



CASS Grant Application (Template)

I. Project Summary

“One day I was on the playground and a group of 5th grade boys held me down and put dirt in my underwear. I did not cry or tell anyone. I just ran away.”

-- 3rd grade boy

“There is a new girl at my school. She is a little bit overweight. All my friends act like she isn't a human being. When she sat by my friend at lunch, my friend scooted over some. People don't like to sit by her on the bus, and she laughs kind of loud, so whenever she laughs, my friends make a fact. I feel bad for her.”

-- 5th grade girl

“As a parent, I felt so helpless and I didn't know what to do...”

What is The Ophelia Project?

The Ophelia Project serves youth and adults who are affected by relational and other non-physical forms of aggression by providing them with a unique combination of tools, strategies and solutions. To achieve long-term systemic change, we help build capabilities to measurably reduce aggression and promote a positive, productive environment for all.

The Ophelia Project believes that everyone deserves a safe, healthy setting for personal and professional growth. Whether it is a child in a classroom or a worker in his or her office, everyone should expect a secure environment, free from emotional torment. We believe that each individual can contribute to creating these safe social climates, in the home, in the school, throughout their communities and within the workplace.

What is a safe social climate? It's an environment where people are protected, respected, encouraged and held accountable for their actions. It also fosters inclusion, healthy relationships and civility. In a safe social climate, every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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 climates that promote emotional health and academic success. Through consulting, curricula, multi-media educational packages, and training workshops for schools, community organizations, scouting groups, or any group looking for positive change, we provide the tools need to initiative 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 among our offerings.

What is CASS?

The Ophelia Project's CASS: Creating a Safe School is an intensive and comprehensive initiative to address relational aggression and promote the development of safe social climates within a school. CASS trains adults to cultivate a pro-social environment while older students in the school serve as peer mentors and support for younger students who are also taught 10 Basic Skills for creating a safe school in weekly class meetings. CASS brings together school staff, students, parents, as well as other local adults who want to contribute to a safer environment with monthly Community Night events to help build positive connections between the school, home, and community. 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.

We recognize that the entire school community must be involved in the mission of creating an emotionally, physically and socially safer school environment. CASS: Creating a Safe School actively involves administrators, faculty, students and parent groups who work together to develop action plans to change social norms.

We look at student safety with more than just a physical consideration. Peer aggression includes relational aggression (RA), which is behavior that is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating her or his relationships with others (i.e. spreading malicious rumors, exclusion, emotional bullying).

CASS: Creating a Safe School...

... empowers older students as trained mentors to their younger classmates and model positive social interaction and courageous intervention.

... targets our cultural attitudes and beliefs about peer aggression that silently support hurtful, aggressive behavior.

... is the only systemic anti-bullying program that effectively addresses the prevention, identification, and mediation of relational aggression.

... focuses on instilling positive normative beliefs as a means that promote a healthy and safe social climate.

... builds relationships and a strong sense of community among people dedicated to creating a safe social climate.

II. Problem Statement

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) is that, “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

Developed by The Ophelia Project to answer the need for bullying prevention and intervention specifically addressing relational aggression, CASS is a school-based comprehensive initiative that works not as a curriculum, but as a **systemic change model**. CASS is a multifaceted change process that brings together a community of caring adults (administrators, teachers, staff, and parents) with older students as mentors to change the social culture in a school or district. Its primary goal is to positively impact the social norms in a school community by addressing the hurtful, covert behaviors of peer aggression and identifying, teaching and modeling a more positive set of normative behaviors for educators, students and parents.

Normative Beliefs are self-regulating beliefs about the appropriateness of social behavior (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). They address the relationship between what we believe and how we act. Our beliefs, whether true or false, often predict how we act. They can make classrooms, schools, and neighborhoods feel comfortable, fun, and socially safe, or they can make them feel uncomfortable and unsafe.

It is the mission of the Ophelia Project, through the CASS program, to establish the following positive normative beliefs in school communities:

1. Aggression is everyone's problem.
2. We treat everyone with respect and civility.
3. We are each accountable for our actions.
4. After we make a mistake, we make it right.
5. Adults help us deal with aggression.
6. We protect each other.

The normative beliefs are set into place by developing, refining, and sustaining 10 Basic Skills. All members of a CASS Community receive training in the 10 Basic Skills as the program is implemented. The Foundation Skills provide background and strategy development for establishing connections, building cohesion, and creating bonds between members of the community. Problem Solving Skills allow members of the community to diagnose, assess, and mediate issues that may arise.

Foundation Skills:

1. Building Community
2. Building Consensus
3. Holding Everyone Accountable
4. Using a Shared Language
5. Telling Stories

Problem Solving Skills:

6. Addressing Behaviors Along Continuums
7. Standing Up for Yourself
8. Protecting Each Other
9. Utilizing Adult Interventions
10. Making it Right

Why CASS Works

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:** programming utilizes components crossing several domains and include parents, teachers, policy issues, school communities, and students.
- **Opportunities for students to build strong and supportive relationships through peer mentorship**
- **Use of varied teaching methods including:** presentations, role-plays, mentor visits, journaling, action planning, storytelling, literary connections, and engaging classroom activities)
- **Sociocultural relevance:** programming includes the target population in planning and implementation through school-wide training and establishment of a volunteer leadership team that will meet regularly to attend to issues surrounding CASS
- **Training:** training is offered for all adults within the school community
- **Outcome 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; adult participants are assessed monthly at each community night
- **Promotion of physically and psychologically safe environment**
- **Student opportunities for belonging, skill-building and empowerment.**

Most importantly, a major component of the program also includes the use of older student mentors to teach younger mentees about peer and relational aggression. This interaction is a truly powerful weapon in the arsenal of bullying prevention in that it promotes development of social-emotional and leadership skills in both mentees and mentors as well as encourages positive role modeling. In the CASS Ambassadors Program, adult facilitators and high school students are given tools to serve as positive role models in a mentoring capacity to middle school students who are then trained to serve as mentors to elementary students. As such, the mentors present lessons aimed at reducing relationally aggressive behaviors particularly to strengthen positive participation of bystanders who typically represent the majority of a school population. With best practices principles and features such as these as a foundation, CASS has the potential to be highly successful in each and every school that implements the program.

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 norms 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 student Ambassadors.
2. The Leadership Team will attend a half-day Leadership Team Training prior to implementation and then meet monthly to ensure proper CASS implementation.
3. The Ambassador Facilitators will attend a half-day Ambassador Program Training prior to implementation.
4. CASS Ambassadors will be recruited and trained within the first year of implementation with formal peer mentorship with a minimum contact of once per month beginning no later than three semesters into full CASS implementation.
5. All school faculty and staff will attend a two day training in the CASS 10 Basic Skills prior to implementation and then semester in-services to further develop skills and address ongoing issues.
6. Students in grades K-8 will attend weekly class meetings for a minimum of 30 minutes to develop the 10 Basic Skills.
7. Parents will receive a CASS Handbook and invitation to monthly Community Nights as well as parent study group offerings when possible.

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. The Fidelity Checklist monitors the lesson plans from the Faculty Manual that are being used as well.

Additional Evaluative Measures:

- *CASS Student Report:* A quarterly report monitoring a student's mastery of the 10 Basic Skills that is distributed with the student's report card.
- *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.
- *CASS On-Line Teacher In-Service Library:* Provides instruction and evaluation on each of the 10 Basic Skills. Can be completed throughout the school year as further teacher skill development.
- *Student Action Plans:* Are developed by students to promote the application of CASS 10 Basic Skills outside of the classroom meetings. Students self-assess their progress and realign plans as necessary.
- *Student Journals:* Provided formative qualitative feedback following each classroom meeting.

VI. Logic Model

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 behaviors for educators, students, and parents

Effects

As a result of our normative beliefs we will:

Increase School Connectedness

Decrease Peer Aggression

Normative Beliefs

As a result of learning the skills, we can say in this school:

Aggression is Everyone's Problem

We treat everyone with respect and civility.

We are each accountable for our actions.

After we make a mistake, we make it right.

Adults help us deal with aggression.

We protect each other.

10 Basic Skills

As a result of our opportunities for learning:

Build Community

Build Consensus

Hold Each Other Accountable

Use a Shared Language

Tell Stories

Use Continuums

Stand Up for Yourself

Protect Each Other

Use Adult Interventions

Make it Right

Opportunities for Learning

In-Services

Class Meetings

Community Nights

Learning Strategies

Role Playing

Storytelling

Mentoring

Journaling

Action Planning

Discussion

Inputs

Staff

Students

Parents