

Realities of Relational Aggression ("Girl Bullying")

- We must prepare our girls for relational aggression because they are likely to encounter it. We must teach them what behavior is and is not acceptable. Although we may *expect* aggressive behavior we do **not** have to *accept* it.
- Observing our daughters experiencing relational aggression can open old wounds and cause us to over react. Be aware of your own issues and how they may negatively influence how you parent.
- Learning to navigate relationships is an important life skill. Girls must learn to be assertive, establish boundaries, maintain friendships and resolve conflict. Adults cannot and should not remove all hardships or try to solve all problems. Allowing girls to solve their own problems with help and support from their parents will empower girls.
- All girls who engage in relational aggression are experiencing fear and insecurity:
 - *Aggressor* – fear of losing top position; uses manipulation and control to avoid having flaws exposed
 - *Victim* – lacks confidence to stand up, may feel she deserves it
 - *Bystander* – lacks self-esteem and confidence to take a stand; may experience guilt
- Roles in relational aggression are fluid and may change from time to time (a victim today may be an aggressor tomorrow).
- Relational aggression can lead to physical bullying or violence. Relational aggression is a risk factor for future delinquency, substance abuse, crime, depression, domestic abuse, risky behavior and anxiety.
- Adults must understand the overriding concerns of adolescent girls:
 - Fear of isolation (losing friendships, group exclusion)
 - Need to feel like she belongs and fits in
- Some technology (texting, instant messaging, social networking, digital photos) offers a completely new venue for relational aggression. Anonymous aggression can leave a girl feeling even more vulnerable and scared of tormentors.

Did You Know?

- Girls are not inherently cruel. Negative messages and stereotypes about girls and women perpetuate behaviors. Girls have enormous relational abilities but need guidance in building healthy relationships. Discuss and model what healthy relationships look like..
- Caring adults providing loving support, unconditional love, moral guidance and a safe haven are critical for healthy adolescent development