

The Fourth and Fifth Rs

Respect and Responsibility

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Reducing Relational Aggression

Susan Wellman, President, The Ophelia Project

A 9th-grade girl returns to school in the fall to discover that her two best friends during middle school no longer want to eat lunch with her. Over the summer her friends got accepted into a more popular group, and the new group doesn't "like" her. Without warning or explanation she is cast out, alone, desolate.

A girl is taunted about her weight for years. In 8th-grade someone hands out flyers with her head imposed on a pig, with the headline: *Winner of Food-Eating Contest. Soon to Go to the National Competition.* She drops out of school.

A 7th-grade boy is quarterback on his football team. He has friends and social standing. Another boy who covets his position starts spreading rumors that he is gay. Friends start avoiding him. He tells no one, asks no one

for help. His grades begin to suffer, and he loses focus on the field. The coach replaces him with the aggressor.

A high school girl is mad because one of her friends "looked" at her boyfriend. When she gets home from school, she instant-messages all her friends that "Sally" is a slut and can't be trusted. She starts rumors about Sally's sex life that are spread throughout the school in hours.



RELATIONAL AGGRESSION (RA) encompasses behaviors that harm others by damaging, threatening to damage, or manipulating relationships, or by injuring peers' feelings. For example:

- Purposefully ignoring someone when angry (giving the "silent treatment").
- Spreading rumors about a disliked classmate.
- Telling others not to associate with a certain classmate as a means of retaliation.
- Excluding others at the lunch table.
- Ruining someone's reputation through instant messaging.
- Using body language such as eye-rolling, sighs, turning away, or pretending not to see someone.
- Passing notes that gossip about and put down others.

These images of how girls (and boys) hurt each other have received national attention with the recent publication of two books: *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* by Rachel Simmons and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* by Roz Wiseman. Through shows like *Oprah* and *Today*, our country is learning what The Ophelia Project has known for years. There is a name for this behavior—"relational aggression" (RA). And it's a serious problem.

Since 1998 The Ophelia Project has been developing intervention strategies for schools and parents. We train high school students to deliver an intervention program to middle school children. We teach parents how to recognize, name, and intervene in RA when they see it happening. We deliver awareness-raising workshops for teachers, guidance counselors, parents, and communities. We have a comprehensive school-based program called CASS (Creating a Safe School) where we bring together a school community of caring staff, parents, and high school mentors to implement long-term, systemic change in the social norms of students.

We believe that we can change the social culture of a school. It takes time and commitment, but it can be done. Together, caring adults and young people have the wisdom and resources to address the problem of relational aggression.

It's easy to dismiss this problem as a normal rite of passage for girls. "Girls are just mean little creatures, right? They'll get over it. Don't worry about it. Look at women; they do the same things to each other—only in more sophisticated and covert ways. We can't do anything about this anyway."

These are the myths that have surrounded relational aggression. Today we know differently. Research shows that girls, as a gender, are as aggressive as boys but express it differently. More importantly, research shows that relational aggression is as harmful as physical aggression.

Think about what we do, as a culture, to help our sons with physical aggression. When Johnny hits his sister over the head with a toy, we intervene: "We don't hit. If you do it again you will have to go to your room for a time-out." We repeat this a few hundred times. When Johnny gets to school, his teachers reinforce this. There are consequences for physical aggressors. The parents are called. Aggressors get sent for help if their behavior persists. We wouldn't consider sending our sons to a school where there is no policy on physical aggression, where hitting, shoving, kicking, or bullying are ignored.

Yet we, as a nation, have done nothing about relational aggression. We didn't know how harmful it is. We didn't even have a name for it. But now we do, and it's time to take action.

Research on Relational Aggression

Research has shown that children begin to use relational aggression during the preschool years. Even at this young age, girls appear to use RA more frequently than boys. RA appears to be as stable a social behavior as physical aggression.

What are the risks to aggressors and victims? RA is associated with serious child adjustment problems such as depression, peer rejection, problematic friendships, and loneliness. Children who are frequently involved in RA episodes are more likely to experience social and emotional difficulties.

How Can a School Address Relational Aggression?

1. Find out what is happening below your

radar screen. Use a T-bar on the board, with boys on one side and girls on the other. Ask students to list what boys do when they want to be mean to each other—then girls. Ask older students what was really going on when they were in your grade. Ask parents what they see happening. Gather as much information as possible. Know how your students aggress, where it happens, and who is doing it.

2. Teach students the language of relational aggression. Tell them there is a name for how girls are mean to each other. Teach them that RA is every bit as harmful as physical aggression. Girls have rarely been told that their behavior is actually "aggression" and that relational aggression is just as much "bullying" as physical aggression. Take a classic example. Someone is mad at Kelly and tries to get all Kelly's friends mad at her, too. This is called "alliance building." Without ever confronting Kelly with her grievance, this "friend" sets it up for Kelly to be excluded from the lunch table, ignored in the halls, and not invited to the weekend sleepover. In this scenario, girls need help in identifying the roles of aggressor, victim, and girls in the middle. They need to know that this kind of alliance building is a form of bullying. They need to know that this is as harmful as taking Kelly behind the school and beating her up.

3. Use role-plays to empower the girls in the middle to take positive action against relational aggression. Find older students who can come into your classroom to do role-plays. Take the information you have gathered from your students; create a scene to show the aggressor, victim, and girls in the middle. (Suggested

High School Mentors

One element that makes CASS (Creating a Safe School) unique is our use of high school students as mentors in middle and elementary schools. We train them to deliver our intervention program to groups of 30 students at a time, both boys and girls. We also train mentors to come into the school and "hang out" with younger students at lunch or recess.

High school students are powerful role models and agents of change. Through role-plays, small group discussions, activities, and coaching, the mentors empower kids in the middle to intervene in peer aggression and promote a new social norm: "It's cool to be kind."

scenes: 3-way phone calls; spreading rumors or hallway gossiping; inviting all but one girl to an event; excluding persons because of appearance.) Stop the role-play when the aggression has taken place, and use the actors to demonstrate each role. Touch the actors on the shoulder one by one and ask students to describe what each might be feeling. Name each role. Use this to build empathy for the victim and recognition of the problem. Then do the role-play over, showing how the girls in the middle can change the dynamics.

At the end of the role-play, freeze the actors and ask the girls in the middle how they were feeling or what they were thinking as they took positive action in the role-play. Then give them another scene and ask them to get into small groups and work out a role-play solution to the problem that was posed.

4. Create a classroom mission statement on how students want to be treated by other students, in and outside of the classroom. This statement is a description of the new norms your school wants to infuse. The various classroom statements can then be compiled by a committee of students, mentors, and an adult to create a schoolwide mission statement to be used in every classroom.

5. Intervene when you witness RA in the classroom. Watch and record all incidents of relational aggression. Intervene immediately by:

- *Verbally interrupting the behavior with compassionate but very firm authority.*
- *Firmly repeating the “respect/responsibility” requirement for being in “our” classroom.*

Make an appointment with the guidance counselor, parents, school principal, and aggressor and:

- *Determine what happened, emphasizing the hurt caused the victim.*
- *Determine the aggressor’s willingness to recognize and change behavior.*
- *Develop an agreed-upon plan of action signed by all for the aggressor to begin to follow “now.”*
- *Monitor the aggressor’s behavior in the classroom with written notations when necessary.*

6. Consider becoming a CASS school. There are five basic components to becoming a CASS school: (1) School Procedures, (2) Safer Classrooms, (3) Parent Education, (4) Mentor Intervention, and (5) Schoolwide

Practices. The Ophelia Project is recruiting 15 CASS schools for 2003-2004. There is a survey form on our web site for interested schools. (See bottom of page.)

Anne Cass is Principal of Riverdale High School (acass@riverdale.k12.or.us) in Portland, Oregon, which has made a commitment to becoming a CASS school. She says: "We saw it as a way to address the nastiness among girls and kids treating each other disrespectfully. Because we're a very small school, it just takes one week-end party, one event, one breakup to have a huge toxic impact on the school."

The Ophelia Project trained all Riverdale staff, 15 high school students (girls and boys), and parents (high school and grade school). High school mentors were trained to do two workshop presentations (one for 5th- and 6th-graders, and the other for 7th- and 8th-graders) to introduce the concept of relational aggression and ways to intervene. Anne Cass says: "This has raised the awareness of faculty. We now use a common language: 'Is that really respectful?' 'How would that make you feel?' 'That doesn't fly here at Riverdale.'"

Kids can be so mean to each other that some kids come to school with knots in their stomachs.

—Anne Cass, Principal

Riverdale now has a SAFE (Safe Atmosphere for Everyone) Task Force comprised of grade school and high school teachers and parents, a board member, two principals, and a student. It meets once a month. The Task Force has written a districtwide policy about relational aggression, defining it and its consequences. Riverdale has also had parent evenings to introduce parents to relational aggression and to talk about what the high school and grade school are doing about it.

Pincipal Cass comments: "We've seen subtle differences at school. Kids are using the terminology. 'Wait, we don't do it that way at Riverdale.' It's not a panacea. Say 'RA,' and some kids will roll their eyes. The school has to be truly committed to make this work. It's a culture shift." ■

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"Civics in Action": Lessons in Citizenship and Character

Kris Cortes, Co-Founder, Current Links In Education



Current Links in Education is a non-profit, non-partisan organization which my husband Dennis and I founded in 1996. Every other week throughout the school year, we publish online *Civics in Action* lessons that help grades 6-12 teachers draw learnings about character and citizenship from the events and issues in the news.

Often students ask, "Why am I learning this—how does this apply to me?" Good teachers weave current events into the classroom, making education relevant.

When education doesn't connect with life, it's often boring, and students don't retain the information. Because Dennis and I had the good fortune to have teachers who did make the connection, we have a passion to make education relevant. We have a passion to keep up with current events and politics ourselves and want to keep our own children informed. We have a passion for teaching students democratic virtues and inspiring them to be active participants in a democratic society.

Sadly, today's society and many youth are apathetic and don't vote or show interest in public affairs. We need an informed citizenry if our nation is to thrive.

A Dual Focus: Government and Virtue

Our bi-weekly online *Civics in Action* lessons typically have a government component and a virtue component. We give students ideas of things they can do to put what they are learning into action, such as e-mailing their congressional representatives. We also provide links to many research sources for each lesson.

After September 11, *Civics in Action* had a lesson on teachers' desks the next day. We wanted to help teachers help students deal with that traumatic event. Many teachers also say they use our lessons for Social Studies or English writing assignments.

We are funded through subscription fees and foundation support. To help urban schools that can't afford the curriculum, we take donations. We have over 120 schools signed up for our program this year. The following are two illustrative lessons (abridged).

9/11: EVALUATING THE FOCUS OF OUR LIVES

Teacher's Introductory Statement:

Often a major positive or negative event encourages us to re-evaluate the priorities and goals of our lives. Tragedies such as the terrorist attacks have the power to put things into perspective, giving us opportunities to grow as individuals and as a nation. Over the past year many of us considered what values are really important to us, and what we can do to act on these values.

Although the terrorist attacks represent the worst of humanity, we should remember that our individual response can create tremendous good. If, because of the terrorist attacks, millions of us choose to dedicate ourselves to lasting values, we can create a wellspring of goodness that will overcome the evil of the attacks.

Journal Writing: In our journals let's write about whether our lives have changed after 9/11. After each question, respond with at least one full sentence.

- 1) *Have you found yourself placing greater emphasis on relationships with other people, simply by appreciating and enjoying the time you have with family and friends?*
- 2) *How have you thought more about the needs of others?*
- 3) *How have you placed a greater emphasis on charitable activities, and/or helping people you personally know who are in need?*
- 4) *How have you thought more about our nation's role in the world and the policies of our nation toward other countries?*
- 5) *After the attacks, did you make any resolutions concerning a different attitude toward life or a specific goal that you wanted to pursue? If yes, what are these changes or goals?*

Discussion Questions:

- 1) *Over the past year, do you think enough Americans have changed the focus of their lives to bring about a change in the character of our nation as a whole?*
- 2) *How are we, as a nation, more focused on helping others in need, on relationships with friends and within families, and on our country's policies toward other nations?*

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U.S. CONSIDERS WAR RESOLUTION ON IRAQ

Introduction:

Since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, President Bush has warned about the dangers of foreign governments, and Iraq in particular, developing weapons of mass destruction. The President is demanding that Iraq destroy all weapons of mass destruction as certified by United Nations weapons inspectors, or if necessary, through U.S. military force. He has also asked Congress to authorize the President to use all means that he deems appropriate, including force, in order to enforce the previous United Nations Security Council Resolutions and defend our national security interests.

The U.S. is also seeking international support by asking the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution demanding that Iraq abide by *previous* U.N. resolutions, or face a military attack. The previous U.N. resolutions include: allowing weapons inspectors complete freedom to search for weapons of mass destruction; demanding that Iraq destroy all of its weapons of mass destruction; and meeting all of the demands the U.N. established following the Gulf War of 1991.

Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq, has not allowed U.N. weapons inspectors into Iraq since 1998 and claims that Iraq has followed the U.N. resolutions and dismantled its program to create weapons of mass destruction. Most political leaders in America who are against a war with Iraq, believe Iraq probably still has some weapons of mass destruction; however, they don't believe they pose a serious threat to America or justify a war.

The British government has released a report stating that Iraq has been trying to acquire large quantities of uranium and has also been trying to buy the highly specialized equipment needed to refine uranium for nuclear weapons.

Discussion Questions:

1.) *Do you think Iraq's weapons pose a serious threat to the U.S. or other nations? If so, how?*

2.) *In evaluating whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, we are relying on information from our government and the British government. Do you trust our government to give us accurate information on these issues? Back your view with specific reasons.*

Essay Writing: Many of our allies are uncomfortable with the idea that the U.S. wants to overthrow a foreign government with military force even though that country hasn't attacked the U.S. The Bush administration says that the technology of weapons of mass destruction brings us to a new age where self-defense includes attacking another nation pre-emptively. *What are your thoughts on whether self-defense is a valid argument for attacking another country before they attack you?* ■

CIVICS IN ACTION

Fostering Citizenship in America's Youth

Bi-weekly lessons use current events and issues to help students understand and to live out:

- virtues
- principles of American government/the Constitution

Civics in Action lessons contain:

- Summary of a current event/issue
- Presentation of several perspectives on the current event/issue
- Discussion of how the current event/issue illustrates a principle of American government/the Constitution or a virtue
- References to historical writings, political philosophy, and connections to other disciplines, such as geography and economics, with embedded research links in the online version.
- Discussion Questions
- Extended Learning Activities including community service projects, journal writing, team research projects, and political participation ideas
- Vocabulary enrichment

Target audience: 6th-12th grades. Teachers use *Civics in Action* as a supplement to their curriculum for character education, current events, American government, Constitutional studies, and social studies classes.

Distribution: E-mail to teachers, downloads from our web site, and regular mail.

How does *Civics in Action* inspire students to live out the virtues and become engaged citizens?

By making virtues and civics *interesting*:

- Lessons connect virtues and principles of American government to current events, issues, and people that students view as exciting and interesting.

By making virtues and civics *relevant*:

- Discussion questions and writing challenge students to develop their own views of how virtues and government/the Constitution apply to real-world situations: global, national, local, and within their school.
- Discussion questions and writing encourage self-evaluation and discussion of how virtues and government/the Constitution impact students' lives.
- Extended learning activities give students an opportunity to live out the virtues and to participate in legislative and other government processes.

Proven to be effective: Direct feedback from teachers speaks to the effectiveness of the *Civics in Action* program. See our web site for teacher testimonials.

Current Links in Education, 1126 Dartmouth Rd., Flossmoor, IL 60422. Subscriptions and free samples of Civics in Action are available at www.virtueinaction.org—or by calling (708) 922-1075.

CHARACTER QUOTES

So much has been given to me, I have no time to ponder over that which has been denied.

—Helen Keller

A thankful heart is the parent of all virtues.

—Cicero

We never appreciate the value of water until the well runs dry.

—Ben Franklin

We are called not to do great things, but to do small things with great love.

—Mother Teresa

Love is the willingness to undergo sacrificial difficulties for the sake of another.

—James Stenson

Humility is recognizing our own inadequacies and abilities and pressing them into service, without attracting attention or expecting the applause of others.

—David Isaacs

The greatest fault is to be conscious of none.

—Thomas Carlyle

Humility leads to strength, not weakness. It is the highest form of self-respect to admit mistakes and to make amends for them.

—John J. McCoy

They that know themselves cannot be proud.

—John Havel

Remain humble, remain simple; the more you are so, the more good you will do.

—St. John Vianney

The most dangerous form of deception is self-deception.

—Josh Billings

In my walks, every man I meet is my superior in some way, and in that I learn from him.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Hope is not the conviction that things will turn out well, but the certainty that things make sense regardless of how they turn out.

—Valcav Havel

Hope is the mother of success.

—Samuel Smiles

Hope never abandons you; you abandon it.

—George Weinberg

Half the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important.

—T. S. Eliot

Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

—Abraham Lincoln

No one can live happily who considers only himself. You must live for others if you wish to live for yourself.

—Seneca

A person wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.

—Ben Franklin

It isn't bad luck and bad people that cause our unhappiness. It's bad choices.

—Hal Urban

Great learning and superior ability are of little value unless honor, truth, and integrity are added to them.

—Abigail Adams

Do not cut your conscience to fit the year's fashions.

—Catherine Cookson

—Character quotes compiled by Ryan McCormack.