



## Parent Manual

# Creating a Safe School Supported by Parents

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# Introduction

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## **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's 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.

## **What is CASS?**

CASS: Creating a Safe School™ is a multifaceted change process that brings together a community of caring adults (administrators, teachers, staff, parents) with students to work together to change the social culture in a school or school district. Its primary goal is to positively impact the social norms in a school community by recognizing and 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.

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.

CASS: Creating a Safe School™ targets our cultural attitudes and beliefs about peer aggression that silently support hurtful, aggressive behavior.

## **Why CASS? We've tried other programs before...**

Because you have gotten to this point, it is clear you are open for change. We only go into schools that recognize the problem, that have the support of their administration, and that have a critical mass of teachers who want to change their social climate and care deeply about their students. Also, CASS will be different because:

- You will not have to work alone. The CASS School Coordinator is backed by a leadership team made up of school administration, parents, faculty members, and student mentors.
- You have teachers who are passionate about making your school an environment where learning is optimized by making sure students are safe and supported.
- You have a remarkable group of students to help you. You know the influence that older students have on younger students. As mentors they can make a significant impact in the lives of your students.
- You have a solid group of parents who will help and support you.
- The Ophelia Project® consultant will be accessible for your assistance.

## **What is Relational Aggression?**

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Relational Aggression (RA) is behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming their relationships with others. It is often covert and subtle and requires careful observation. It is not just “kids being kids.” It is hurtful, intentional behavior that damages self esteem and makes it difficult for creating and maintaining healthy relationships. It may include all or some of the following behaviors: eye rolling, ignoring, building alliances, teasing and put downs, spreading rumors and gossip, forming exclusive cliques, or cyberbullying.

Relational aggression is one form of peer aggression; other forms are physical and verbal aggression. Physical aggression is usually more overt and recognizable; verbal aggression typically includes put downs and spreading rumors and may be part of relational aggression. All forms of aggression occur on a continuum; while behaviors at the low end may seem harmless, like sighing or rolling one’s eyes, they quickly move to the high end to include hurtful gossip, exclusion, or threats via the Internet.

### **What is the impact of Relational Aggression?**

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is an important developmental task for children and teens. Relational aggression works against the development of these relationships. It is hurtful, damages self-concept and interferes with academic and physical development.

Community leaders and parents often see the impact that relational aggression has on children and teens, but do not always understand what is happening. They may observe a child who is less secure than before or one who claims that “no one is my friend.” They may notice that good friends no longer call or come by to “hang out.” They may observe children and teens who once earned good grades doing poorly in school, complaining more frequently of stomachaches and illness or saying that they do not want to go to school or participate in after-school activities.

### **How can creating a safe social climate help you begin to address relational aggression?**

A safe social climate is one where all can express their opinions, share their ideas, and celebrate their diversity. Put downs are not acceptable and inclusion is encouraged. Becoming proactive is critical. Rather than reacting to incidents of aggression *after* they occur, anyone can work to create organizations, clubs, sports teams or classrooms where people respect each others’ abilities and differences, value cooperation, and celebrate tolerance and diversity. Girls can be challenged to examine their beliefs about how to treat others because research tells us that beliefs predict behavior. They can learn to be more inclusive in their friendship circles and more aware of the contributions each of their peers can offer to the group. Relationships occur in a context... *a culture*. Everyone wants to belong, have friends, and feel connected. In a safe social climate, everyone is encouraged to respect their peers and friends; aggressive behaviors are actively discouraged and positive, pro-social behaviors are actively taught and practiced.

### **Why focus on relational aggression?**

Relational Aggression (RA) is often covert and subtle and requires careful observation. It is not just “kids being kids.” It is hurtful, intentional behavior that damages self esteem and makes it difficult for creating and maintaining healthy relationships. It may include all or some of the following behaviors: eye rolling, ignoring, building alliances, teasing and put downs, spreading rumors and gossip, forming exclusive cliques, or cyberbullying.

Recent research has shown that children begin to use relational aggression (RA) during the preschool years. Moreover, RA is as stable a social behavior as physical aggression, at least through the middle school years. That is, some children consistently use RA in their social interactions, despite changes in classrooms from year to year.

### **What are the risks associated with relational aggression?**

Perhaps more striking than the prevalence and stability of RA among children are the risks associated with those who participate in RA, either as a victim or an aggressor. Research shows that RA, similar to physical aggression, is associated with serious child adjustment problems such as depression, peer rejection, problematic friendships, and loneliness (Crick et al., 1998; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick et al., 1996; Grotzinger, et al., 1998). In other words, children who are frequently involved in RA episodes are more likely than uninvolved children to experience social and emotional difficulties – difficulties that may have a lasting negative impact on children’s development. These studies indicate that relationally aggressive children are vulnerable to many of the same difficulties as are physically aggressive children.

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is an important developmental task for children and teens. Relational aggression works against the development of these relationships. It is hurtful, damages self-concept and interferes with academic and physical development.

Community leaders and parents often see the impact that relational aggression has on children and teens, but do not always understand what is happening. They may observe a child who is less secure than before or one who claims that “no one is my friend.” They may notice that good friends no longer call or come by to “hang out.” They may observe children and teens who once earned good grades doing poorly in school, complaining more frequently of stomachaches and illness or saying that they do not want to go to school or participate in after-school activities.

# How do you Change Normative Beliefs and Social Climates?

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## **Why should schools change normative beliefs about relational aggression?**

Take a few minutes and try to imagine a school that has no policy or intervention for physical aggression. Imagine a community where students are allowed to physically attack each other with no adult intervention or consequences. Imagine adults taking the position that “boys will be boys”, that aggression is just something we can expect, and if we let them alone they will work it out themselves. It is unthinkable because we know that physical aggression, left unchecked, will escalate. We know that aggression hurts the aggressor, the victim and kids in the middle while harming the social climate for everyone else. Yet relational aggression is not treated this way. Schools do not have policies. Adults do not know how to intervene. Parents do not know how to respond. Today we know that relational aggression and verbal aggression are just as harmful as physical aggression – and they are more prevalent. Children are not “just mean”; they learn how to aggress. By not intervening, we have allowed the aggression to escalate.

Peer aggression is a very serious problem. No one has come up with a silver bullet to solve it. We do not think there is one. But we do believe we can change the social climate in our schools. It is not easy or quick, but it can be done.

Schools are the key. Many schools have intentionally and thoughtfully created a good climate for learning. Schools know how to promote the beliefs, norms and behaviors needed for students to learn. The same skills and focus can be applied to changing the social climate. Within every school where peer aggression is a problem, there is a set of social norms that allow aggression to take place. Once we recognize what is really going on, we can begin the long term process of changing the normative beliefs and social behaviors.

## **What will happen to change the social climate with CASS?**

To change the social climate in a school community, we are working at a level of transformation. This is an audacious, but possible mission. It is possible that if we all work together with the conviction, passion and discipline needed to maintain a high level of commitment until the normative beliefs have changed.

Through the CASS program:

- Parents receive education and training on how to deal with their own children and the school when there is a problem.
- Teachers develop the tools to recognize covert aggression in their own classrooms and know what they can do to prevent it.
- Administrators are provided with a set of guidelines that students and faculty members can follow when they deal with peer aggression.
- Student mentors serve as role models and leaders in the process of changing the school norms and creating a safer social climate in their school.

## **How Does CASS Work for Teachers?**

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All teachers want their classrooms to be safe, supportive environments where everyone is respected and students feel valued. Chances are your classroom already enforces the same values and concepts that are part of the CASS program. What CASS can do is provide you with clear, easy to follow strategies to increase student empowerment and reduce aggression not only in your classroom but in the entire school. This is not a curriculum to be taught in a specific class period, nor is it a one shot training program. CASS is a systemic program aimed at changing the way all members of a school community interact with each other to create a safe, social environment.

### **I've seen too many other programs. Why is this different?**

I'm a teacher. I've sat through way too many in-service programs that I never thought about again once they were over. I've watched good program ideas get off to a thunderous start only to dissipate into nothing. As a teacher I wanted new ideas. I welcomed change. I even appreciated most of the in-service programs our administrators chose for us. I would take the handouts and put them in the TO DO file right on top of my desk. My intentions were sincere. Later, I would discover them at the bottom of the file, and eventually they went into the bowels of my filing system, never to be seen again. No one seemed to care. I wanted to be part of something that made a real difference in our lives. Why does it so seldom happen? (Susan Wellman – Founder of the Ophelia Project®)

### **CASS is Clear and Consistent**

The School Code of Conduct, Hierarchy of Consequences, and methods for dealing with aggression are the same for every student, in every class, throughout the school. Even parents are encouraged to use the same strategies at home. Never again should you hear that “Mrs. Smith said it's ok,” or “We can do that in Mr. Jones's classroom.” By following a clear, consistent pattern of behaviors, students develop a sense of right and wrong based on positive normative beliefs established within the school.

### **CASS is Communication and Collaboration**

Your students will develop effective skills for communicating their emotions and needs. They will become skilled at storytelling and role playing methods for examining their personal experiences and practicing social skills. Students learn to work with mentors, teachers, parents, and school administration to ensure that the school environment is safe and supportive.



## **How Does CASS Work for Parents?**

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### **Why include parents in a program to reduce aggression in schools?**

Parents are confused, frustrated, concerned and disturbed by peer aggression in their children's lives. At best, a parent just comforts a child and the aggression passes without undue harm. At worst a parent intervenes poorly with the alleged aggressor or the school, or may unwittingly model more aggression. When a mother is told that her child is the aggressor and asks her child about the situation, she often gets a very different version of the story. It is a real challenge for a parent to learn the truth and know how to respond when the social situation is misinterpreted, distorted, and covert. Thus, reaching parents and giving them the tools to intervene effectively is an essential part of the CASS program.

### **But isn't this the school's job?**

- There is a limit to what schools can do alone. They need the support of parents.
- The CASS program is based on the success of The Ophelia Project® using volunteers to accomplish a wide range of community interventions. We know there are exceptional parents in every school community willing to help. In our CASS schools, parents serve on the Task Force, train mentors, facilitate community programs, and publish the CASS Update Newsletter.
- A critical mass of parents in a school community need to know the language of peer aggression and receive tools to help them help their children navigate the often icy waters of peer relationships and friendship. Parent leaders can have enormous influence on other parents who are struggling with the same issues.
- School personnel need parents who will champion them as they implement the CASS program.

### **What do parents need to know about peer aggression?**

- Bullying (repeated aggressive acts) is a real problem and one that needs adult intervention on some level.
- The common phrase, "let them work it out" is ineffective because research shows that this non intervention strategy only allows the strong to get stronger and the target to be defeated.
- Normal day to day conflicts often call for parent interventions—just to help the child learn how to resolve them more effectively, but also to establish correct behaviors in your home.
- It is often difficult for parents to accept that children lie about their misbehavior or aggression at school. Some parents are too quick to discount the teacher's version of the incident.
- Parents can take preventive measures with their children as soon as they see signs of peer aggression, often as young as preschool age.
- Parents should get to know their children's friends whenever possible. Sometimes two sets of parents working cooperatively can help their children work through an episode.
- Parents can unwittingly model relational aggression.

## **How Does CASS Work for Students?**

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Students today have many different groups to answer to when making decisions about their behaviors. Parents may have one message, the school supports another, and finally there is the consensus among friends as to what is the right way to act. The codes of conduct differ based upon who the child is interacting with at the moment. CASS boldly addresses this problem and instead uses a standard Code of Conduct based upon six normative beliefs.

### **How do students replace current norms with CASS Norms?**

Students meet weekly with their classes for Class Meetings in which they learn the 10 Basic Skills in a CASS Community. The CASS Norms are reinforced by exploring these skills and learning new ways to relate to others within the community and mediate peer aggression. Parents, teachers, and others in the school community are all using the same Code of Conduct which is enforced by the same Accountability Model. By using a standard set of norms, students no longer have to pick and choose between which behaviors are acceptable based upon the audience.

After Year One of CASS, each student will have a student mentor. Student mentors guide their mentees through mediating peer aggression and using the CASS Norms as guides for behavior in all aspects of life. Students have the option to become CASS Mentors after they have experienced one year in the CASS Program.

### **How can students see CASS Norms as the “cool” choice for behaviors?**

According to research by Cross and Peisner (2009)<sup>1</sup> regarding relational aggression, “It appears that communication about true peer group behavior framed in a positive, healthy, and ‘cool’ normative message can reduce the perception that ‘everyone is doing it.’” CASS acknowledges that students look to their peers for behavioral cues more often than the adults in their lives. Through student mentorship, positive behaviors are role modeled and explored with students.

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<sup>1</sup> Cross, J., & Peisner, W. (2009). RECOGNIZE: A social norms campaign to reduce rumor spreading in a junior high school. *Professional School Counseling, 12*(5), 365-377.

## **CASS Normative Beliefs – Code of Conduct**

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Normative Beliefs are self-regulating beliefs about the appropriateness of social behavior.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Huesmann, L.R., & Guerra, N.G. (1997). Children's normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(2), 408-419.

## **10 Basic Skills in CASS Communities**

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The CASS program is based upon developing, refining, and sustaining 10 Basic Skills as all members of a school system build a community rooted in responsibility and accountability. 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

# Parent Leader Checklist

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Parent leaders in CASS Schools have many responsibilities and wear many hats. The parent team should consist of at least twenty parents, who may serve on subcommittees dedicated to one or two more tasks on this checklist.

- ✓ Task One: Recruit Parents and Attend Train The Trainer
- ✓ Task Two: Get Organized
- ✓ Task Three: Assist with the Faculty In-Service
- ✓ Task Four: Prepare Community Programs
- ✓ Task Five: Prepare monthly CASS Update Newsletter
- ✓ Task Six: Promote CASS in the school and community
- ✓ Task Seven: Assist with CASS assessments.
- ✓ Task Eight: Facilitate New Family Orientation program
- ✓ Task Nine: Hold a celebration for all CASS volunteers.

# Task One: Recruit Parents and Attend Trainings

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Build your parent team. Distribute parent interest form to all families within the school. Choose at least twenty parents who:

- ✓ Represent the student body (be sure to have diversity on your team that matches the diversity of your school).
- ✓ Demonstrate support for the school and teachers.
- ✓ Feel passionate about making the school a safer place.
- ✓ Want to be part of the solution.

Parent leaders need to be able to attend CASS Trainings. Get a firm commitment from participants to attend as many sessions as possible. Communicate with potential participants.

- ✓ Send emails
- ✓ Make phone calls
- ✓ Provide employer letters to request for time off
- ✓ Provide basic information about CASS (Photocopy the Introduction of this manual)

## Sample Parent Interest Form

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Dear Parents,

We would like to offer you an exciting opportunity to take a leadership role in your child's school as a member of the parent leadership team for the Creating a Safe School (CASS) program that will be implemented beginning next fall in your child's school. If you are interested, your responsibilities would include:

- Attending a two day training event over the summer.
- Planning community education programs.
- Preparing monthly newsletters.
- Promoting a positive change in the social climate of your child's school.

If you are interested in Creating a Safe School for your child and wish to serve as a parent leader, please return the bottom of this letter to school with your child as soon as possible. We thank you for your continued support of your child's growth and development.

Sincerely,

Our School's CASS Task Force

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Parent(s) Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Student(s) Name(s) and Grade(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I am willing to help with:

- Planning community education programs.
- Preparing monthly newsletters.
- Promoting the CASS program in the school and community.
- Attending training sessions for parents and faculty members.
- Serving as a liaison between parents and school staff.
- Help introduce new school families to the CASS program

## Sample Letter to Parent Employers

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Dear Employer,

Your employee, (name), is taking an exciting stand at his/her child's school by becoming a parent leader in the Creating a Safe School (CASS) program. This program is dedicated to creating a safe social climate within schools by promoting multi-faceted change of normative beliefs among students, faculty, parents, and administration. Everyone in the school community will learn strategies for mediating aggression and taking a proactive stance against aggression. These skills will not only help members of the school community make the school a better place, but we hope to see positive change permeate family and even workplace environments.

To become a parent leader in the CASS program, it is necessary to attend a two day workshop called "Train the Trainer" where all participants will learn the 10 Basic Skills for Creating a Safe School. We hope that you support your employee in becoming a positive agent of change in his/her child's school and allow him/her to take professional leave for these two days to attend the training session. The training dates are (insert dates). If you have any questions regarding this program, please feel free to contact me, the CASS School Coordinator.

Thank you,

(name)  
CASS School Coordinator  
(phone)  
(email)



# Task Two: Get Organized

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After the Train the Trainer event, hold a parent meeting to organize the parent team. Be sure to send out emails or phone parents to remind them of the meetings. Someone at the meeting should serve as a secretary and take notes regarding what has been discussed and who will be serving on each committee. Minutes from the meeting should be distributed via email.

Cover the following items at the meeting:

- ✓ Have parents share their commitment to working forward with CASS.
- ✓ Get feedback from Training —positive and negative. Have someone prepare a summary of the comments to provide to the Ophelia Project consultant.
- ✓ Build committees for the following items:
  - **Teacher Liaisons** – will help teachers mediate issues with other parents in the school; reinforce the parent protocol; attend faculty in-services to help with role plays and showing support (Task Three)
  - **Community Programs** - prepare monthly programs that reinforce the 10 Basic Skills and provide information for families (Task Four)
  - **CASS Update** –prepare the monthly email or hard copy newsletter to be distributed in the school each month (Task Five)
  - **Public Relations** – promote CASS within the school and community; contact local news sources when large CASS events occur (Task Six)
  - **Assessment** – assist school coordinator and Task Force with assessing the program throughout the year (Task Seven)
- ✓ Allow committees a chance to meet and begin planning their responsibilities for the first month of school. Each committee should designate a committee chairperson who will report to the overall parent team leader.
- ✓ Discuss the parent protocol. Role play using it.
- ✓ Set a schedule for subsequent committee meetings and whole parent team meetings.

# Task Three: Assist with the Faculty In-Service

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The Teacher Liasons committee will need to work with the Teacher Leaders and Task Force to help prepare the in-service. It is essential that the teachers at the in-service see the parents in attendance as supportive. Parents at the in-service will attend the Meet and Eat and Introduction to CASS portions of the presentation to get to know the teachers and help generate support for the CASS program.

Other opportunities to help with the in-service include:

- ✓ Help prepare materials
- ✓ Set up audiovisual aids
- ✓ Set up facility with chairs / tables
- ✓ Prepare food or arrange for catering for lunch
- ✓ Prepare role plays or other interactions that reinforce concepts presented in the in-service

# Task Four: Prepare Community Programs

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Community Programs are monthly gatherings approximately ninety minutes long that reinforce the 10 Basic Skills and provide information for families. These events are geared to parents, teachers, and other adults in the school community (cafeteria workers, bus drivers, support staff). Community Programs are not for students to attend.

Before the start of the school year, set dates for the programs. It is recommended to schedule one program each month at the same day and time of the month. (First Monday night at 7:00). Due to the many holiday events during December, it may be helpful to omit a parent meeting in this month.

For each program the committee will:

- ✓ Choose the agenda for the program.
- ✓ Designate presenters and provide opportunities for practice.
- ✓ Include at least one administrator and faculty member in the program.
- ✓ Make it a warm, comfortable event for everyone who comes. Provide refreshments if possible.
- ✓ Provide babysitting services for parents to encourage more participation.
- ✓ Have publicity for the next parent program—ask everyone to come back with a few friends. Provide a “teaser” to spark interest in the next topic. The new information will get people to come back.

## Community Program Themes

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The themes for the Community Programs are also discussed during the monthly faculty meeting are the focus of Class Meetings for students during that month. Parent leaders can coordinate with Teacher Leaders, the Task Force, and Student Mentors to set up role plays or presentations during the community programs.

**September:** Welcome to CASS (Basic Skills One, Two, and Three)

**October:** The Language of Peer Aggression (Basic Skill Four)

**November:** The Five Critical Steps for Addressing Peer Aggression

**January:** Using Continuums to Address Behaviors (Basic Skill Six)

**February:** Target and Bystander Interventions (Basic Skills Seven and Eight)

**March:** Parent Interventions (Basic Skill Nine)

**April:** Making it Right (Basic Skill Ten)

**May:** Wrapping Up a Year with CASS

After Year One, parents can choose particular areas of interest to use as the topic for a Community Program. Use the Supplemental Materials that are included as appendices with this manual. It is acceptable to repeat a program from the previous year (and recommended to repeat the September program) if that issue specifically needs addressed within the community.

# Community Program Template

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Timings can always be adjusted as necessary, but this basic layout for a program will help your team organize and plan for Community Programs.

Timing	Description	Presenter
10 minutes	<b>Welcome</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a short Community Building activity to have participants interact and get to know each other.</li> <li>• Introduce the speakers for the evening.</li> </ul>	
10-30 minutes	<b>Introduce a skill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk the audience through the particular elements of the skill that is the focus of the evening.</li> <li>• Provide handouts or use presentation materials as necessary.</li> </ul>	
5 – 10 minutes	<b>Present a role play or tell a story</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work ahead of time with other parents, teachers, or student mentors to prepare role plays</li> <li>• Invite an audience member to share a personal story relevant to the topic</li> </ul>	
10-30 minutes	<b>Provide opportunities for participants to practice skill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow participants in small groups to role play or discuss the skill</li> <li>• Process role plays</li> </ul>	
5-10	<b>Closure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow several participants to share reactions to the program.</li> <li>• Provide a “teaser” to spark interest in the next topic. The new information will get people to come back.</li> <li>• Have participants fill out evaluation forms.</li> </ul>	

## Agenda for First Community Program

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Timing	Description	Presenter
10 minutes	<b>Welcome and Introductions (Basic Skill 1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In groups of 6-8 build community: What brought you here? What issues do you see among children that concern you?</li> <li>• Introduce Parent Team Members, Task Force, and any Faculty in attendance</li> </ul>	Principal or head of Parent Team
5-10 minutes	<b>Introduction to CASS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss what will be happening this year and years to come</li> </ul>	Parent Leader
10-30 minutes	<b>Building Consensus for the School Code (Basic Skill 2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce school code and engage audience in how they feel about it.</li> <li>• Introduce the Parent Protocol</li> </ul>	School Administrator
10-20 minutes	<b>Accountability and Making it Right (Basic Skills 3 and 10)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce Accountability Model and Discipline Code</li> <li>• Use student mentors (if available) to role play Making it Right</li> </ul>	School Administrator or Teacher Leader
5-10	<b>Closure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for coming</li> <li>• Provide a “teaser” to spark interest in the next topic. The new information will get people to come back.</li> <li>• Have participants fill out evaluation forms.</li> </ul>	Parent Leader

# Task Five: Prepare monthly CASS Update Newsletter

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CASS Updates are e-mails sent regularly to all school employees and families. The purpose is to keep everyone up to date on what's happening and hopefully share a lot of good news. So often we get all jazzed up about something and then it fades away. We want to keep CASS on their mental and heart agenda.

- ✓ Send out requests for e-mail information to all school employees and families.
- ✓ Create an e-mail list serve. Ask the school IT specialist if you do not know how to do it.
- ✓ Use the CASS Update Template to create an email each month. The School Coordinator will have the file on the Supplemental CD that accompanies the CASS School Coordinator's Manual.
- ✓ View the CASS Supplemental Information that is included as appendices at the end of this manual for information to include in the Update.

# Task Six: Promote CASS in the school and community

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To keep momentum and excitement for the CASS Program going, it is necessary to provide awareness within the school and community. The rule of thumb is that every parent needs to hear about CASS three times before it registers there is a new program.

- ✓ Promote Community Programs.
  - Send home flyers, and be sure that dates are included in the CASS Update.
  - Set a goal for how many parents you want to attend each program.
  - Consider providing incentives for program participants. This could be as simple as at 50/50 raffle or door prize at each event.
- ✓ Encourage Basic Skill One: Building Community at all school events.
- ✓ Contact local news sources to advertise CASS events.
- ✓ Identify all avenues for you to promote the school code, parent protocol and the parent programs.
  - School Web Site
  - Information that regularly goes home to parents (perhaps from the teachers)
  - Letter from the principal
  - Information passed out at parent conference night
  - Calling parents with dates to remember
- ✓ Get advice from others who have either succeeded or failed to promote things in the school.
- ✓ Map out your PR plan on a calendar. What information, in what form will be sent in which way at what time.
- ✓ Track how people found out about CASS. You could insert this question in parent program evaluation which is filled out at the end of each parent program.



# Task Seven: Assist with CASS assessments.

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The Assessment Committee will have to work closely with the Task Force and School Coordinator to aid in administering and evaluating assessments.

- ✓ Distribute and collect assessments at the end of each Community Program
- ✓ Distribute and collect assessments at the end of the Train the Trainer workshop and Faculty In-Services.
- ✓ Assist with end of semester assessments.
- ✓ At the end of each parent team meeting, ask for general reactions to the progress of the CASS program so far. Report to the School Coordinator.

Informally, the Assessment Committee can ask the following questions to get an idea of how CASS is progressing in the school:

- ✓ Have you seen any changes with your children and their friends?
- ✓ Have you done anything differently as a result to CASS?
- ✓ If not, why?
- ✓ Do you have any ideas of how we could get more parents to the education programs?
- ✓ Where should we go from here?
- ✓ What issues are you concerned about?
- ✓ What can we do to resolve any issues we are having with the program?

# Task Eight: Facilitate New Family Orientation program

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Schools are a dynamic environment where the population changes quite frequently. When new families come into the school, it will be necessary to inform them of the CASS program.

For families who enter the school half-way through the school year:

- ✓ Provide a committee member who will serve as a CASS Mentor for the new family.
- ✓ Spend some time going over the Basic Skills that have been covered so far in the community programs.
- ✓ Walk through the School Handbook with the family.

For families who will start during CASS Year Two or later:

- ✓ Plan an orientation program (approximately two hours) to introduce entire families to the CASS program.
  - Provide a committee member who will serve as a CASS Mentor for the new family.
  - Walk through the School Handbook
  - Give an overview of the Language of Peer Aggression
  - Introduce the Parent Protocol
- ✓ Encourage parents to attend the Train the Trainer program and serve on the parent team.

# **Task Nine: Hold a celebration for all CASS volunteers.**

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You made it through a full year of CASS successfully and are well on the way to Creating a Safe School! Celebrate this great accomplishment!

- ✓ Invite all school employees, parent volunteers, and student mentors.
- ✓ Provide food and a comfortable atmosphere.
- ✓ Award certificates of participation (see template on School Coordinator CD)

# Appendices

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## **Appendix A: Role Plays for Community Programs**

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### **Being available and ready when your child is ready – asking questions, showing compassion**

#### **Steps**

- Listen
- Name the behavior and identify as serious
- Ask questions
- Provide possible next steps
- Rehearse with the child

#### **Situation**

Child is acting moody. You ask what's up. No answer. You wait. The child begins to talk and you first commiserate, name it, and admit its seriousness. Then ask questions. What happened? When? Where? How did it feel? How often? Then ask what he/she wants to happen.

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### **When your child is a victim: helping him/her stand up for him/herself**

#### **Steps**

- Get the Facts
- Discuss his three options (letting it go, confronting the aggressor, getting help from an adult)
- Rehearse a meeting with the aggressor (follow this guideline)
- Ask the aggressor to meet with you alone
- Affirm the friendship or the child
- Tell exactly what you want to stop (stop talking about me behind my back)
- Reaffirm the friendship or person

#### **Situation**

Your child wants the bullying to stop and wants to talk to the aggressor himself/herself. You give him/her four steps to follow. Now you are going to practice it together. You are the coach. Be gentle in the coaching. Whenever she/he does something right—point it out. Move forward until the child is comfortable.

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## **When your child is the kid in the middle: standing up for your friends**

### **Steps**

- Get the Facts
- Explain your value system

### **Situation**

You role-play how your child will deal with the aggressor the next time this happens. The aggressor is talking badly about a person to a group of kids. You are part of the group and the person is a friend of yours. You stop the conversation by saying, “When the aggressor attacks you for defending your friend say...”

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## **When your child is the aggressor: Hold her accountable for her actions and help her decide how to do this.**

### **Steps**

- Get the facts
- Challenge your child to tell the truth
- Do not get misled by all his/her excuses
- Explain your value system
- State what you want to see happen
- Discuss some consequences

### **Situation**

You have found out that your child has bullied a friend. You get the facts; do not get sidetracked by excuses, and state how you feel about this kind of behavior. Discuss what should happen and how you will hold her accountable. The trick here is not to get sidetracked.

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## **Approaching another parent when your child is the victim: (This is a conversation between two parents.)**

### **Steps**

- Say you are calling because of a situation between your children and you were hoping to work together to help the problem.
- Give the facts non-judgmentally
- Be open for a different story
- Share what you know about peer aggression and what the school is doing about it.
- Reaffirm your desire to help the kids work this out themselves with some guidance from the two of you.
- Brainstorm ideas if the parent is cooperative
- If the parent is not cooperative, say something to leave the door open or what your next step will be.

### **Situation**

You call the parent of the aggressor. You ask for help and she cooperates. Then try it without cooperation.

## **Appendix B: Five Critical Steps for Addressing Peer Aggression**

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How often have you heard the expression “you have to look before you can see?” We often miss incidents of aggression because we are not aware of what is occurring in our classrooms, school buildings and communities. We have to look carefully and thoughtfully for negative social behaviors before we can truly see what is happening and begin to address it. The following steps are a way to start:

### **1. See Aggressive Behaviors**

- Expand your thinking to include all forms of overt and covert aggression.
- Challenge your own normative beliefs.
- Consider your past experiences.
- Become a careful observer.

### **2. Teach the Language of Peer Aggression**

- Know the language of feelings and peer aggression.
- Describe the behavior that you are observing and call it aggression.

### **3. Emphasize Positive Normative Beliefs**

- Write down positive norms and display them.
- Hold everyone accountable for demonstrating these norms.
- Express your behavioral expectations clearly and frequently.

### **4. Practice Pro-Social Skills**

- Teach pro-social skills to enhance empathy, emotional intelligence, relationship building, and conflict resolution.
- Develop intervention strategies to deal with peer aggression when it occurs.
- Support and encourage the ‘kids in the middle’ to speak out in appropriate ways.
- Take advantage of teachable moments to reinforce the norms and integrate them into your everyday routines and experiences.
- Reinforce the new behaviors in your day-to-day interactions.
- Teach students alternative positive strategies for dealing with conflict and friendship issues.

### **5. Share What you Know**

- Create school-wide policies and procedures to address Peer Aggression.
- Make common school areas safer social environments.

## Appendix C: Dos and Don'ts for Parents

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- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do listen attentively to your child's stories and ask thoughtful questions</li></ul>                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not rush the conversation or make light of your child's concerns. Do not assume that things will always work out on their own.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do listen objectively knowing that what you are hearing may not be all there is to the story.</li></ul>                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not assume that you are getting the whole story, but know that you are getting their perspective</li></ul>                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do teach kindness and role model this in your home every day.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not teach your child, indirectly, to get even or take revenge.</li></ul>                                                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do teach empathy by asking your child to describe how it might "feel" to be the victim of relational aggression. Role-play various scenes with her, to help her take someone else's perspective.</li></ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not allow your child to believe that her feelings are the only ones that matter.</li></ul>                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do make family closeness a top priority. Create meaningful activities for your family to share on a regular basis.</li></ul>                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not forget for even one day that girls want closeness with their family more than anything else.</li></ul>                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do teach your child about peer aggression. Name it.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not stop talking because the subject becomes uncomfortable.</li></ul>                                                                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do ask your child, "Who did you stick up for in school today?"</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not underestimate the power of your child protecting someone else.</li></ul>                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do model positive interpersonal relationships in your home.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not inadvertently model RA in your own friendship circle.</li></ul>                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do talk daily to your child. Ask leading questions about your child's peer group and social interactions within that group, i.e., "What's up with Amanda and Angela? Who has been hanging out together lately?"</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Do not ask questions yes/no questions such as "did you have good day at school?"</li></ul>                                                  |



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do everything possible to make sure your child has friends and activities outside the school’s social scene. Examples may include volunteer opportunities in the community, dancing, scouting, church groups, community sports, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not make popularity an “above all end all” value or goal in your family.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do be aware of the messages your child receives from the media: TV, movies, music and the Internet. In your child’s eyes these messages may communicate that it is cool and desirable to behave in a relationally aggressive manner. Talk to your child about real people and real feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not underestimate the power of the media to directly influence his/her behavior.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do teach problem solving skills beginning in childhood: naming the problem, using “I feel _____” statements; direct solution oriented confrontation should be encouraged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not try to solve problems for her. She learns from practice.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do work with your child’s school to implement programs that address these issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not pass up an opportunity to make this a community effort.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do make positive contact with your child’s friends’ parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not think you can raise your children alone. It takes a community of friends.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do consider finding a mentor who can give your child unconditional, objective advice. Also, consider mentoring one of your child’s friends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not feel threatened because your child shares information with her mentor rather than you.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do take your child’s problem seriously.</li> <li>▪ Do <b>listen attentively</b> to your child’s stories and ask thoughtful questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do not panic!</li> <li>▪ Do not rush the conversation or make light of your child’s concerns. Do not assume that things will always work out on their own.</li> </ul>

## **Appendix D: Research and Resource Information for CASS Updates and Community Programs**

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### **Statistics**

Statistics were obtained from: [www.nmha.org/may/index.cfm](http://www.nmha.org/may/index.cfm)

Kids who say other students bully them at school are 50 percent more likely to admit they brought weapons to school during the past month than students who've never bullied or been bullied. (NICHD, 2003)

Nearly 4 percent of boys and more than 6 percent of girls have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder caused by violence they have endured or witnessed. (JCCP, 2003)

About every two hours, a young person kills himself or herself. (AAS, 2002)

Three million teenagers have considered suicide or attempted suicide in the past year. (SAMHSA, 2002)

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among people under 24 years old after accidents and homicide. (CDC, 2002)

During middle school years, an incident of bullying occurs every 7 minutes (Craig & Pepler, 1996 in Garrity et al., 1997; Banks, 1999 in Beale & Yilik-Downer, 2001).

20% of kindergarten students are exposed to peer victimization (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996 in Leff et al., 1999).

10% of students in grades 3-6 are extremely victimized by classmates (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988 in Leff et al., 1999).

The incidence of bullying is greater for younger children than older children (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1987; Rigby & Slee, 1991 in Leff et al., 1999).

Bullying is more common among 6th-8th graders than 9th-10th graders (Bullying among U.S. children: A two-sided problem, 2001, June).

Direct bullying (teasing, taunting, hitting, shoving, kicking) increases through elementary years, peaks during middle school, and declines during high school years. Indirect bullying (willful exclusion causing social isolation) tends to remain constant (Banks, 1999 in Beale & Yilik-Downer, 2001).

43% of children surveyed reported being afraid of using the bathroom at school for fear of harassment (Mulrine, 1999 in Beale & Yilik-Downer, 2001).

20% or more of all schoolchildren are frightened through much of their school day (Hazler, Hoover, & Oliver, 1991 and Olweus, 1991 in Garrity et al., 1997).

Students, aged 8-12, who were interviewed named the class bully as their number one concern (Shure, 2000).

American schools harbor approximately 2,100,000 bullies across racial, ethnic, and geographical location (Shure, 2000).

20% of children report being a bully (Weir, 2001).

25% of American students report being afraid that violence in their school will increase in the next two years – understandable, with the realization that 1 in 8 students report carrying a gun to school on a regular basis (Harris & Associates, 1999 in Hazler, 2000).

More than 160,000 children skip school every day because they fear bullies, according to figures from the National Association of School Psychologists (Bowles, 2001; O’Neill, 2000).

1 out of every 20 students missed school in a month because the student did not feel safe during or on the way to school (Center for Disease Control, 1995 in Hazler, 2000).

Most school shootings have been motivated by revenge, according to recent Secret Service research (Legislatures take on the schoolyard bully, 2001, July/August).

In more than two-thirds of 37 school shootings, the attackers felt “persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured” (National Threat Assessment Center, 2000 in Bowles, 2001).

In more than three-fourths of school shootings, the attacker told someone, almost always a peer, about his plan beforehand. Only twice out of 37 cases did that kid tell an adult (National Threat Assessment Center, 2000 in Streisand et al., 2001).

70% of children believe teachers handle episodes of bullying poorly (Hoover in Mulrine, 1999).

Even teachers sometimes bully students by using sarcasm as a teaching tool (Schoolyard bullies and victims may be at risk as adults, 1997/September).

Special education students may be at greater risk of being victimized. Characteristics such as clumsiness or other disabilities may be used as a pretext for bullying. These students, even in a mainstream or integrated setting, may be less well integrated socially and lack the protection against bullying that friendship gives.

Worldwide, 65% of boys identified as bullies by Grade 2 had a major criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus in Woodward, 1997)

The American Justice Department says that one out of every four kids will be abused by another youth this month, and every seven minutes a child is bullied on a playground. Major studies in Norway in the 1980s and 1990s with more than 150,000 students found that about 15 percent of students in primary and lower secondary school, or approximately one in seven students, were involved in bullying with a degree of regularity—as a victim, as a bully, or both. At least 5 percent (more than 1 in 20) of all students were involved in more serious bullying at least once a week.

In the United States in 1998, the prevalence of bullying was found to be even more substantial. A study carried out with a national sample of more than 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10 found about 30 percent of the sample reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying—as a bully, as a victim, or both. Students in middle school (grades 6 through 8) reported greater frequency of bullying than did students in grades 9 and 10.

Similar results were obtained in another study of more than 6,000 middle school students in rural South Carolina. About 23 percent reported that they had been bullied by other students “several times” or more frequently during the past three months.

Approximately 20 percent reported that they had bullied other students with the same frequency.

## **What is Relational Aggression?**

Relational Aggression (RA) is behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming their relationships with others. It is often covert and subtle and requires careful observation. It is not just “kids being kids.” It is hurtful, intentional behavior that damages self esteem and makes it difficult for creating and maintaining healthy relationships. It may include all or some of the following behaviors: eye rolling, ignoring, building alliances, teasing and put downs, spreading rumors and gossip, forming exclusive cliques, or cyberbullying.

Relational aggression is one form of peer aggression; other forms are physical and verbal aggression. Physical aggression is usually more overt and recognizable; verbal aggression typically includes put downs and spreading rumors and may be part of relational aggression. All forms of aggression occur on a continuum; while behaviors at the low end may seem harmless, like sighing or rolling one’s eyes, they quickly move to the high end to include hurtful gossip, exclusion, or threats via the Internet.

## **What is the impact of Relational Aggression?**

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is an important developmental task for children and teens. Relational aggression works against the development of these relationships. It is hurtful, damages self-concept and interferes with academic and physical development.

Community leaders and parents often see the impact that relational aggression has on children and teens, but do not always understand what is happening. They may observe a child who is less secure than before or one who claims that “no one is my friend.” They may notice that good friends no longer call or come by to “hang out.” They may observe children and teens who once earned good grades doing poorly in school, complaining more frequently of stomachaches and illness or saying that they do not want to go to school or participate in after-school activities.

How can creating a safe social climate help you begin to address relational aggression? A safe social climate is one where all can express their opinions, share their ideas, and celebrate their diversity. Put downs are not acceptable and inclusion is encouraged. Becoming proactive is critical. Rather than reacting to incidents of aggression after they occur, anyone can work to create organizations, clubs, sports teams or classrooms where people respect each others’ abilities and differences, value cooperation, and celebrate tolerance and diversity. Girls can be challenged to examine their beliefs about how to treat others because research tells us that beliefs predict behavior. They can learn to be more inclusive in their friendship circles and more aware of the contributions each of their peers can offer to the group. Relationships occur in a context... a culture. Everyone wants to belong, have friends, and feel connected. In a safe social climate, everyone is encouraged to respect their peers and friends; aggressive behaviors are actively discouraged and positive, pro-social behaviors are actively taught and practiced.

### **Why focus on relational aggression?**

Relational Aggression (RA) is often covert and subtle and requires careful observation. It is not just “kids being kids.” It is hurtful, intentional behavior that damages self esteem and makes it difficult for creating and maintaining healthy relationships. It may include all or some of the following behaviors: eye rolling, ignoring, building alliances, teasing and put downs, spreading rumors and gossip, forming exclusive cliques, or cyberbullying.

Recent research has shown that children begin to use relational aggression (RA) during the preschool years. Moreover, RA is as stable a social behavior as physical aggression, at least through the middle school years. That is, some children consistently use RA in their social interactions, despite changes in classrooms from year to year.

### **What are the risks associated with relational aggression?**

Perhaps more striking than the prevalence and stability of RA among children are the risks associated with those who participate in RA, either as a victim or an aggressor. Research shows that RA, similar to physical aggression, is associated with serious child adjustment problems such as depression, peer rejection, problematic friendships, and loneliness (Crick et al., 1998; Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick et al., 1996; Grotper, et al., 1998). In other words, children who are frequently involved in RA episodes are more likely than uninvolved children to experience social and emotional difficulties – difficulties that may have a lasting negative impact on children’s development. These studies indicate that relationally aggressive children are vulnerable to many of the same difficulties as are physically aggressive children.

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships is an important developmental task for children and teens. Relational aggression works against the development of these relationships. It is hurtful, damages self-concept and interferes with academic and physical development.

Community leaders and parents often see the impact that relational aggression has on children and teens, but do not always understand what is happening. They may observe a child who is less secure than before or one who claims that “no one is my friend.” They may notice that good friends no longer call or come by to “hang out.” They may observe children and teens who once earned good grades doing poorly in school, complaining more frequently of stomachaches and illness or saying that they do not want to go to school or participate in after-school activities.

### **Examples or Relational Aggression:**

- Spreading rumors
- Calling kids names
- Passing nasty notes
- Making fun of someone in class by rolling your eyes or making disparaging sounds
- Bumping into someone on purpose
- Poking or pinching someone in the hall
- Taunting someone in the hall
- Damaging someone's property

Knocking books on the floor  
Making fun of someone's clothes, appearance, or weight  
Instant messaging rumors and gossip  
Getting friends to exclude someone you are mad at  
Revealing someone's secrets  
Talking behind other's backs  
Making mean jokes and then saying "just kidding"  
Letting out a loud sigh of disrespect

### **RA: It's Not Just "Girl Stuff"**

While both boys and girls use verbal bullying most frequently, boys are more likely to engage in physical bullying; girls are more likely to use indirect bullying (Olweus, 1999; Ahmad & Smith, 1999).

Contrary to popular belief, relational bullying, which combines direct and indirect bullying strategies to gain power and social standing over peers seems to be equally common across gender, though may be demonstrated in gender-specific ways .... this type of bullying is exhibited earlier by girls, boys catch up as their verbal skills increase (Björkvist et al, 1992 & 1994).

### **Why should schools change normative beliefs about relational aggression?**

Take a few minutes and try to imagine a school that has no policy or intervention for physical aggression. Imagine a community where students are allowed to physically attack each other with no adult intervention or consequences. Imagine adults taking the position that "boys will be boys", that aggression is just something we can expect, and if we let them alone they will work it out themselves. It is unthinkable because we know that physical aggression, left unchecked, will escalate. We know that aggression hurts the aggressor, the victim and kids in the middle while harming the social climate for everyone else. Yet relational aggression is not treated this way. Schools do not have policies. Adults do not know how to intervene. Parents do not know how to respond. Today we know that relational aggression and verbal aggression are just as harmful as physical aggression – and they are more prevalent. Children are not "just mean"; they learn how to aggress. By not intervening, we have allowed the aggression to escalate.

Peer aggression is a very serious problem. No one has come up with a silver bullet to solve it. We do not think there is one. But we do believe we can change the social climate in our schools. It is not easy or quick, but it can be done.

Schools are the key. Many schools have intentionally and thoughtfully created a good climate for learning. Schools know how to promote the beliefs, norms and behaviors needed for students to learn. The same skills and focus can be applied to changing the social climate. Within every school where peer aggression is a problem, there is a set of social norms that allow aggression to take place. Once we recognize what is really going on, we can begin the long term process of changing the normative beliefs and social behaviors.

### **Why include parents in a program to reduce aggression in schools?**

Parents are confused, frustrated, concerned and disturbed by peer aggression in their children's lives. At best, a parent just comforts a child and the aggression passes without undue harm. At worst a parent intervenes poorly with the alleged aggressor or the school, or may unwittingly model more aggression. When a mother is told that her child is the aggressor and asks her child about the situation, she often gets a very different version of the story. It is a real challenge for a parent to learn the truth and know how to respond when the social situation is misinterpreted, distorted, and covert. Thus, reaching parents and giving them the tools to intervene effectively is an essential part of the CASS program.

### **What do parents need to know about peer aggression?**

- Bullying (repeated aggressive acts) is a real problem and one that needs adult intervention on some level.
- The common phrase, "let them work it out" is ineffective because research shows that this non intervention strategy only allows the strong to get stronger and the target to be defeated.
- Normal day to day conflicts often call for parent interventions—just to help the child learn how to resolve them more effectively, but also to establish correct behaviors in your home.
- It is often difficult for parents to accept that children lie about their misbehavior or aggression at school. Some parents are too quick to discount the teacher's version of the incident.
- Parents can take preventive measures with their children as soon as they see signs of peer aggression, often as young as preschool age.
- Parents should get to know their children's friends whenever possible. Sometimes two sets of parents working cooperatively can help their children work through an episode.
- Parents can unwittingly model relational aggression.



## **RA: Strategies for Parents**

Excerpted from an article at <http://www.aracnet.com/~dclark/rachelsimmons.html>

Dr. Kathy Masarie, founder of Full Esteem Ahead, instructed Oregon parents to learn from their children by setting up “safe” situations in which their children feel comfortable talking to them and with each other about relational aggression.

Dr. Masarie offered the following solutions and strategies to aid parents in becoming aware of and supportive of their children's friendship issues:

Break down the myths which keep us stagnant. Some of these myths are: “That is just the way kids are.” “Kids need to be bullied.” “Bullying is a right of passage.” “If (the targeted kid) would change, everything would be okay.” “We can't do anything about it.” Dr. Masarie noted that the reason kids are targeted is not because they are too weird, too nice, too fat, too ugly, non athletic, weird or look different. Rather, they are targeted for one reason: Someone decided to bully them. Bullying, she says, is an intentional act and the person doing the bullying is usually taking advantage of his or her position of power. Thus, parents should not try to “fix” the target. Rather they should attempt to shift the bully back to a “good kid” by making him or her aware of a new truth: there is no cause that justifies bullying. Dr. Masarie encourages parents to give a “language” to bullying so that their children will have words to describe what is happening to them. This, she says, empowers children to come to the realization that they can do something about it.

Listen well. If you don't hear the story, then you don't know its' happening and you can't do anything about it. If you are shrouded under a dark cloud, the bully will have the power to continue his or her behavior. Dr. Masarie asserts that calm parents tend to hear more. By staying calm and not overreacting when your child begins to confide in you about RA scenarios, your child may be more willing to reveal the whole story. She reminds parents that it is more helpful to listen to your child than to talk too much. Dr. Masarie advises parents not to jump to conclusions. According to Dr. Masarie, it is rare to get an accurate story from just one person. She suggests asking questions such as, “What happened before that?”, “Who else was involved?”, and “What else did you do?” Once you have identified the problem, you can take the next step. This includes talking to people and obtaining resources which will empower your child to find a solution to the bullying. Dr. Masarie noted that there are at least twenty helpful books in print regarding RA.

Create safe spaces for kids. Dr. Masarie suggests that parents strive to create places in their children's lives in which their children can be “who they are.” Such places allow children to be more honest and truthful, rather than having to act in certain, expected ways. Dr. Masarie reminds parents that while we can't choose our children's friends, we can support our children friendships by attempting to find out what unique characteristics our children's friends have. By doing so, we can better understand why our child has chosen a particular person to be his or her friend. Dr. Masarie also recommends that parents strive to help their children's friends feel comfortable within their home, so that their children will continue to feel comfortable bringing friends home. She additionally suggests that parents form support groups in which their children can talk with others about RA issues, such as the Girls Empowerment Network.

Parents can also support their children by starting up and or helping to organize after school clubs such as Irish dance, Chess, and Robotics.

Become the change that you want to see. Dr. Masarie stated her belief that adults see RA every day and experience it in their own lives. However, we have the power to change our own behavior. She encourages parents to not only recognize bullying behaviors in themselves and in the world, but also to attempt to catch themselves in instances when they do not talk directly with others about their feelings. She advises parents who “vent” to other friends when they are angry to do so in a healthy, contained way. This means refraining from attempts to ruin the reputation of the person whom they are angry at. According to Dr. Masarie, awareness of RA can empower parents to become part of the solution, rather than being bystanders who allow RA to continue to happen by justifying or ignoring these types of behaviors. Dr. Masarie calls parents to bring positive energy to their child's school by raising others' awareness level of RA and collaborating with others to work to reduce RA.

## Parents' Primer on School Bullying

BY RICHARD B. GOLDBLOOM, M.D.

In March 2000 an honor-roll student named Hamed Nastoh jumped off the Pattullo Bridge in New Westminster, B.C. Hamed, 14, left a seven-page note that said he was killing himself because his classmates tormented him with names like gay or faggot. He had never told his mother he was being bullied.

A few months later, on November 10, another 14-year-old, Dawn-Marie Wesley of Mission, B.C., hanged herself with a dog leash in her bedroom. She too left a note for her family. It read: "If I try to get help, it will get worse. They are always looking for a new person to beat up, and they are the toughest girls. If I ratted, there would be no stopping them. I love you all so much!"

Most Canadians remember the tragic 1997 murder of Reena Virk, a high-school student whose battered body was recovered from the Gorge Waterway, near Victoria. Her head and internal organs had been severely damaged by a beating that rendered her senseless before she was deliberately drowned. One girl and a boy were convicted of second-degree murder, and six girls were found guilty of aggravated assault. Her death is an example of bullying taken to its ultimate expression. But even in its mildest everyday forms, bullying is about one thing: the strong taking unfair advantage of the weak.

Bullying has been defined as "the tendency for some children to frequently oppress, harass or intimidate other children, verbally, physically or both, in and out of school."

It is not the minor behavior problems that are a part of growing up, such as horseplay, occasional good-natured teasing or even the odd physical scrap between children of equal strength.

The most common form is name-calling. Children call others names for many reasons: because the other child is short or fat, is of a different skin color, or has a lisp, a stutter or a physical disability. Maybe he is a slow learner or wears clothes that differ from the run of the mill. Victims are often smaller or weaker than average, or shy and insecure.

Boys bully more than girls, and the tormenting is more often physical. Debra J. Pepler of the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University has reported that 23 percent of boys surveyed said they had engaged in bullying, compared to only eight percent of girls.

Among victims, however, both genders were equally affected. With girls, bullying often takes more subtle forms, such as whispering campaigns, spreading rumors and shunning—acts designed to destroy friendships. This can be every bit as painful as physical aggression. Many parents are unaware that it is happening because they never discuss it with their kids and because bullying is often a kind of underground activity that many children won't report.

Most bullying takes place in and around school and is often reinforced by an audience. In one study, 120 hours of video surveillance in Toronto schools showed that in over 20 percent of bullying, peers actively reinforced bullying by physically or verbally joining in the aggression. In 54 percent of cases, they reinforced the bully by watching but not joining in. In only 25 percent of cases did peers support the victim.

How common is bullying? Toronto's Board of Education has documented that in grades 4 to 8, one child in five was victimized periodically, while one in 12 was bullied weekly or daily.

Patrick McNiven\* is a happy-go-lucky seven-year-old, now in Grade 2 at a small elementary school near Halifax. His parents, Tracy and Kevin, say Patrick loves everybody and talks to everyone. But shortly after starting school last year, Tracy remembers, "Patrick started crying one night and said he didn't want to go to school anymore.

"At first he would not tell me what the problem was. But with some coaxing, he finally revealed that an older boy from Grade 2 ('Jimmy') was spitting on him every morning in the bus." When Tracy told Kevin, his first response was, "Just tell Patrick to hit that kid!"

But the following day, Tracy decided to speak to the bus driver about it. He wasn't much help. "I can't see everything that goes on, you know!"

The next day, the boy spat in Patrick's face again. Tracy approached the bus driver a second time. Finally, he agreed to seat Jimmy up front, next to him. That lasted exactly one day, after which Jimmy was back to spitting on Patrick again.

In desperation, Tracy decided to speak to Jimmy's parents. The boy's father met her on his front doorstep. He listened for a minute, then said Patrick must have done something to deserve it. He then became belligerent. "He said it was my problem, not his—so I just walked away, thinking Jimmy's father must have been a bully as a child, because he's still a bully as an adult."

Frustrated, Tracy told Patrick that if Jimmy spit on him again, he should spit right back. He did, the next morning, and Jimmy hasn't spit on him since. Tracy admits, "I know it was probably the wrong thing to do—but I'm almost sorry I didn't tell him to spit back from the beginning."

What turns some children into bullies? Researchers, led by Kris Bosworth of the University of Arizona, collected information from 558 students in grades 6 to 8, then divided the students into three groups: 228 who rarely or never bullied anyone; 243 who reported a moderate level of bullying; and 87 who reported excessive amounts of bullying. Those who reported the most bullying behavior had received more forceful, physical discipline from their parents, had viewed more TV violence and showed more misconduct at home. Thirty-two percent lived with a stepparent, and 36 percent lived in a single-parent household. Bullies generally had fewer adult role models, more exposure to gang activity and easier access to guns. This partly explains why bullies need help as much as victims: Many learn their behavior by example.

Bullies often want people to look up to them, and they try to achieve this by acting tough. Their behavior is usually initiated to create status for themselves. They are often unhappy in school, immature and unpopular, but other kids may associate with them out of fear rather than friendship. In some, bullying is part of an overall pattern of antisocial behavior and rule breaking.

Many boys who have been bullies continue their style of behavior in later life. As adults, they are at increased risk for criminality, marital violence, child abuse and sexual harassment. Beginning in 1961, Drs. Donald West and David Farrington of Cambridge University studied over 400 South London boys from ages eight to 32. They found convicted delinquents had previously tended to be troublesome and dishonest in their primary schools, only to become aggressive and frequent liars at age 12 to 14, and bullies at age 14.

Dr. Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen, Norway, an international authority on bullying, has found that 60 percent of boys identified as bullies in grades 6 to 9 had at least one court conviction by age 24. Over time, compared to the general population, they had four times more relatively serious, recidivist criminality than nonbullies.

How can you tell if your child is being bullied? Most schoolchildren won't tell you, often because they are afraid of reprisals. But certain symptoms should make you suspicious. These include unexplained reluctance to go to school; fearfulness or unusual anxiety; sleep disturbances and nightmares; vague physical complaints (headaches, stomachaches), especially on school days; or belongings that come home ripped or are missing altogether.

If you suspect your child may be a victim, it's best not to ask the question outright. Dr. Sarah Shea, director of the Child Development Clinic at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax, suggests: "Ask your child indirectly how he or she is spending lunch hour; or what it's like walking to school, walking home or taking the school bus. Ask if there are any children at school who are bullies, without personalizing it. And when you meet with teachers, ask how they deal with conflict when it occurs. If you are certain your child is being bullied, let the school know that you take it seriously, and ask what can be done to help."

Some parents find it embarrassing to learn that their child is being bullied. But a few simple rules make it a lot easier to deal with:

- Be a good listener. Stay calm, and give your child plenty of time to tell you how he or she feels. Make it clear it's not your child's fault. Above all, don't suggest your child simply fight back. That may increase your child's chances of further victimization. Some children are nonaggressive by nature, and you can't change that.
- Don't overreact. Ask yourself, is this serious enough to discuss with the teacher? With the principal? With the police?
- Help your child avoid the situations that expose him or her to bullying. If it occurs on the way to or from school, find a safe route and arrange for an older child companion. Also, point out places the child can go for help. Finally, let the school authorities know if there is a problem, and keep a written record of incidents and who was involved.

What can a community do about bullying? Hetty van Gulp has more than 30 years experience as a teacher and school principal in Halifax. Van Gulp's son, Ben, would be 25 years old today had his life not ended abruptly in an episode that changed her life. In 1991 Ben was an athletic Grade 9 student. He also had an uncommon condition called neurofibromatosis, which can weaken blood-vessel walls.

Another boy at school had been picking on Ben for about a year. One day in the gym, he pushed Ben to the ground. Ben collapsed and was rushed to the hospital, where emergency surgery showed that the main artery that runs along the spine had been weakened by the neurofibromatosis and the force of the fall had caused it to rupture. Despite heroic efforts, he died. Ben's death turned van Gulp to thinking about aggression in schools. With the help of colleagues, she wrote a proposal to establish an organization she called the League of Peaceful Schools.

## **Excerpted from Professional School Counseling, 2001**

Recent research regarding youth victimization suggests that bullying by peers is a common experience during adolescence (Cash, 1995; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazier, 1992; Olweus, 1994). Peer victimization (also referred to in the literature as bullying and teasing) has been described as an unprovoked attack that causes hurt of a psychological, social, or physical nature (Smith, 1991).

These behaviors have social, academic, and psychological consequences that impact the well being of both the victim and the bully (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Grilo, Wifley, Brownell, & Rodin, 1994; Hazier, Hoover, & Oliver, 1992; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, Kaistaniemi, & Lagerspetz, 1999; Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991; Sharp, 1996).

In addition, bullying has negative impact on the overall school climate (Roberts & Coursol, 1996).

Most middle-school children report having experienced victimization, with attacks happening more frequently at school than elsewhere (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997). School counselors have an obligation to assess whether bullying is a problem for their students, to intervene appropriately, and to be proactive in preventing bullying behavior (Smith, 1991).

As many as 81% of school-aged males and 72% of school-aged females report having been bullied, with younger children (i.e., ages 10 to 13) experiencing greater levels of victimizing behavior (Cash, 1995; Hazier et al., 1992). Most research has focused on severe physical attacks such as threatening bodily harm or weapons, with fewer studies of nonphysical or less severe types of attacks like mocking or social isolation (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999; Clarke & Kiselica, 1997; Crick, Bigbee, & Howe, 1996; Olweus, 1994). Boys identify being the aggressor more often than do girls, in particular for overtly aggressive behaviors such as kicking or hitting (Shapiro et al., 1991).

Studies of the outcomes of both relational and overt forms of aggression have revealed negative effects on academic, social, and psychological functioning. Repeated bullying has been associated with negative school outcomes like absenteeism and poor academic performance (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). Excessive teasing has also been related to depression, social anxiety, decreased self-esteem, anger, and sadness (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Grilo et al., 1994; Hazier et al., 1992; Salmivalli et al., 1999; Shapiro et al., 1991).

## **Boys And Girls Are Cruel To Each Other In Different Ways -- But The Effects Are Equally Harmful**

This story has been adapted from a news release issued by American Psychological Association

WASHINGTON - The vast majority of past studies on peer victimization have focused on boys and physical aggression. But new research illustrates that girls also experience peer victimization, usually relational aggression, in which a person is harmed through hurtful manipulation of their peer relationships or friendships. Examples of relational aggression include retaliating against a peer by purposefully excluding her from one's social group or badmouthing her to her peers. Girls who are relationally victimized are rejected by their peers, feel lonely, experience social anxiety, are socially distressed, and are significantly more submissive than their peers, according to a study in the April issue of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

Researchers Nicki R. Crick, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota, and Maureen A. Bigbee, M.S./M.S.W., of Ramsey Elementary School examined 383 fourth and fifth graders' (194 boys and 189 girls) self-reports of victimization and assessed peer perception of children's positive and negative treatment by classmates. While most past studies concentrated on the initiators of aggressive behavior, the researchers focused their efforts on the children who are targets of such behavior and they examined how such aggression affects their adjustment. The authors found that girls were significantly more relationally victimized, while boys were significantly more overtly victimized (overt aggression harms others through physical damage or the threat of such damage).

The researchers note that victims of relational aggression experience significant adjustment problems, and all victimized children report relatively high levels of emotional distress and loneliness. Relationally victimized children also report more self-restraint problems than their peers, including more difficulty inhibiting anger and greater impulsivity. The authors say assessment of relational victimization provides valuable insights into children's adjustment difficulties that are not evident when examining overt aggression, overt victimization, or relational aggression. "These insights demonstrate the value of studying relational victimization in order to increase our knowledge of social contributors to children's mental health problems, particularly for girls," says Dr. Crick, lead author of the study.

The researchers suggest that those who work with children, including teachers and clinicians, must pay attention to victims not only of physically aggressive attacks, but also to those who are victimized by relational slights, for both types of victims may be at risk for adjustment difficulties. Future research should examine the preceding factors and consequences of both forms of peer victimization in order to develop effective treatment programs for victimized boys and girls.



## **What Can You Do If Your Child Is a Bully?**

You will need to work closely with the school to resolve the situation. Being informed by the school or another source that your daughter or son is bullying other students may be a difficult fact to face.

Making excuses, denying, hiding and playing down your child's behavior will not help him or her.

On the contrary, you should act quickly for the sake of the victim and for your own child's future. It is sometimes difficult to admit that your child is less than perfect because then others will see him that way too. Only when you allow the child to admit his or her actions is there the chance for growth of character.

Children who are aggressive toward their peers are at high risk for what is known as anti-social development, including criminality and misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs at a later stage in their lives. It is, therefore, important to take time now to guide your child on to positive paths.

Make it quite clear that you take bullying seriously and will not accept the continuation of this behavior. If both you and the school show consistently negative reactions to the child's bullying, the chances that your child will change are increased.

Try to set up some simple rules for family interactions. Whenever your child follows the rules, praise him or her. If your child breaks the rules, consistently enforce some kind of negative consequence (for example, the withholding of allowance or other benefits/privileges).

Spend 15 minutes or more of quality time with your child every day. Gain thorough knowledge into who he or she is spending time with and what they are doing. It is easier for children or young people to change their aggressive behavior if they feel they are reasonably well liked and listened to by their parents/caregivers.

Help your child use his or her energy and need to dominate in a more positive way, for example, by encouraging him or her to participate in a sport like basketball or soccer, in which one must play by the rules. Explore any particular talents your child may have that can be further developed to enhance his or her self-esteem.

If these kinds of measures, and the plan that has been set up with the school, have not resulted in noticeable changes in your child's behavior after some time, then you should get in touch with a mental health professional for more help.