaviors can include exclusion from activities or a desired friendship group, the silent treatment, and spreading false rumors (Pronk & Zimmer-Gembeck 2009).

Relational aggression is a far-reaching problem that can begin early in life. Research demonstrates that relatively simple forms of relational aggression can be detected among children as young as 3 years of age (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). Research has also indicated that children across cultures spontaneously report relationally aggressive acts as mean and harmful, making this a problem that affects children across cultures (Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006).

Prior studies have shown that relational aggression is salient among adolescent girls but it has recently become clear that relational aggression also affects boys. For example, research indicates that relational aggression occurs quite frequently among boys, and boys who display relational aggression (as opposed to physical aggression) experience greater psychosocial maladjustment than boys who display gender normative expressions of aggression (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010). Research has also found that male and female students feel less safe in schools in which relational aggression is frequent (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010).

Relational aggression has also been identified as a significant contributing factor in physically aggressive episodes (Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006). But while evidence is accumulating to suggest that relational aggression may create just as much, or possibly even more, damage than physical aggression, it is an area that is often overlooked by anti-bullying programs, which mainly target more overt and physical forms of aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Young, Boye, & Nelson 2006). Relational aggression is often overlooked in schools because overt physical violence is better understood, more readily observed, and more easily confronted. (Young, Nelson, Hottle, & Warburton 2011).

According to Gottfredson and colleagues (2005), “although most schools employ many different strategies to prevent problem behaviors, approaches that emphasize individual deficits (such as counseling and instructional programs) are considerably more common than attempts to alter the psychosocial climate or the quality of interactions among people in the school. It appears that school personnel operate more on the basis of an individual-deficit theory of problem behavior causation than on the basis of a theory of environmental influences,” (p. 437). Thus, it seems that school staff members are more likely to blame “bad kids” than “bad norms.”

According to Nixon and Werner (2010), a systemic approach to aggression prevention and intervention is supported by research (see Greenberg, et al., 2003; Nation et al., 2003; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003) and these approaches are, “generally whole-school or universal approaches that involved addressing aggression as a group process supported by members of the school community,” (p 607). Thus, in a school-wide systemic model, schools address the overall way that aggression is perceived and dealt with. The guiding infrastructure for this concept is the normative beliefs held by all members of the school community regarding peer aggression.

Nixon and Werner further suggest that changing students' normative beliefs is critical when predicting changes in relational aggression over a period of time. Their research (Nixon & Werner, 2010; Werner & Nixon, 2005) strongly supports a systemic approach aimed at changing the normative of beliefs of students as the means for reducing relational aggression and victimization.

CASS addresses the need for relational aggression prevention through a whole school initiative based upon a positive, normative belief structure implemented school wide. This approach's need and rationale is well justified by the above research and also confirmed by current initiatives within legislation and education policy. As of 2012, 48 states have formal legislation regarding bullying with many laws requiring a research based initiative within the all schools (bullypolice.org, 2012).

III. Program Implementation

Program Framework

A study of 16 school intervention programs over 25 years published by *School Psychology Quarterly* in 2008 found that bullying prevention programs tend to have modest positive outcomes. The most successful ones are associated with a combination of program components including: role play and journals, involved adults who are authoritative and warm, collaborative school-wide programming, a positive environment (school connectedness), student education, and staff training. Accordingly, CASS is based upon this empirical evidence that connects change in normative beliefs about aggression to change in behavior. As a result, CASS has been carefully constructed on best practice foundations including:

- *Comprehensiveness*: Intervention efforts address multiple audiences including parents, teachers, students, administrators, auxiliary staff, sports coaches, and local community members
- *Relationship Building*: Opportunities for students to build strong and supportive relationships through cooperative learning experiences, peer mentorship, and the Youth Ambassador program
- *Varied Learning Strategies*: CASS Concepts coursework incorporates lessons reaching all multiple intelligences as well as the cognitive levels in Bloom's Taxonomy through presentations, role-plays, mentor sessions, journaling, action planning, storytelling, literary connections, cooperative learning, project-based learning, multi-media representation and presentation, fine arts presentation, and more.
- *Youth Leadership*: The Youth Ambassador program provides students with a leadership role as the heart, soul, and voice of CASS through participation on the school leadership team, presenting student assemblies, speaking at Community Night programs, and offering peer mentoring.
- *Professional Development*: Training is offered for all adults within the school community on the successful implementation of CASS
- *Community Involvement*: monthly community nights
- *Evaluation*: Students and school staff are assessed at the beginning and end of the school year to assess progress both short- and long-term goals and objectives; fidelity monitoring occurs throughout the year with the assistance of The Ophelia Project.

IV. Goal and Objectives

Goal:

As a result of increased school connectedness and decreased peer aggression, CASS positively impacts the social norms in a school community by recognizing and addressing peer aggression and identifying, teaching, and modeling a positive set of normative beliefs for educators, students, and parents.

Long Term Outcome Objectives:

1. To statistically significant value, increase school connectedness over each year of CASS implementation.
2. To statistically significant value, decrease peer aggression, specifically relational aggression over each year of CASS implementation.

Short Term Implementation Objectives:

1. The school will create a Leadership Team to oversee CASS including representation from school administration, faculty, parents, and Youth Ambassadors.
2. The school faculty and staff will attend an in-service session to prepare them for actively supporting CASS with additional training for faculty who will lead the Youth Ambassador program and the CASS Concepts course.
3. Students within the school will complete the CASS Concepts course over one semester of instruction during their time in the high school.
4. The Youth Ambassadors will present at least one whole school assembly during the course of the year.
5. The school will offer at least one Community Night program to inform parents, extracurricular moderators, sports coaches, and local community members of their opportunities to be a part of the CASS initiative.

V. Evaluation

CASS utilizes three modalities of evaluation to ensure the best possible outcomes:

1. Outcome Evaluation
2. Process Evaluation
3. Fidelity Evaluation

1. Outcome Evaluation:

The Ophelia Project offers the quantitative Outcome Evaluation independently contracted through Pennsylvania State University's Center for Organizational Research and Evaluation (CORE). Students and school staff complete the Student Climate Survey and Teacher Climate Survey, respectively, at the beginning and end of each school year to measure change in levels of aggression as well as consensus towards the CASS Normative Beliefs. A summative evaluation report is provided to the school at the end of each school year.

2. Process Evaluation:

An Ophelia Project CASS consultant meets each semester with focus groups within the school representing staff, administration, parents, and students to formatively and qualitatively evaluate the progress of CASS and develop short term goals aligned to the most pressing needs of the school.

3. Fidelity Evaluation:

Monthly, the Leadership Team assesses program fidelity with a pre-developed Fidelity Checklist to ensure that all groups within CASS are meeting appropriate benchmarks and remaining aligned with the implementation timeline.

Additional Evaluative Measures:

- *Teacher In-Service Surveys:* At the end of each teacher in-service, a program assessment is provided to gain formative feedback on the development of teachers' skills.
- *Student Action Plans:* Are developed by students to promote the application of CASS Concepts outside of the classroom sessions. Students self-assess their progress and realign plans as necessary.
- *Student Journals:* Provided formative qualitative feedback following each classroom meeting.
- *Assembly and Community Night Feedback:* Obtained after each program to assess the effectiveness of the presentation

Consultation and Problem Solving Services from The Ophelia Project

- *School Handbook Consultation:* Review and assessment the effectiveness of aggression and bullying policies within the school handbook
- *Disciplinary Infraction Tracking:* An Ophelia Project program manager can assist the school administration in analyzing appropriate disciplinary infractions and action planning to address areas of concern
- *SAP Team Consultation:* An Ophelia Project Program Manager

VI. Student Logic Model

