

“SHE SAID, THEN I  
SAID, THEN THEY  
SAID.....”

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH  
RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN GIRLS

# Illuminate Etiquette

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- Questions? Place them in the chat window on the left for “This Room”.
- Please conduct your participation in a professional manner.
- A copy of the presentation will be provided for download at the conclusion of the webinar.

## Presenter

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# What RA looks like?

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- Teasing
- Jealousy
- Gossip
- Rumors
- Haters
- Bullying and Fighting
- Mean Mugging
- Threats
- Being Excluded
- Eye-rolling

# Definition

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- According to Rosalind Wiseman, author of “Queenbees and Wannabes” .....
- Relational aggression is a psychological term that signifies the use of relationships to hurt peers. It encompasses starting rumors, spreading gossip, teasing, creating and or joining cliques, deliberately excluding another girl, and many of the stereotypical behaviors associated with girls.”

# What she said.....

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- “If words don’t work, after a while,  
I’ll just pop the other girl in the mouth!”  
- 14 years old girl

# What the Literature says.....

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- According to a recent national survey, over half of young people who have been rejected or ignored have also been hit, shoved, kicked, or tripped at least once in the past month, compared to one-quarter of young people who have not been victims of RA.

- 12 Strategies That Will End  
Female Bullying / Girl Wars

# High Price of Low Self-Esteem

## Real Girls, Real Pressure/Dove Foundation

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- An alarming number of girls are turning to destructive action when feeling insecure.
- Girls with low self-esteem are 3X's more likely to participate in dangerous behaviors when feeling bad about themselves.
- 75% of girls with low self-esteem reported engaging in negative and potentially harmful activities, such as disordered eating, cutting, bullying, smoking and/or drinking compared to 25% of girls with high self-esteem.

# High Price of Low Self-Esteem

## Real Girls, Real Pressure/ Dove Foundation

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- 61% of teen girls with low self-esteem admit to talking badly about themselves, compared to 15% of girls with high self-esteem.
- 25% of teen girls with low self-esteem resort to injuring themselves on purpose or cutting themselves when feeling badly about themselves compared to 4% of girls with high self-esteem.
- 25 percent of girls with low self-esteem starve themselves; over eat, refuse to eat, vomit, when feeling bad about themselves.

# More Self-Esteem Issues from the Dove Foundation

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- 78% of girls with low self-esteem admit that it is hard to feel good in school when you do not feel good about how you look.
- 71% of girls with low self-esteem don't feel pretty enough, thin enough or stylish enough as compared to 29% of girls with high self-esteem.
- A girl's self-esteem is more strongly related to how she views her own body shape and body weight than how much she actually weighs.

# Relational Aggression.....

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- Prevents girls from aligning with one another at an important time in their development
- Is connected to peer rejection, decreased acts of socially appropriate behavior
- Both victims and bullies of RA experience depression, loneliness, emotional distress, isolation, and alienation
- Most girls approve of and use RA
- Dramatically affects academic achievement

# Effects of Relational Aggression

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- According to Girls, Inc.
  - one in four high school girls report depressive symptoms, compared with less than 1 in 5 high school boys.
  - in a four year study of 1,000 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders children who witnessed violence were more likely to report committing acts of violence themselves
  - 7% of girls in 5<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grades reported that she had been sexually abused at least once

# More Effects of RA

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- Juvenile Justice Stats.....
  - One in three juveniles arrested for crimes is female (Tufts Univ. Center for Children)
  - 10% of gang members are girls  
(Office of JJDP)
  - Statistically, Black young women are more likely to report having been in a physical fight than young white women (CDC)

# What They Said.....

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- “They were very creative in the way they would torture me. They would steal my notebooks and they would just write all over (them) ‘Vanessa is fat’, ‘Vanessa wears a bra’, ‘Vanessa sucks’ and all this stuff. In the winter they would scratch it into the ice on the bus and we’d ride around town like that. The girls promised that it was just a joke.”

*Odd Girl Out, page 51*

# Girl Life in an Urban School

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- Female students comprise 49% of the student population
- 57% of the females keep the rules
- 38% commit violations that impede order
- 36% commit violations of serious misconduct
- 29% commit violations that are life or health threatening
- In 6 high schools female students were cited for adult-directed fighting and verbal abuse

# Female Aggression in School

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- In an effort to assess relational aggression in female student behavior a survey of 276 girls was taken in three high schools. The survey also explored girls' responses to methods of self-improvement and their plans for the future.
- African American, Asian, Caucasian, and girls of mixed race heritage participated in the survey.

# Friendship With Other Girls

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- Is it easy for you to make friends with other girls?

THS: N=118      Yes 52%      No 48%

SR: N=25      Yes 44%      No 56%

BHS N=104      Yes 53%      No 47%

Yes: I am friendly, easy to get along with; nice

No: Girls have attitudes, like drama, no trust

# Dissin' Other Girls

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- The girls were asked to respond to this question about their behavior at school.
- I exclude or ignore some girls on purpose.

	Every day	Once/2x a week
SR: N=25	44%	40%
THS: N=133	44%	29%
BHS: N=104	34%	13%

At SR the Never category was 0%

# Being Mean

- I say mean things, tease, or call other girls names
- Every Day, Once/2x a Week, Once/2x a Month, Once/2X a Year, Never.....

	ED	O2W	O2M	O2Y	N
SR: N=25	24%	28%	8%	24%	16%
THS: N=137	12%	19%	19%	18%	32%
BHS: N=109	6%	10%	15%	23%	47%

# Fighting In School

- In the survey, girls who fight were asked to respond to several items, rating each question from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree
- If a friend is in a fight, I will help her out.

		SA	A	Un	D	SD
THS:	N=104	30%	29%	29%	5%	8%
BHS:	N=65	39%	22%	34%	2%	5%
SR:	N=24	58%	21%	13%	4%	4%

# Fighting In School, cont'd

- When asked to respond to:  
“I would like to be able to avoid fighting if I could”, girls who fight said they.....

	SA	A	Un	D	SD
THS: N=103	40%	39%	16%	1%	5%
BHS: N=64	56%	19%	16%	8%	2%
SR: N=24	21%	42%	21%	4%	13%

This could gives us some hope!

# “Go To” Persons In School

- In the survey the girls were asked to respond to: I have a staff person at school with whom I can discuss my successes and problems.

- Their responses:

		SA	A	Un	D	SD
THS:	N=129	52%	23%	9%	7%	9%
BHS:	N=106	28%	20%	23%	10%	20%
SR:	N=24	33%	25%	21%	8%	13%

# “Go To” at Home and Community

- Here’s what girls had to say about having someone out of school to talk to:
- I have a family member or adult friend with whom I can discuss my successes and problems. (family, church member, neighbor)

	SA	A	Un	D	SD
THS: N=129	52%	23%	9%	7%	9%
BHS: N=103	63%	22%	11%	1%	3%
SR: N=22	55%	18%	9%	14%	5%

# How Much Do You Really Know About the Girls in Your School?

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- > What does she dream about?
- > How does she spend her time away from school?
- > Who are her friends? Her associates?
- > What does she share with you?
- > Who are her “go to” people?
- > What does she care about?
- > What does she worry about?
- > What does she believe about herself?

# A Protocol of Services

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- Changing the climate in school for girls requires a plan and support from school administrators. What is their assessment of the school's climate? Meet with teachers.
- Get the school's social workers, counselors, to identify on-site services
- Focus groups with diverse group of girls
- Report out of meetings with girls to administrators, school counselors and social workers

# Protocol of Services cont'd

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- Meetings with community prevention and treatment service providers and social services agencies providing services in the school's boundaries
- Assignment of administrator or school staff to work on Service Protocol
- Timetable and clearly stated goals
- Community-based gender specific programs for girls and their caregivers
- Development of evaluation tools

# Listening to Our Girls

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- Based on the information from the surveys and the focus groups, gender-specific activities, programs and services were offered on site to the participating high and middle schools targeted as school climate schools with a particular focus on schools with high incidences of relational aggression.

# Listening to Our Girls cont'd

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- Some of the gender-specific services, programs and activities currently taking place in middle and high schools in the Columbus City Schools
  - Urban Girl Scouts
  - MECCA Mental Health Program
  - Community for New Directions
  - Directions for Youth and Families
  - Huckleberry House
  - Mt. Carmel Crime and Trauma Program

# Listening to Our Girls cont'd

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- Project Linden
- Columbus UMADAOP
- Thoissane Dance Company
- Career Discovery
- Friends of Art for Community  
Enrichment (FACE)
- The Angel In You Program
- CAPA
- The Wexner Center for the Arts

# School-wide Initiatives for Girls

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- - Personal Leadership Speakers Series
- - Café Career Day
- - “Go To” Adults in the School Building
- - Girls’ Fair
- - Girls’ Leadership Tea
- - Sister Circles/Building Community
- - Lunch Time with the Principals
- - Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution
- - Team Building Exercises in Class

# Resilience

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- Teasing, gossip, and reputations regulate girls' behavior and make them afraid to be and become who they really are. ....

The most important goal is that through difficult experiences like these, (each girl) creates, maintains, and communicates her personal boundaries to other girls. If she's able to do this, the sting of cruel words will lose their venom and she'll feel stronger and more resilient, and proud of herself. R.W.