



“It’s been twenty years, and I still haven’t had the strength to forgive my middle school tormentors...”

“Why was I singled out? Why me?”

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

These are real words from people across the country who have been impacted by the troubling presence of relational aggression in our society, and who have finally found an ally in the work and mission of The Ophelia Project.

Founded as a catalyst for positive change within schools and communities nationwide, The Ophelia Project is committed to helping youth form healthy peer relationships while creating safe social climates for all. A safe social climate is defined as one that does not accept taunting, covert aggression or bullying as normal behaviors or rites of passage.

Though American society has taken strides to confiscate weapons and calm raging fists, we still allow emotional violence to occur without consequence.

Now is the time to let your own voice be heard.

Why does The Ophelia Project deserve your support? Let’s review the facts...

- ◆ Joseph Wright, medical director of advocacy and community affairs for the Children’s National Medical Center, posits that “bullying is a public health problem [tied to] the larger issue of youth violence in this country.”
- ◆ According to a 2002 Safe Schools Initiative report by the U.S. Secret Service, “two-thirds of perpetrators in recent school shooting incidents described feeling persecuted, bullied or threatened by their peers.”
- ◆ A 2007 Stanford University School of Medicine survey showed that nine out of 10 elementary school students have faced bullying, while six in 10 students surveyed admitted to participating in bullying behavior.
- ◆ Research proves that relational aggression is related to increased depression; lower academic performance; increased suicidal ideation; increased risky sexual behavior; increased anxiety, anger and sadness; substance abuse; eating disorders; loneliness; and other negative consequences.

The Ophelia Project programs *work*.

“In most schools, relational aggression occurs on a daily basis; it has come to be accepted as normal. The Ophelia Project has opened my mind to the fact that what’s going on isn’t right and I get a great feeling knowing that I am part of a counterculture that is working to prevent relational aggression.”



What Makes Us Unique?

We strive for long-term systemic change.

The Ophelia Project's school and community-based services are not a "quick fix" for the problems our children face today. Our mission focuses on long-term cultural change, which can be achieved by standing up against destructive social norms that perpetuate the cycle of covert aggression in children, youth and adults.

We train youth as leaders.

We recognize that older youth can and need to act as role models and agents of change for younger children. We train youth as mentors to deliver programs focused on efficacy and building empathy skills. Research has proven that the results of peer mentoring relationships are overwhelmingly positive. In fact, mentoring programs are increasingly recognized as a leading strategy for improving achievement of children and adolescents who are at risk for academic failure (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). Researchers examining the Big Brothers Big Sisters program found that those adolescents who were mentored through intentional discussion about school, careers and life in general had fewer unexcused school absences, improvements in classroom performance and more positive relationships with parents and other adults (Tierney & Grossman, 1995) .

All of our programs are designed around the latest academic research.

We diligently evaluate our programs each year to determine their effectiveness and make changes when required. We have expanded our research and evaluation staff over the past year, and have also expanded our method and management of data collection. The Center for Disease Control in 2006 awarded The Ophelia Project a \$50,000 federal appropriation for development of The Ophelia Institute™ of Research and Program Development at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College.

We choose to work collaboratively with schools and existing community organizations.

We develop programs where there is a void and a need, and cooperate with organizations that already have expertise. Collaborative relationships have been formed with Girl Scout councils in New York, Ohio, Wyoming and Nevada. Pilot partnerships with a number of Erie businesses have lead to innovative intervention programs like Workforce Dynamics™.



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.

We are dedicated to creating safe social climates.

Spotlight on Relational Aggression

- ◆ Relational aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming their relationships with others. Examples of relational aggression can include exclusion, gossiping or rumor spreading, alliance building and cyberbullying.
- ◆ In the United States alone, **160,000 children miss school each day** due to fear of being tormented by classmates (National Education Association).
- ◆ An article in The Washington Post states that “U.S. researchers who have studied bullying say part of the problem is that such behavior is often accepted, even encouraged by adults...adult approval and the influence of television, video games, and movies teach [kids] that being mean is not only acceptable, but good.” (August 23, 2005)
- ◆ Technology is allowing relational aggression to become more covert and seemingly consequence-free. According to a new poll commissioned by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids of 1,000 students from across the country, one in three teens and one in six preteens have been bullied in cyberspace. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids estimates that more than 13 million children ages 6 to 17 have been victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is an increasing concern today, because the aggressor does not actually witness the humiliation and pain their target feels, and the aggressor does not internalize remorse or empathy for the target.

The Current State of Relational Aggression

- ◆ As of today, 32 states in the U.S. have passed anti-bullying legislation requiring school districts to adopt policies in regards to bullying. Seven more are actively working to pass similar legislation.
- ◆ An Indiana University School of Medicine study published in the January 2007 issue of the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine said that a whole school program is the best way to create a safe social climate. The study's author Rachel Vreeman, M.D. says, “Whole school interventions involving teachers, administrators and social workers committed to culture change are most effective and are especially effective at the junior and senior high school level.”
- ◆ The Ophelia Project's national relational aggression study now includes data for nearly 2,000 students across the country. Our research demonstrates that 27%, or more than one in four students, do not feel emotionally safe at school, thus indicating the need for significant changes within our nation's schools and communities.
- ◆ A study of 800 students who participated in The Ophelia Project's CASS: Creating A Safe School™ program during the 2004-2005 academic year revealed that students were less tolerant of relationally aggressive behaviors over time, and the top 25% of relationally aggressive students showed positive changes in reducing their relationally aggressive behaviors over time.



The Ophelia Project Today

- ◆ The Ophelia Project employs 20 full and part-time staff members, as well as a newly formed national board of directors.
- ◆ CASS: Creating A Safe School programs currently serve more than 2,500 students in dozens of schools across North America.
- ◆ To illustrate the effectiveness of CASS: Creating A Safe School programming, our research team surveyed five schools. Surveys were taken before the CASS: Creating A Safe School programs were implemented and again one year after the students participated in CASS: Creating A Safe School. After a year of involvement in CASS: Creating A Safe School, relationally aggressive behavior that is used by aggressive students was reduced by **23%** in girls and **10%** in boys. In the sixth grade classes (the largest single-grade sampling), aggressors use of this behavior was reduced by **16.7%**.
- ◆ In 2007, The Ophelia Project was selected as the recipient of the **American Association of University Women's Eleanor Roosevelt Fund Award**, an award honoring an individual, project, organization or institution for outstanding contributions to equity and education for women and girls.
- ◆ There are currently 10 National Opheliates operating across North America in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Indiana, Florida, California, Wisconsin, and British Columbia, Canada. A National Opheliate™ is a satellite based off the model developed at our headquarters in Erie, Pa. National Opheliates evolve from a few committed individuals who develop community organizations that lead, plan, create and implement programs with the guidance of volunteers and paid staff.
- ◆ The Ophelia Project's second annual national conference, **Creating Safe Social Climates: It's About YOUth!**, was held October 23-24, 2006 in Evanston, Ill., just minutes from downtown Chicago. The conference will raise awareness about peer aggression and showcase best practices in youth programming. A regional seminar **It Has a Name: Relational Aggression** is scheduled for October 19, 2007 in Erie, Pa.
- ◆ Program development has resulted in five off-the-shelf original curricula that are now available to serve individuals, schools, and organizations with immediate needs, and are soon to be available for purchase online.
- ◆ Inquiries to The Ophelia Project are steadily increasing. Our national Web site has seen an incredible leap in users and sessions leading up to the 2006 national conference and has maintained the traffic in the months following the event.



The Ophelia Project At A Glance

The Ophelia Project was the first national organization to systemically address relational aggression. We know from research and experience that emotionally, socially and physically safe climates are critical for children and adolescents to succeed in school and in life. Through awareness, education and advocacy, we work with youth, families, schools and communities to build safe social climates by promoting healthy character development and addressing relational aggression.

The Ophelia Project is a national nonprofit organization founded in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1997. We emerged as one community's decision to increase parental and community support for adolescents; we grew to become one of the nation's leading experts in identifying relational aggression and creating safe social climates in schools, the workplace and communities.

Over the past decade, our message of creating safe social climates has resonated internationally with tens of thousands of parents, school and community professionals, adolescents, and young adults. By early 2004, the necessary support and demand for our services was in place, and we opened our national headquarters in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Today, we raise awareness about relational aggression, provide educational resources and innovative programming, and advocate for healthy youth throughout the world. Our quest to create safe social climates is detailed through our continuum of services that we offer to individuals, schools and communities nationwide.

For more information about how to bring The Ophelia Project to your school or community organization, contact Diane Mitra at dmitra@opheliaproject.org, or call (888) 256-KIDS (5437).