



***In Their Own Words:  
Stories of Relational Aggression and Bullying***

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*2011 Edition*

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# Introduction

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Note: Words in **bold** throughout the introduction are in the glossary at the end of this study guide.

## “In Their Own Words: Stories of Relational Aggression and Bullying”

represents the diverse voices of teenagers as they share the personal impact of peer aggression. Hearing these stories can have a powerful effect on students who are struggling to fit in, make friends, and cope with the social and emotional challenges of adolescence. Processing the messages conveyed in these student experiences is an important first step in addressing all types of peer aggression: physical, verbal and relational. This DVD can be used to begin the process of creating a safe social climate where adolescents are able to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

## What is Peer Aggression?

**Aggression** is behavior that is intended to hurt or harm others (Berkowitz, 1993; Brehm & Kassin, 1990; Gormly & Brodzinsky, 1993; Myers, 1990; Vander Zanden, 1993; cited in Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It is important to note that aggression is an intentional act. One person, called an **aggressor**, deliberately chooses to hurt or harm another person who is then referred to as the **target**. The types of hurt or harm perpetrated in aggression can be classified into three specific types of aggression: physical, verbal, and relational.

**Physical aggression** is harm and control through physical damage or by the threat of such damage (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999). For youth, these behaviors include:

- Slamming someone into a locker
- Tripping someone
- Grabbing items that belong to someone else
- “Playfully” punching someone on the arm
- Dropping someone’s lunch tray
- Physical fighting
- Threatening to “get someone” after school

**Verbal aggression** is communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent; also referred to as symbolic aggression (Vissing, Strauss, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). These behaviors can be spoken aloud, written, or expressed through images. Examples of verbal aggression include:

- Name calling
- Put downs
- Screaming or yelling
- **Taunting**
- Racial, religious, ethnic or gender related slurs
- Spreading **rumors**
- Insulting someone’s clothing, hair or physical features
- Writing hurtful language about another person (includes text messages, email, and posts on the Internet)
- Distributing embarrassing photos of another person

The third form of peer aggression - **relational aggression** - is more often covert or subtle. Relational aggression is harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships. (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) Because it may be less obvious than physical or verbal aggression, it requires careful observation. It may include some or all of the following behaviors:

- **Exclusion**
- Building **alliances**
- Embarrassing someone in front of that person's friends
- Spreading rumors
- Malicious **gossip**
- Three-party phone calls if one of the callers is not aware of the third person on the line
- Giving the silent treatment or ignoring someone
- Forming exclusive **cliques**

Relational aggression often includes behaviors that adults may not view as necessarily aggressive. For example:

- Eye rolling
- Exaggerated sighing
- Whispering behind someone's back
- Ignoring someone when they greet you or ask a question
- Treating someone as if they were invisible

All forms of peer aggression are hurtful and harmful. Too often, peer aggression is written off as "boys will be boys" or "that's how girls act." Sometimes adults refer to peer aggression as a rite of passage that everyone must experience. At The Ophelia Project, we strongly argue all of these sentiments are myths about peer aggression grounded in falsehood. No one should have to experience peer aggression, and it should not be permitted to continue as a part of life. Everyone, adults and youth, has an obligation to establish a safe social climate free from aggression.

### **Is peer aggression really a big deal?**

Research from The Ophelia Project (2007) reported that 90% of students reported being the target of bullying or relational aggression at one time or another. This research also concluded that targets of aggression experience higher rates of absenteeism, higher rates of depression and other mental health issues, increased somatic complaints (headaches, insomnia, etc...), lower levels of academic performance, increased discipline problems.

Aggression and victimization among children and adolescents is considered a serious problem plaguing today's youth. According to Davis and Nixon (2010a), 22% of students reported peer victimization two times a month or more.

A majority of students also find themselves in the role of the **bystander**: a person who is not an aggressor or target but is caught somewhere in between as a witness to peer aggression. Bystanders also experience many of the negative effects of aggression that targets go

through. The Youth Voice Project (Davis & Nixon, 2010b) asked about regular exposure (2 or 3 times a month or more) to each type of aggression as a bystander and found that:

- 48% of students were regularly exposed to relational aggression.
- 54% of students were regularly exposed to verbal aggression.
- 30% of students were regularly exposed to physical aggression.

Whether directly involved as an aggressor or target or indirectly involved as a bystander, an overwhelming majority of adolescents experience peer aggression on a regular basis.

### **The New Frontier of Peer Aggression: Cyberbullying**

Preteens and adolescents communicate with their peers in a variety of ways: social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, email, instant messaging, cell phone texting, blogs and Web pages. When these communication methods are used in relationally aggressive ways, great harm to the development of healthy peer relationships can occur. **Cyberbullying** is willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010).

More than one-third of youth report being the victims of cyberbullying. Of these youth, 60% said that their online experiences as a target of cyberbullying affected them at school, home, and with friends, and reported experiencing feelings of frustration, anger and sadness (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

What is interesting is the anonymous nature of cyberbullies; although Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) reported that while 84% of the cyberbullies knew their target, 69% of targets could not identify their cyberbully! Through anonymity and what The Ophelia Project refers to as the “**empathetic disconnect**,” cyberbullies are able to aggress upon a target without immediate emotional feedback, nonverbal responses, or any other sign of discomfort or disapproval. Thus, the cyberbully continues their aggression unchecked or unaware of the extent to which their actions are hurtful, thus create a somewhat tacit approval of their behaviors.

The other contributing factor to the intense impact of cyberbullying is the **infinite bystander effect**. Essentially, this means that every person online or with a cell phone is a bystander to the aggression because the aggressive post, picture, or conversation is saved in a public arena for anyone to view. While traditional face-to-face aggression has the number of bystanders limited to those who are present at the time of the aggression, cyber-aggression can be viewed anytime by anyone.

While the topic of cyberbullying is only mentioned as an aside in one of the stories, it may come up in discussion. The first step is for parents, teachers and community leaders to learn more about how students can use technology to create and maintain healthy relationships and discourage them from using it to engage in peer aggression.

## **What Is the Impact of Peer Aggression on Tweens and Teens, Their Families, Educators and Youth Group Leaders?**

Youth who are preoccupied with managing social interactions are not available to learn or participate in extracurricular activities. Instead of working to create healthy relationships and learning more about their own identities and capabilities, they experience self-doubt and loneliness. For example:

- A middle school student sits at home crying because her friends have excluded her from their weekend shopping trip. She wonders what she did to upset her friends.
- A high school boy gets up the courage to ask a girl to the movies and is taunted by his friends, who call the girl a loser.
- A girl with leadership potential becomes the target of exclusion, thereby losing confidence in her ability to function as an important part of the group.
- The new kid in school does everything he can to fit in with the popular kids, but they continue to exclude and taunt him.
- A teenager spends hours each night on the Internet monitoring her friends' Facebook walls and email messages; consequently, she has little time or energy left to work on her history paper.
- A tenth-grade boy receiving text messages throughout the day telling him to "watch his back" after school finds it very difficult to concentrate in class.

Adults often see the impact that peer aggression has on their children, but do not always understand what is happening. They may observe a child who is less secure than before, one who claims that "no one is my friend," or notice that good friends no longer call. Parents may observe teens who once earned good grades doing poorly in school, complaining of stomachaches and illness more frequently, or saying that they do not want to go to school.

When cyberbullying occurs, the information gap between educators, parents and students becomes evident. Many preteens and adolescents are more technologically savvy than their parents and teachers. Many adults do not understand the importance of technology in their children's social lives. Parents may be confused and disturbed by all forms of peer aggression and will look toward school personnel and community youth leaders for answers as well as support.

Youth group leaders, sports coaches and those who lead extracurricular activities also observe these behaviors. Preteens and adolescents carry their friendship issues and challenges with them when they leave school. These issues have an impact on after-school clubs, sports and community activities.

# Using the DVD and Study Guide

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When using this DVD and study guide, you may chose to simply go through the video selections in order, or choose a selection that is most relevant to the needs of your group at the time. The stories, topics, and skills are not sequential so skipping around is perfectly ok!

“In Their Own Words: Stories of Relational Aggression and Bullying” is a powerful DVD that introduces the topic of peer aggression to youth. There are 13 stories, nine told by girls and four by boys. The stories were not scripted. Each participant was asked, “Tell me about a time when you experienced relational aggression or bullying.” What you see on the DVD is the response to this question.

This guide contains thought provoking questions that can serve as a catalyst to identify the impact of peer aggression and develop strategies to begin to address the problem and then application and extension activities to help students further develop an understanding of the topics and apply this knowledge in authentic learning experiences.



## **Suggested group session format**

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### **1. Welcome your group with an ice-breaker of your choice.**

This gets your group comfortable with each other. You are most likely going to be talking about some sensitive or intense issues during your discussions. It is imperative that group members are comfortable and also have established some rapport and trust. Find ice-breaker activities online or come up with your own mixers!

### **2. Introduce key terms and the topics being covered in the video selection.**

It may be helpful to hang note card with key terms printed on them in an area that all members the group can easily see. Define each term for the group, and ask if group members can provide examples of the term. Correctly using the language of peer aggression provides participants with a clear and precise way to describe what they are seeing and build knowledge about the topics covered in the study guide.

### **3. View video selection.**

Show the stories from start to finish, or stop and start them as you see fit to encourage discussion during the stoppages or make predictions about the actions of the students involved in aggression. It may also be helpful to show the video once through and then show it again in the stop and start format to highlight specific elements of the story.

### **4. Use “Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions” to develop understanding and analyze concepts presented in the video.**

We recommend that you begin the discussion with a more neutral, open-ended question such as: “Reactions, comments, impressions?” The responses will tell you a lot about what the participants are thinking and wondering but be prepared because these can take the conversation into a direction not covered by the suggested questions – and that is completely ok too as long as the facilitator is comfortable with what is being discussed!

*Important: You may notice that some questions seem redundant, or hint at the same idea with different wording. This is intentional because sometimes participants will not automatically have that inspirational “ah-ha” moment where things click and make sense. If you feel a question has already been addressed, skip it. If you feel you need to go more in depth with something, ask your own questions. We want these questions to provoke young minds to critically analyze these situations and draw conclusions, but we want the discussion to be authentic and meaningful, not a scripted conversation.*

### **5. Complete one or more Application and Extension activities.**

Each story has at least five suggestions for students to apply what they have learned about the discussion topics within their school or organization or to extend their knowledge to further development or introspection. Choose an activity that best meets the needs and capabilities of your group. Some stories you may want to do several application activities, other stories you may choose not to extend beyond discussion. This is simply an option for you to show your students that what they observe on the DVD and then discuss in their group does apply to their lives in real and meaningful ways.

Additionally, there are more Interdisciplinary Connection ideas that can be used with any of the stories and these activities are included in the appendices.

## **6. Wrap Everything Up**

Provide some closure. Suggestions include:

- Recap important elements of the discussion.
- Ask everyone to action plan\* a way to use a strategy for identifying, preventing, or intervening in the type of aggression that they observed in the video.
- Make informational posters or handouts to share new knowledge or skills with others.
- Challenge youth to use their new knowledge or perspective on aggression in a positive, proactive manner.

\*see the Action Plan Template in the appendices

# Learning Objectives

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As a result of viewing the DVD and participating in discussions and application activities, youth should be able to:

- **Define aggression and specific forms of aggression**
  - Relational aggression
  - Verbal aggression
  - Cyberbullying
  - Exclusion
  - Gossip
  - Alliance building
  - Taunting
  - Cliques
  
- **Identify the roles within peer aggression: aggressor, target, and bystander**
  - List feelings associated with each role
  - Differentiate types of bystanders
  - Learn ways to act in support of the target
  
- **Evaluate the need for making it right after aggression**
  - Define forgiveness
  - List criteria necessary for “making it right”
  - Role play situations in which aggressors make it right
  - Define revenge and reactive aggression
  - Evaluate revenge and reactive aggression as inappropriate responses to aggression
  
- **Develop and enhance pro-social skills**
  - Define empathy and perspective taking
  - Role play positive outcomes to aggressive situations
  - List emotions experienced by youth in all three roles within aggression
  - Write simulated journal entries from the perspectives of others
  
- **Analyze relationships and peer interactions.**
  - Discuss the importance of “fitting in” and acceptance among peers
  - Define healthy vs. unhealthy peer relationships
  - Evaluate the need for friendships
  - Discuss ways a friendship can change or dissolve over time
  
- **Identify personal strengths that can help overcome aggression**
  - Define leadership
  - Distinguish between positive and negative leadership
  - Establish a positive self-concept by identifying positive attributes and qualities
  - Role play positive solutions for standing up for oneself and others
  - Promote self-confidence

## Topic Index

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Listening to these stories can be an intense experience. Many teens will see themselves, their friends or their peers. Each story can generate heartfelt discussion and introspection. Some of the stories are complex and address several peer aggression themes. Others focus on one aspect of peer aggression. All are real, poignant, and powerful in their honesty.

Below is a list of the topics discussed in “In Their Own Words,” as well as a list of the specific stories that address each topic.

- **Relational Aggression**
  - **Exclusion:** Stephanie, Camilla, Jenny, Bethany, Lana, Samantha
  - **Cliques:** Stephanie
  - **Gossip and Rumors:** Camilla, Bianca
  - **Teasing vs. Taunting:** Matt
  - **Building Alliances:** Bethany
  - **Stereotyping:** Ross
  
- **The Roles in Aggression**
  - **The Aggressor:** Justin
  - **The Target:** Anthony, Justin, Lana, Samantha, Ross
  - **The Bystander:** Shana, Camilla, Matt, Jenny
  
- **Making it Right:** Anthony
  
- **Revenge:** Anthony, Bethany
  
- **Personal Strength**
  - **Leadership:** Bianca, Gina
  - **Self-Confidence:** Bianca, Lana, Gina
  
- **Friendship:** Shana, Gina
  
- **Adult Intervention:** Matt
  
- **Cyberbullying:** Bethany

# Stephanie's Story

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## *Today Will They Like Me?*

### **Overview:**

Stephanie, like all girls her age, wants to fit in and belong. She talks about the challenges of making friends when cliques exist and you are "different." In this case, she is in the racial and ethnic minority. Her story illustrates common factors from which peer aggression can begin: diversity, stereotypes, and the need for social acceptance. Stephanie's story will generate discussion about exclusion, cliques, trying to fit in, and stereotypes. It focuses on a need that all teens can identify with: wanting to be accepted as part of the group.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Aggression:** behaviors that are intended to hurt or harm others
- **Clique:** an exclusive peer group
- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Friendship:** a relationship between peers who generally like each other
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Self-Concept:** the general view or opinion a person has regarding himself

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Relational Aggression: Exclusion***

- What are some examples you have seen of exclusion (can be from the story or from personal experience)?
- How does it feel to be excluded?
- Stephanie says that some days the group accepted her and other days they did not. Why do you think this happened? Has this ever happened to you?
- Stephanie said the girls would pick and choose when they would be nice and mean but "not really aggressive mean." What do you think she meant by this statement? Is exclusion aggressive?
- How did Stephanie feel when she was not invited to the sleepover?
- Do you think talking about the sleepover in front of Stephanie when she was not invited is a form of relational aggression?
- Do you think the exclusion the Stephanie experienced was intentional or unintentional? Why?

#### ***Relational Aggression: Cliques***

- What is the difference between a clique and friendship group?
- Is it ok to have a close circle of friends or a BFF that you prefer to hang out with over other peers?
- Stephanie said she had to try to fit in and be cool. Why are people outside of a clique often driven to seek acceptance?

- Stephanie tried to speak, read, or write in Chinese to try to be more accepted. What are some of the compromises we make to fit in?
- Sometimes cliques try to justify their exclusivity because they have a specific attribute or purpose. Is a clique ok if it is formed around a single quality or interest that others outside of the clique do not have? For example, the girls at Stephanie's school were all Asian and Stephanie is not. Should she have to be accepted into this group? What about if everyone in the group liked softball and Stephanie was not athletic?
- Why was Stephanie so hurt when her friend rejected her birthday gift?
- How can you include more peers to create a more fluid friendship group?

### **Application and Extension:**

- Create a comparison chart between cliques and friendship groups. Consider also making pro-con lists for each.
- List ways to avoid exclusion and be more inclusive.
- Role play ways to make it right after exclusion.
  - What could you say or do when you feel excluded?
  - What are some ways to make it right if you have excluded someone?
  - How can bystanders intervene when they witness exclusion?
- Write an alternate ending for Stephanie's story where she gains acceptance with the other girls at her school.
- Write a simulated journal from Stephanie's perspective. What feelings are you experiencing? What goals are you setting for your peer relationships?
- In her story, Stephanie asks, "Today, will I fit in?" Write about a time when you felt this way.
- Design a bulletin board displaying the diversity within your school. Come up with a slogan or catch phrase that embraces the differences of others but still celebrates the unity among students. (Examples: "Many races, one Central High family!" or, "Different histories, united in the present, for a better future!")
- Share a story about a time when you felt like you did not fit in.

# Shana's Story

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## *I'm in the Middle!*

### **Overview:**

Shana becomes a bystander when her two best friends discover that they both like the same boy. Her story illustrates how friendships develop, change, and sometimes end. Her story is hopeful and reflective.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Friendship:** a relationship between peers who generally like each other
- **Bystander:** the person or persons who are not aggressor or targets but are caught somewhere in between; also known as a “kid in the middle”

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Friendship***

- Why do we want friends?
- Do friendships change over time? How or why?
- What does it take to really be best friends forever?
- Is it important that people who are friends with you are also friends with each other? Why or why not?
- Shana said, “Life goes on after boys and stuff.” Have you ever had friends argue over a member of the opposite sex? Does life really go on?
- There are phrases like, “Bros before hoes,” that imply friendship is stronger than a dating, romantic relationships, or hookups. Do you find that these credos are accurate? Is this an acceptable rule to have in a friendship?
- Shana ended up finding a new friend that she became closer with after her two former best friends had their fight. Have you ever had to walk away from a friendship? What did it feel like?
- At the end of her story, Shana says that her friends ended up speaking again and were able to get along, but never were close or chose to hang out with each other again. Are these types of relationships considered friendships? If not, what would you call it?
- Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, “’Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” Does the same hold true for friendships?

#### ***Role in Aggression: The Bystander***

- How did Shana feel when her two best friends were fighting over a boy?
- Think of a time when you were the one in the middle. How did you feel?
- What did Shana try to do to get her friends back together?
- Do bystanders feel hurt when they witness peer aggression? Why or why not?
- What other options could Shana have tried to get her friends to stop fighting?
- Is it ok for a bystander to just walk away and let an aggressor and target work it out themselves? Why or why not?

## **Application and Extension**

- End the discussion by asking teens to brainstorm the characteristics of healthy friendships. Create posters that illustrate one or more of these characteristics.
- Write a job description and application for a friend. What qualities are you looking for? What skills should this person possess?
- Write a letter from Shana to each of her friends about how she feels stuck in the middle while they are fighting.
- Create a bystander board game.
  - What types of situations will the bystander go through as they move through the board?
  - What can they do to get through each situation?
  - Are there bonus points for standing up for a target?
  - What does a bystander need to do to win?
  - Will negative bystander interventions make a person lose a turn or move backwards?



# Camilla's Story

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## *Why Are They Being So Mean?*

### **Overview:**

Related by a middle school student, this story illustrates how relational aggression impacts the intended target, as well as those youth who are caught in the middle as bystanders. Camilla's story addresses several types of relational aggression: being "mean," ignoring someone, spreading rumors, gossip and exclusion. This story can generate discussion about the difference between "rude" behavior and relational aggression – is there a difference at all?

### **Key Terms:**

- **Bystander:** the person or persons who are not aggressor or targets but are caught somewhere in between; also known as a "kid in the middle"
- **Upstander:** a bystander who comes to the aid of a target and stops the aggression
- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Gossip:** an aggressive or untruthful statement shared about another person
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Rumors:** false information about a person spread to a number of other people

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Relational Aggression: Exclusion***

- Camilla talks about other girls being "not my favorite group of people, they're not the nicest people," "rude," and "mean." What does this mean to you?
- When a group of people are rude to others outside the group, is it always relational aggression? Why or why not?
- How does it feel to be ignored?
- Camilla said the girls just decided to be mean for "some weird reason" that "didn't even make sense." How do you think this made Vanessa feel?
- Camilla calls Sarah the "queen bee." What does this mean? What kind of power does a queen bee have?

#### ***Relational Aggression: Gossip and Rumors***

- Why are rumors and gossip so damaging?
- If someone you knew was spreading rumors, how would you react?
- When people walk by you and whisper things to each other while looking at you, how do you feel? What do you think they are saying?
- When is it ok to share information about another person? When is it not ok?
- What can you do if you hear gossip or rumors about another person?

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Bystander***

- When Camilla sat next to Vanessa at the lunch table, how did this make each of them feel?
- What would you have done in this situation?
- Why are kids in the middle often nervous when someone is excluded?
- Camilla becomes an upstander when she befriends Vanessa. How can you be an upstander for someone else who is being excluded?
- Camilla said she felt bad for Vanessa so she went and sat with her in the cafeteria. Does taking the perspective of a target help a bystander become an upstander?

### **Application and Extension:**

- Play the game “Telephone” (where people sit in a line and whisper a phrase to the person behind them in line to see how a message changes from one person to the next) as a way to demonstrate how gossip and rumors can spread through a group or school.
- Create a chart demonstrating the difference between “Sharing Information” and “Gossiping.”
- Camilla says Elaine is not that bad but Sarah is the queen bee of the group. Write a reflection from Elaine’s perspective about how the group has been treating Vanessa. Do you think Elaine views herself as a bystander or an aggressor?
- The social dynamic of middle schools and high schools can best be seen in the cafeteria. Draw a map of your school’s cafeteria and (carefully) label the tables in the lunch room. Challenge your students to “shake things up” and sit somewhere else for a day and try to meet some people outside of their social circle. (Facilitator’s note: Do not allow students to use derogatory labels! All labels should focus on positive attributes of the groups. This activity should be carefully planned and structured to avoid it turning into an opportunity for aggression or hurt feelings.)
- Role play things Camilla would have said to help Vanessa feel better and become her friend.
- Squeeze the toothpaste out of a tube into a student’s hand. Then ask the student to return the toothpaste to the tube. Like the toothpaste, gossip cannot be contained once it is let out. Even after apologies are made, things can never go back to the way they were. Another way to illustrate this is to burn a grilled cheese sandwich. Like friendship after gossip and rumors, the sandwich is ruined and unappealing. However, with a butter knife it is possible to scrape off the burnt part of sandwich and reveal the delicious sandwich underneath. Still however, there is always a slight taste of the burnt bread that cannot be scraped away.

# Bianca's Story

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## *What It Means to Be a Leader*

### **Overview:**

With middle school class elections as the backdrop, Bianca demonstrates what it really means to be a leader in the face of both subtle and overt peer aggression. Her story illustrates inner strength and determination as she struggles to be true to herself and her goals.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Friendship:** a relationship between peers who generally like each other
- **Gossip:** an aggressive or untruthful statement shared about another person
- **Leadership:** the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Rumors:** false information about a person spread to a number of other people
- **Self-Confidence:** a positive awareness and belief in one's abilities to complete a task

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Self-Confidence***

- Why was Bianca willing to stand up for herself and campaign for the position she wanted? How did her peers react?
- What are the risks you face if you choose to stand up for yourself?
- What are the risks you face if you go along with what everyone else thinks you should do?
- If you were in Bianca's position, would you have run for treasurer like Theresa wanted her to? Why or why not?

#### ***Relational Aggression: Gossip and Rumors***

- Bianca responded to the rumors about Jeremiah by telling him she was not saying bad things about him. How did this affect their friendship?
- Bianca says the other girls just "talked about people" all the time. Have you known someone like that? How did you feel about that person?
- There is an Irish saying, "Who gossips with you will gossip of you." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- Political races often contain a fair amount of "mudslinging" where one candidate says something damaging about the other candidate. Is mudslinging the same as gossiping or spreading rumors? Why or why not? Do you feel this behavior is aggressive or it is expected and therefore permissible?

#### ***Leadership***

- Bianca says Theresa and the other girls treated her like "a follower." How do you think this made her feel?

- What do you think are the characteristics of a good leader?
- What are the characteristics of a poor leader?
- Theresa was aggressive in trying to get people to vote for her so she could become a leader. Is it ok for leaders to assume their position through aggression or manipulation?
- Who would you have voted for – Bianca, Theresa, or Jeremiah? Why?
- If other people ended up running against Bianca do you think she still would have won? Why?

### **Application and Extension:**

- Can you think of a time you stood up for yourself when others tried to tell you what to do? Write a story about this time. How did you feel? Or make up a story about how you might act in the future. Let your imagination tell the story!
- Follow a political campaign. Notice how candidates use gossip and rumors to influence voters. What other aggressive tactics are used in politics? Is relational aggression used as a key tool for politicians to gain an edge over their opponent?
- Research a famous historical leader. List the qualities of this leader that allowed him/her to inspire influence and be effective.
- Write down your personal strengths. Choose one strength and create a motivational poster that will inspire self-confidence.
- Create a certificate for yourself to remind you of your greatest accomplishment to date. Now create another certificate for yourself for an accomplishment that you wish to make. Remain confident that you can achieve this goal and create a plan that will culminate in you awarding yourself the second certificate!
- Develop a “Campaign Code of Conduct” for your school’s student government. Compare this to campaign laws in government. Why are these rules necessary?

# Anthony's Story

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## *Breaking the Cycle of Revenge*

### **Overview:**

Anthony's story speaks to inner strength and the power of reflection. As a physically short seventh-grader, he was continuously tormented by a taller classmate and his buddies. When nature plays a trick on the aggressor the following year, Anthony resists the urge to retaliate. Anthony's story illustrates the potential cycle of revenge. It provides opportunities to look at the face of peer aggression and how helpless the targets feel. Finally, Anthony raises the issue of making it right.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Aggressor:** the person who chooses to hurt or damage a relationship
- **Empathy:** the awareness of another person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions
- **Forgiveness:** the process of concluding resentment, indignation, or anger as a result of perceived offense, difference, or mistake, and/or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution
- **Making it Right:** An apology or any restorative action to repair a relationship and reestablish civility between the aggressor and the target  
Consists of three components:
  1. Apologize with sincere words or through a restorative action
  2. Serve any necessary disciplinary consequences
  3. Assure the target and bystanders that you will make an effort to not be aggressive again
- **Perspective Taking:** the ability to view a situation from the mindset of another person
- **Revenge:** a response to an aggressive act in which a target assumes the role of aggressor and make a former aggressor a target; role reversal in an aggressive act
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying
- **Taunting:** a hurtful, aggressive statement often implying the taunter has power over the taunted
- **Teasing:** a playful way of joking between peers
- **Verbal Aggression:** a communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Target***

- At first Anthony shrugs off the taunting and says, "No big deal." It does not seem to bother him. Is it always easy for a target to walk away from aggression?
- Anthony said, "The more guys there were making fun of me and calling me short, the worse I felt." How can multiple aggressors affect the impact of aggression on a target? Why do you think Anthony felt this way?
- Anthony was taunted for an entire school year and says "I felt powerless. What could I do?" Why does Anthony feel so powerless?

- Anthony was taunted for being short – something that he had no control of. What are some of the issues that are off limits for playful teasing and automatically fall under hurtful taunting?

### ***Revenge***

- Anthony did not taunt the boy who had teased him about being short. Why not?
- What do you think might have happened if Anthony had teased him?
- Anthony said, “I have every right to call him short.” What do you think he means? Is revenge justifiable? Why or why not?
- When Anthony decides not to taunt his former bully because he remembers how it felt he is exhibiting empathy, the ability to see a situation from someone else’s perspective. How can empathy help break the cycle of revenge and aggression?

### ***Making it Right***

- Is Anthony still waiting for an apology?
- Do you think his former tormentor will ever apologize? Why or why not?
- Can you think of a situation where you could apologize to someone you have hurt in the past?
- Neither Anthony nor his former tormentor acknowledges the bullying that took place in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. If no one ever mentions it again and both parties move on with their lives, does the former aggressor still have to make it right?

### **Application and Extension**

- Write an apology to someone you have hurt in the past and ask them if you can make it right.
- Split the class into debate teams. One team will support the statement, “Revenge is never justifiable because it replaces aggression with more aggression.” The other team will support the statement, “Revenge can be a powerful tool to teach people the harm of aggression. It is also ok to hit back if someone has hit you first to even up the score.”
- Role play a situation in which Anthony stands up for himself and tells his aggressors to stop calling him short.
- Role play a situation where Anthony’s aggressors apologize.
- Write a simulated journal from the perspective of Anthony’s aggressor after he sees that Anthony has now grown to be taller than him. What are you thinking or feeling? Are you fearful that Anthony will seek revenge?

# Matt's Story

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## *Standing Up and Making a Difference*

### **Overview:**

When Matt sees his brother being taunted on the playground, he stands up for him by confronting not only the aggressor, but also by talking with the child's mother. He demonstrates how one person - the bystander - can truly make a difference when peer aggression occurs. Matt's story can also lead to a discussion about the role of adults when peer aggression occurs.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Aggressor:** the person who chooses to hurt or damage a relationship
- **Assertive:** a calm and firm position regarding a belief
- **Bystander:** the person or persons who are not aggressor or targets but are caught somewhere in between; also known as a "kid in the middle"
- **Upstander:** a bystander who comes to the aid of a target and stops the aggression
- **Passive Onlooker:** a bystander who just watches an aggressive incident but takes no action whatsoever
- **Taunting:** a hurtful, aggressive statement often implying the taunter has power over the taunted
- **Teasing:** a playful way of joking between peers
- **Verbal Aggression:** a communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Bystander***

- At first, Matt doesn't realize that the boy being teased is his brother and he doesn't intervene. Have you ever been a passive onlooker – a witness to peer aggression who does nothing?
- Matt says he wanted to "be a defender" for his brother. Think about a time when you wanted to stick up for someone. Was it hard? Why or why not?
- Bystanders have many choices with how to behave. View the "Types of Bystanders" graphic at the end of this study guide. Why do different types of bystanders exist? What motivates bystanders to choose if/how to intervene?
- Matt addresses the boy Jason who was at the forefront of the group who was picking on his brother, Zachary. Do you think it is harder to be an upstander if there are multiple aggressors?
- Matt was older than the boys who were picking on his brother. Do you think this made it easier for him to stand up for Zachary? Does the age or status of the aggressor affect bystander intervention? Why or why not?
- Matt is assertive when talking to Jason and his mother. He calmly states what he sees going on and lets them know it is unacceptable. How does being assertive (and not being aggressive) help an upstander be effective at standing up for someone?

### ***Verbal Aggression: Teasing vs. Taunting***

- The boys teased Matt's brother by calling him "fat." How do you think this made Matt's brother feel?
- There is a phrase, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Do you believe this? Can words hurt? Why?
- Sometimes teasing is a playful and fun way to interact with friends. Can you innocently poke fun at someone's appearance or weight without being hurtful? Why or why not? When does this cross the line and become aggressive taunting?

### ***Adult Intervention:***

- The aggressor's mother tells Matt that "...they're just kids – they're playing." How did you think Matt convinced her that her son's behavior was not okay?
- Do adults always see peer aggression? Why not?
- Why do you feel teenagers do not always seek adult help with peer aggression?
- Do adults always make a situation better or do they sometimes make it worse? How? Why?

### **Application and Extension**

- Identify the statements Matt uses to stand up for his brother.
- Matt ends his story by saying that he felt "...good standing up, making a difference." What injustices make you want to make a difference? Research a cause that advocates for targets of aggressor or perhaps another social injustice and plan a way for your class or a group of friends can help.
- Create a continuum showing statements that are fun teasing and then "cross the line" into hurtful taunting. When does a statement go from fun and playful to hurtful and mean?
- Create a list of "go to" adults who you can talk to about peer aggression. Why do you feel these people can help you?
- Write a list of phrases you can use as an upstander standing up to peer aggression.
- Write about a time when you saw aggression and did not do anything. How can you act differently next time? Write an alternate ending to your story.



# Justin's Story

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## *Reflections of a Middle School Bully*

### **Overview:**

It takes courage to admit that you were a bully and Justin's story shines light on the value of reflection and accountability. This story illustrates the value of naming peer aggression and recognizing that it is hurtful and damaging to everyone involved - the target, the kids in the middle *and* the aggressor. Justin's story will spark conversation about times when participants were the aggressors. Are they willing to admit their actions and be accountable?

### **Key Terms:**

- **Accountability:** an understanding and acceptance of ownership for a behavior
- **Aggressor:** the person who chooses to hurt or damage a relationship
- **Making it Right:** An apology or any restorative action to repair a relationship and reestablish civility between the aggressor and the target  
Consists of three components:
  1. Apologize with sincere words or through a restorative action
  2. Serve any necessary disciplinary consequences
  3. Assure the target and bystanders that you will make an effort to not be aggressive again
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Aggressor***

- Why do you feel Justin and his friends made fun of Zach? Do you think Zach did anything in particular to be bullied by the other boys?
- Do you think Justin is really sorry for the way he treated Zach?
- Is there a way that Justin could make things right with Zach, even though several years have passed since the lunch incident?
- Justin mentions that kids who were once bullies get bullied now and "it all comes back to you in the end. It's called karma." Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?
- Defining the term accountability. What does it mean to take responsibility for how you treat others? Was Justin held accountable for what he did to Zach?

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Target***

- Zach got "bent out of shape about it" when the other boys tormented him. What other feelings do you think Zach experienced as a target?
- Are there certain people in your school who get bullied because other students have labeled them like Zach was labeled "the class nerd?" Why do you feel students do this?
- Zach did not stand up for himself at all. Why do you think he did not try to stop the bullying? Do you think he could have stood up for himself?
- What other options did Zach have if he could not stand up for himself?

## **Application and Extension**

- Create posters in your school to help rid the use of labels such as “class nerd” or “geek.” Encourage students to come up ways to help students realize they are all important, valued, and respected.
- Saying sorry can be a tough thing. Role play ways for Justin to apologize to Zach.
- Role play ways for Zach to either stand up for himself or seek help from an adult.
- List reasons why aggressors choose to hurt others (to look cool, to gain popularity or status, because it’s fun, because the other person “had it coming,” to get back at someone) and then write a more positive way to handle the situation and avoid being aggressive.
- Have a school-wide contest to come up with the most creative (but genuine) way to “Make it right” after being aggressive.

# Jenny's Story

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## *If I Knew Then What I Know Now...*

### **Overview**

As a high school mentor in The Ophelia Project's CASS: Creating a Safe School™ program, Jenny learned about the impact of relational aggression, especially on kids in the middle. As she talks about what she has learned in the mentoring program, she illustrates the pain of relational aggression and its effect on the lives of teenage girls. Jenny's story is a classic example of how the bystander reacts when a friend is the target of relational aggression. Jenny's reaction to her friend's exclusion and her inability to defend her will lead to discussion about the different types of bystanders.

### **Key Terms**

- **Bystander:** the person or persons who are not aggressor or targets but are caught somewhere in between; also known as a "kid in the middle"
- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Passive Onlooker:** a bystander who just watches an aggressive incident but takes no action whatsoever
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions**

#### ***Relational Aggression: Exclusion***

- Why do you think the girls vote Sarah out of the lunch table?
- Why is exclusion so painful for the target?
- Do you think Sarah knew why the girls excluded her?
- How do you think Sarah felt when she turned to Jenny and said, "Jenny, are you coming?"
- Jenny mentions there were two leaders of the lunch table. Do you find that in exclusion there are people who convince others to exclude someone? Why do you feel this happens?
- Jenny says it was not worth it to let Sarah walk out of her life. She says she regrets that she still has not made it right with Sarah. Do you think after filming this video she talked to Sarah and apologized? Why or why not?

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Bystander***

- Why doesn't Jenny stand up for Sarah when she is excluded from the lunch table?
- What would have happened if Jenny had left the table too, and sat with Sarah?
- When Sarah was "voted out," Jenny says "we were stunned." Why do you think she did not do anything?

- What do you think would have happened if Jenny or any one of the other students had stood up for Sarah?
- Jenny mentions that the whole lunchroom knew what was happening to Sarah, and that there was even a table near the front of the cafeteria for students who had been kicked out of other tables. Why do you think all of these students were passive onlookers and did nothing to intervene? Does this happen often in your school where many people watch aggression and no one does anything?

### **Application and Extension**

- Role play different ways Jenny or Slodjana could have stood up for Sarah.
- List ways that students can avoid exclusion and make everyone feel like they belong.
- Write or perform a public service announcement to be read on the school announcements or television station.
- Create an “Upstander’s Contract” that asks students to pledge to stand up for targets when they see aggression occur.
- Develop a recognition system for rewarding students who stand up for targets such as the “Upstanders Wall of Fame” or other incentive.

# Bethany's Story

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## *I Still Do not Understand How This Happened...*

### **Overview:**

Bethany, who was once popular, became the target of relational aggression. Her story illustrates relational aggression changes the way a target views oneself. She also talks about her attempt to exact revenge on her former friends and why it did not work. Bethany's story illustrates a form of relational aggression, building alliances. When her three good friends turn on her, she says, "I didn't understand why and I still do not." Her reflection will stimulate discussion on how random relational aggression can feel to the target and the role of revenge in trying to defend oneself.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Alliance:** a relationship between two or more people with an intention to exclude or act aggressively towards another person
- **Cyberbullying:** willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices
- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Revenge:** a response to an aggressive act in which a target assumes the role of aggressor and make a former aggressor a target; role reversal in an aggressive act

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Relational Aggression: Building Alliances and Exclusion***

- Why do you think Bethany's friends didn't invite her to the party?
- At first, Bethany thinks she is the one who did something wrong. Is self-doubt often a result of being the target of relational aggression? Why or why not?
- When a group of people build an alliance against someone, that individual is excluded. What other examples of exclusion does Bethany talk about? (no one to talk with during class, no one to eat with during lunch in the cafeteria)
- Bethany said, "Everyone was in on this secret about me and I didn't even know what that secret was." Do you think even if Stephanie knew Kelly's reason for building an alliance against her she would have been ok with the exclusion?

#### ***Revenge***

- What does Bethany do to try to get back at her friends?
- Does it work?
- Does revenge ever work?
- What do we mean by the "cycle of revenge"?
- I thought that revenge would make everything better but it didn't.

### ***Cyberbullying***

- Bethany says that one of the things her friends did was to “curse her on the Internet.” How is cyberbullying different from face-to face bullying?
- How do teens use email, text messaging or social networking sites to embarrass or humiliate someone?
- Who are the bystanders online?
- How can a bystander be “silently supporting” the aggressor online?
- Is it possible for a bystander to support the target online? How?
- If you knew someone was being cyberbullied and knew that the target was unaware of the cyberbullying, what could you do? Is it still cyberbullying if the target doesn’t know it is happening?

### **Application and Extension:**

- An example of alliance building can be found in sports rivalries. How does a person from a visiting sports team feel when they come to your school? Is forming an alliance in this manner acceptable? Develop a plan for your school to prevent this type of alliance building that can lead to exclusion or have visitors to your school feel like targets of relational aggression.
- Create a plan for reporting cyberbullying to a website administrator, a parent, a teacher, or local law enforcement.
- Role play a situation in which Bethany non-aggressively confronts Kelly about the exclusion.
- Bethany says she does not understand why the other girls built an alliance against her, and maybe the other girls did not understand this themselves. Write a letter from Kelly’s perspective in which Kelly makes it right and explains why she did asked the other girls to stop being friends with Kelly.
- Bethany talks about how she told herself that Kelly’s parents would let her invite too many people and that is why she was excluded. Sometimes, this really is that case and a person is excluded not to be mean or hurtful, but simply because there can only be so many people involved. (Perhaps there are only three seats in the car, so only three friends can go somewhere together, or a friend’s parents will only allow two people to stay overnight at their house.) Come up with ways to politely explain and reassure someone that they are not being excluded as way to hurt them, but for one reason or another they cannot join the group. How can you reassure this person that you still value their friendship?

# Lana's Story

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## *Fitting in at All Costs*

### **Overview:**

Like Stephanie, Lana desperately wants to fit in and be like everyone else. In her story, it is her religion that puts her in the minority and makes acceptance a challenge. Her statement, "...I took anger out on myself", illustrates a serious effect of peer aggression, the internalization of pain and negative emotions. Lana's story can generate discussion about how we celebrate or disregard diversity and the impact that has on our friends and classmates.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Minority:** a group of people who share a characteristic that is not representative of the larger population
- **Self-Confidence:** a positive awareness and belief in one's abilities to complete a task
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Target***

- Why did Lana lie to her friends about her religion? Do you think it is common to try to hide or deny something to avoid becoming a target?
- What other kinds of "un-cool" things have you or other people know tried to hide to avoid aggression? (religion, sexual orientation, interests, family situation)
- What do you think Lana meant when she says she felt "...alone and sad... and I took anger out on myself?"
- What other emotions did Lana experience as a target?
- Do you think anyone supported Lana and tried to help her?

#### ***Relational Aggression: Exclusion***

- When you are part of a group, how does that make you feel?
- Have you ever been in the minority? How does that feel?
- Do you sometimes feel pressure to exclude others because they are members of a minority group whether it is ethnic, racial, religious, or gender based?
- Lana started making fun of the Jewish faith just to try to fit in and take the focus off herself. Have you ever felt pressured to insult or exclude others to be part of a group?

#### ***Self-Confidence***

- Lana said she now admits to being Jewish saying, "I don't care because it's a part of my family and it's a part of my life." How does hearing this statement make you feel?
- To what does Lana attribute her confidence in embracing her religion?

- Lana concludes by saying she wants to be a good role model and accept herself and who she is. Is this an easy statement to make? Why or why not?

### **Application and Extension:**

- Lana was part of a high school program where students were mentors to middle school students. When teens have an opportunity to talk with younger students about peer aggression, they begin to understand their own experiences and reactions. Encourage students to create or join a mentoring or volunteer program – or simply reflect upon the questions below.
  - If you were a mentor to a younger student, what would you want him or her to learn about how to treat others?
  - What story would you want to share with them about peer aggression?
- Host a diversity fair. Have students research different ethnic groups, races, or religions and create displays showing positive aspects of the group. Encourage students in the entire school to visit the displays and then reflect upon what they have learned.
- List attributes that make you unique and valuable as a person. Find a way to celebrate at least one attribute on the list.
- Hold a “creative comeback contest.” Encourage students to come up with an assertive (non-aggressive or retaliatory) statement to say to an aggressor that helps the target feel empowered and able to walk away from aggression.
- Role play a situation in which Lana not only stands up for herself, but also her faith.
- Research organization in your area where your group can volunteer. Assign each person an organization to research and present. What is the organization’s mission? What do they do? What ways can youth your age volunteer? If possible, have representatives from all of the organizations come in for a volunteer fair.



# Gina's Story

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## *Friendships Change...and Sometimes It Hurts*

### **Overview:**

Gina recalls her transition from middle to high school by talking about her experience with sports teams and competitive environments. As a mentor for The Ophelia Project's CASS: Creating a Safe School program, she talks about what it means to be a role model for younger girls and to help create safe social climate for everyone. It is easy for teens to relate to Gina's reflections on the transition from middle school to high school. Her story can spark discussion about the way friendships change, often for the best, as teens branch out in high school and discover who they can become.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Empathy:** the awareness of another person's thoughts, feelings, and intentions
- **Friendship:** a relationship between peers who generally like each other
- **Leadership:** the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions**

#### ***Friendship***

- Why do Gina and her middle school friends vow that "we're never going to change" when they enter high school? Have you ever made a pact like this with friends?
- Why is the transition from middle school to high school (or switching schools) hard on friendships?
- Gina says when upper classman would say "frosh" it did not really bother her, but when other freshman, especially her friends, started to say it then it was different. Does aggression have a deeper impact when it comes from a friend or a stranger? Why?
- Gina talks about "branching out" to make new friends. Do a lot of teenagers do this? Why or why not?
- Is it hard to end a friendship, even when you realize as Gina did that your friends may not be "the best sort of friends to have?" Why?

#### ***Leadership***

- Like Lana, Gina was a mentor to younger students and said it had a big impact on her. How does being a role-model or mentor for someone else shape our own beliefs and actions?
- Gina talks about wanting to make a difference for kids so that they do not have to go through what she went through. Does empathy help make someone a more capable leader? Why or why not?
- How can peer leadership help reduce aggression?
- Gina mentions that the students she mentors have had an impact on her. Is effective leadership a reciprocal relationship where leaders and followers learn and are shaped from each other? Why or why not?

## **Application and Extension**

- Role play a situation where Gina confronts her friends about the way she feels when they call her “frosh.”
- Reflect on a time where you had a friendship going through a transition or friendship that ended. Write a letter to yourself in the past that shows support, empathy, and encouragement.
- Write about or discuss a friend, a leader, or an adult with whom you have had a reciprocal relationship where you both learned something from each other. What made this relationship so special? List the benefits of a reciprocal relationship.
- Branch out like Gina did. Join a new club, try a new sport, or find a way to make new friends or do something you previously never would have thought of doing before. Keep a journal through this process and record the feelings (good and bad) that come along with trying new things.
- Create a comic strip where two friends try to overcome a hurdle in their friendship and remain friends.

# Samantha's Story

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## *The Girl Who Was not There*

### **Overview:**

Samantha poignantly relates how it felt to be the new kid in sixth grade. Her story also speaks to the need everyone has to be part of a group and to be valued as a person. During Samantha's first week as the new kid in school, no one spoke to her or tried to make her feel welcome. Students who feel connected to their peers and school are more "protected" from peer aggression and are better able to handle it when it does occur. Samantha's story can help make the connection between how we treat newcomers and how peer aggression develops.

When one girl reaches out to her and invites her to lunch, Samantha experiences relational aggression in the form of exclusion.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Target***

- When no one reaches out to her during her first week in a new school, is this peer aggression or something else? Why do you feel this way?
- Look at Samantha's body language as she tells her story so many years later. What do you see as she talks about her experiences as a new student?
- Watch Samantha's video clip again and list all of the words she uses to describe her emotions. Did she feel all the negative emotions that targets of relational aggression experience?
- Was Samantha a target of relational aggression? Why or why not?
- Do some people feel targeted even though the "aggressors" are unaware that their actions are hurtful? Does unintentional neglect count as aggression?

#### ***Exclusion***

- Samantha finally she feels like she is making a friend but then is ignored by the girls at the table. How did this make her feel?
- What do you think her new friend was thinking? Why do you think she did not say anything to bring Samantha into the group?
- Have you ever thought you were including someone but they still felt excluded?
- What would you do in this situation if you were Samantha? The friend?
- Why do you think new students in a school may feel excluded by everyone?

## **Application and Extension**

- What recommendations could you make to your school administration about how to welcome freshmen or new students? Working in small groups, design an outline for an orientation session that students would deliver.
- Think of someone who is new to your school. What could you do to welcome him or her? What help do you need from others (friends and adults) to do this?
- Try to identify someone in your school who you do not know. Reach out to this person and try to include them in your social circle or at least try to see if you have anything in common that you could use to build a friendship.
- Role play the lunch table situation with Gina and the new friend. What could Gina have said or done to be noticed? What could the friend have done to better include Gina? What could some of the bystanders have done?
- Figure out criteria for determining if someone's actions are intentionally or unintentionally aggressive. List ways to make it right even if the aggression was unintentional.

# Ross's Story

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## *Do You See Me??*

### **Overview:**

When Ross first appears in the video, he reflects the stereotype of a social outcast. He talks about how he turned his depression and anger on himself and became more and more withdrawn in middle school. By the end of his story, as he relates his experience as a mentor in an Ophelia Project CASS: Creating a Safe School™ program, viewers are surprised to discover his true self.

### **Key Terms:**

- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Stereotype:** an exaggerated approximation of the average behaviors or beliefs of a group of people who share a similar trait; can be based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other traits
- **Target:** the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying

### **Discussion Topics and Guiding Questions:**

#### ***Roles in Aggression: The Target***

- Have you ever known someone like Ross?
- Are people always who they appear to be on the outside?
- If one of Ross' classmates had reached out to him, how might things have been different?
- When someone reaches out to become your friend, how does that make you feel?
- Ross said, "People won't go after you when you're not a small target." What are some ways people try to make themselves look big or tough to avoid being a target?
- Ross said he was aggressive towards himself. He would get angry, depressed, and all of his frustrations about being a social outcast became aggression he aimed at himself. Have you ever experienced this? Why do you feel many targets withdraw from interacting with other peers?

#### ***Stereotyping***

- Do you think Ross's parents or teachers knew he was the target of peer aggression or felt isolated? What could they have done to help?
- Do you think people stereotype some teenagers as "loners," "emo," or "goth" and ignore issues they may be having with peer aggression? What can you do to help break this stereotype?
- Does someone's appearance or mannerisms have an impact on how they are treated by peers? Why or why not?

## **Application**

- We can assume that many people - students and adults - saw that Ross was lonely, rejected and depressed. What could they have said or done to make a difference? Role play a way that you could talk to Ross and make him feel respected, included, or valued.
- Ask the group to write one idea for a way in which they could reach out to someone they know who may be lonely or feel rejected.
- At the end of Ross's story, he sheds his hard-rocker, loner appearance and embraces himself as a mentor in the CASS: Creating a Safe School program who now has peer connections and a sense of self-worth. Think of a false-front you have donned or a wall you have put up to hide your inner self. Draw a picture representing how you think the world sees you and then another picture of how you see yourself. Are there a lot of differences?
- Have a debate over the phrase, "Stereotypes exist for a reason." Do stereotypes exist because people with a certain look or heritage have certain qualities, or do we seek out ways to classify or exclude people by creating stereotypes?
- Locate the information for local help lines or agencies that can help students who are feeling alone or depressed. Create a brochure with this information for students in your school.

# Appendices

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- Glossary
- Interdisciplinary Connections
- Curriculum Standards Alignment
- Tips for Role Playing
- Action Plan Template
- References

## Glossary

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- **Accountability:** an understanding and acceptance of ownership for a behavior
- **Alliance:** a relationship between two or more people with an intention to exclude or act aggressively towards another person
- **Aggression:** behaviors that are intended to hurt or harm others
- **Aggressor:** the person who chooses to hurt or damage a relationship
- **Assertive:** a calm and firm position regarding a belief
- **Bystander:** the person or persons who are not aggressor or targets but are caught somewhere in between; also known as a “kid in the middle”
- **Clique:** an exclusive peer group
- **Upstander:** a bystander who comes to the aid of a target and stops the aggression
- **Cyberbullying:** willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices
- **Empathy:** the awareness of another person’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions
- **Exclusion:** a form of relational aggression where a person or group of people do not permit someone to be a part of a peer group; can be intentional or unintentional
- **Forgiveness:** the process of concluding resentment, indignation, or anger as a result of perceived offense, difference, or mistake, and/or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution
- **Friendship:** a relationship between peers who generally like each other
- **Gossip:** an aggressive or untruthful statement shared about another person
- **Leadership:** the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task
- **Making it Right:** An apology or any restorative action to repair a relationship and reestablish civility between the aggressor and the target  
Consists of three components:
  1. Apologize with sincere words or through a restorative action
  2. Serve any necessary disciplinary consequences
  3. Assure the target and bystanders that you will make an effort to not be aggressive again
- **Minority:** a group of people who share a characteristic that is not representative of the larger population
- **Passive Onlooker:** a bystander who just watches an aggressive incident but takes no action whatsoever
- **Perspective Taking:** the ability to view a situation from the mindset of another person
- **Relational Aggression:** harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships
- **Revenge:** a response to an aggressive act in which a target assumes the role of aggressor and make a former aggressor a target; role reversal in an aggressive act
- **Rumors:** false information about a person spread to a number of other people
- **Self-Concept:** the general view or opinion a person has regarding himself
- **Self-Confidence:** a positive awareness and belief in one’s abilities to complete a task



- ***Stereotype***: an exaggerated approximation of the average behaviors or beliefs of a group of people who share a similar trait; can be based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other traits
- ***Target***: the person who is aggressed upon or bullied; the object of bullying
- ***Taunting***: a hurtful, aggressive statement often implying the taunter has power over the taunted
- ***Teasing***: a playful way of joking between peers
- ***Verbal Aggression***: a communication intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or a communication perceived as having that intent

## Interdisciplinary Connections

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Perhaps the application ideas for each individual activity did not appeal to you or your group, or, more positively, perhaps you completed them all and are yearning for more! Either way, here are some additional ways to encourage tweens and teens to think critically about peer aggression and apply their knowledge in creative ways while also aligning with specific content areas in a curriculum.

### *Writing*

Respond in writing to any of the following prompts:

- Describe someone who knows you well and sees the “you” inside.
- Describe someone who only knows the “external” you. What would you like to tell him or her about yourself?
- Think of someone you hurt in the past and write an apology to that person.
- List feelings associated with being a target, aggressor, or bystander.
- Reflect upon a situation in which you failed to stand up for yourself or someone else. What could you have done differently?
- Do you feel bystanders should act as upstanders? Why or why not?
- Reflect upon a time when you were an aggressor. What motivated your aggression? Would you do it again? Did you make it right?
- When, if ever, is revenge ever justified?
- Is making it right always necessary?

### *Literature*

- Find examples within literature of healthy relationships, support for a target, descriptions of an aggressor, etc.
- Identify the roles in aggression within a literary work.
- Identify examples of aggression in a literary work.
- Use empathy and perspective taking to identify with characters, determine their motivations, or make predictions as to what will happen next in a literary work.
- Create a timeline showing the development or collapse of a relationship or friendship. Note important events that build friendship or serve as a catalyst for ending a relationship.
- List qualities of characters that contribute to self-confidence and self-concept.

### *History*

- Describe a time in history when bystanders played an important role.
- Relate a time in history when lack of accountability allowed bad things to happen.
- Choose a conflict, war, or aggressive event in history. Identify each of the roles in aggression.
- Compare the conclusion of a conflict, war, or aggressive event to the criteria for making it right. Do governments or historical leaders ensure that a situation is made right?
- Identify the roles of minorities, stereotypes, and exclusion in history. (Holocaust, civil rights movements, Spanish Inquisition, Crusades, etc...)

### ***Foreign Language / Cultures***

- Identify the terms used in other languages used to describe aggression. Are there direct translations or are the terms described somewhat differently. Discuss why differences would occur.
- Learn the appropriate ways to forgive and make it right in another language.
- Identify the cultural differences between behaviors that are considered aggressive in one culture but not in another.

### ***Fine Arts***

- Create a mask from heavy paper. Have teens design a collage on the front of the mask using words, pictures and drawings that represent the “face” they show to the world. On the back, assemble pictures, words and drawings of the “self” that the mask is hiding. Share and discuss.
- Illustrate a comic book with the roles of the aggressor, target and bystander.
- Design posters to illustrate the impact of peer aggression and how teens can learn to support the target.
- Create bulletin boards to educate others on the topics addressed in the DVD.
- Write a song about peer aggression, self-confidence, or the importance of making it right.
- Perform a play with aggression as a theme. Provide a study-guide or discussion questions for the audience.
- Choose songs that align with the mood of people within an aggressive act. Discuss why these songs fit so well with the emotions

# Curriculum Standards Alignment

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## Common Core State Standards

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### *English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards*

- Reading
  7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well in words.
- Writing
  1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
    - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
    - Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- Speaking and Listening
  1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
  3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Language
  6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension and expression.

## American Diploma Project Benchmarks

### *English: Language*

**A6.** Recognize nuances in the meanings of words; choose words precisely to enhance communication.

### *English: Communication*

**B2.** Summarize information presented orally by others.

**B3.** Paraphrase information presented orally by others.

**B7.** Participate productively in self-directed work teams for a particular purpose

### *English: Media*

**G1.** Evaluate the aural, visual and written images and other special effects used in television, radio, film and the Internet for their ability to inform, persuade and entertain (for example, anecdote, expert witness, vivid detail, tearful testimony and humor).

- G2.** Examine the intersections and conflicts between the visual (such as media images, painting, film and graphic arts) and the verbal.

### **National School Climate Standards**

\*Note: These standards are achieved through executing many of the application and extension activities which encourage students to promote positive normative beliefs and strategies for a safe school climate. Simply watching the video and discussing the topics will not meet these standards.

1. The school community has a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing and sustaining a positive school climate.
2. The school community sets policies specifically promoting (a) the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic and intellectual skills, knowledge, dispositions and engagement, and (b) a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage students who have become disengaged.
3. The school community's practices are identified, prioritized and supported to (a) promote the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students, (b) enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities; (c) address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage those who have become disengaged; and (d) develop and sustain an appropriate operational infrastructure and capacity building mechanisms for meeting this standard.
4. The school community creates an environment where all members are welcomed, supported, and feel safe in school: socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.
5. The school community develops meaningful and engaging practices, activities and norms that promote social and civic responsibilities and a commitment to social justice.

### **Centers for Disease Control National Health Education Standards**

“Health is affected by a variety of positive and negative influences within society... [Health includes] identifying and understanding the diverse internal and external factors that influence health practices and behaviors among youth, including personal values, beliefs, and perceived norms.” (CDC, 2008, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sher/standards/2.htm>)

2. Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
4. Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
5. Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
6. Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.
8. Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

## Tips for Role Playing

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*“Research suggests that some children who bully at school lack empathy and are violent because this is how they are treated at home. They do not empathize because they have not learned to do so. If such children are placed in the victim role, they can learn to empathize with victims of bullying. Role play is an excellent way of making the experience of others real; if awareness about bullying is raised, a no-bullying culture is encouraged.”*

*Keith Sullivan, The Anti-Bullying Handbook*

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Role playing is a challenging and powerful way to make the experiences of others real. When preteens and adolescents take on the different roles of aggressor, target and bystander, they begin to see how each participant really feels. Exploring these feelings during role playing begins to create *empathy, true understanding for the feelings of others*, more effectively than through group discussions. Through a better understanding of the effects of relational aggression, students begin to *believe* that their actions can make a difference.

### **Through role play, teens can:**

- Explore the roles within peer aggression
- Reflect on their own experiences and gain new insights
- Learn to identify examples of peer aggression
- Resolve conflicts
- Create solutions
- Develop empathy for others
- Reinforce pro-social skills
- Explore ways in which the bystander can make a difference

### **Tips for Facilitators:**

- A well-directed role play can be a challenging and powerful learning experience for the youth.
- Role plays provide opportunities for youth to explore situations, gain insight, identify problems, resolve conflicts, and create solutions.
- Role plays allow youth to experience and identify with characters and roles that simple discussions cannot.
- Role plays must be realistic to help youth experience the maximum learning value of the role play.
- Role plays are best if based on current normative beliefs in the youth’s environment.
- Role plays serve as another approach to confronting the issue of aggression without directly confronting the aggressor.

### **Step One: Prepare the Role Play**

- Decide ahead of time the purpose or goals of the role play exercise.
- Form a suitable size group in order for all of the roles to be filled and be sure everyone is participating.
- In order to develop empathy, research shows that it is more effective if a mentee with a predominant role steps into the “shoes” of another role. (i.e. the aggressor assumes the role of the target in particular role plays)
- Role play must be age appropriate.
- Avoid having youth role play aggression whenever possible. Instead, start the role play after the aggressive act has taken place or have a mentor play the role of the aggressor.

### **Step Two: Prepare the Role Players**

- Explain process and purpose of role play and what they will be doing.
- Stress that the role play is a way to allow them to generate solutions to a problem or explore unfamiliar situations.
- Explain that the purpose is to be educational, experimental, fun, informative, intentional and practical.
- Explain that there are “no stars.”
- Use a few “practice runs” to warm up.
- Role playing is action-based and focused on getting in touch with feelings and solutions around peer aggression.
- As the youth go into the role play and put their energy in developing and portraying realistic characters, they begin to experience what each is feeling and experiencing as they play it through.

### **Step Three: Prepare the Audience**

- Remind the audience to be attentive to behaviors. They will be asked to provide feedback.
- If youth are not quite sure of what is expected the mentor will provide guidance and demonstration.
- The mentor should emphasize that there is no right or wrong way to play the roles, just different interpretations. The mentor can always ask for ideas on how the role could have been played differently.
- Positively reinforce all youth for participating.

### **Step Four: Present the Role Play**

- Have youth perform the role play for the audience.

### **Step Five: Process the Role Play**

- Processing provides the youth the opportunity to discuss how it felt and what they were thinking while in the various roles.
- When role playing aggressive acts: describe each role in aggression (target, aggressor, and bystander) and determine the roles of characters in the role play.
- Ask the following questions while youth answer “in character”:

- a. Aggressor: How did you feel? (Powerful, popular, threatened, ashamed, etc.)
  - b. Target: How did you feel? (Sad, scared, excluded, confused, frustrated, helpless, etc.)
  - c. Bystanders: What was going on with you? How were you feeling? (Embarrassed, Stuck, Scared, Silent, frustrated, guilty, disappointed in myself, alone, etc.)
- Discuss alternate options or outcomes and how these could be achieved.
  - Seek realistic solutions.
  - Turn questions to audience for suggestions.
  - Youth should try out a few of the suggestions followed by processing each idea. How did that feel? Is that a realistic solution? etc.



## Action Plan Template

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Action plans are a wonderful way to bridge the gap between skill practice and skill usage. The Ophelia Project has found that participants in our programs can be quite effective with skills and strategies in a controlled setting or role play, but choose not to use these skills in “real life.” Challenge members of your group to plan a way to use what they learned outside of the learning environment. It is extremely important to follow up and reflect upon any written action plans. Hold participants accountable by setting a date for follow up and then reflecting on the reasons for success (or lack of success) with the action plan.

Name:	Date:
Topic or Skill:	
Action Plan Steps:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
Intended goal / result:	
Resources I need to achieve my goal:	
People who can help or support me:	
Date for follow up:	Goal achieved? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Why do you think you were successful or unsuccessful?	

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