

## Relational Aggression: How Parents Can Help!

Starting young, involve children in groups outside of the school setting. For example sports, girl/boy scouts, clubs, etc. Give them diverse friendship circles, so that if a situation arises, there are alternate venues of support already in place. Furthermore, by expanding and enriching your child's horizons, s/he may stumble upon a passion, which will engross her/him and help shore up a sense of identity. This is something they may cling to in the face of any instances of RA in the future.

Challenge your young adolescent. Acknowledge the pervasiveness of gossip - after all, it is a form of intimacy. How long can s/he go without gossiping? Can she and her friend's journal their gossiping? (Who gossips the most?) This is very tangible and very eye opening to adolescents. It also begins to chronicle abuse.

Remember that kids themselves are our most powerful weapons. Teens listen to other teens. Empower your adolescent. Encourage her/him to stand up for victims by not jumping on the bandwagon. They can effect change - by doing simple things like refusing to be an 'audience' for a bully. Walk away. Or don't laugh in class. Don't gossip. Don't sign 'petitions'. Don't participate in on-line hostilities. Not going along with the abuse du jour does not necessarily mean publicly standing up for the victim. A first step is standing outside the tide of aggression. Get a life - be too busy for this stuff. And your example will encourage others to stand outside the tide and refuse to go along with the abuse. Once others stop participating, the dynamics change. Often the abuse just dies -or it can be publicly challenged.

If you are the parent or guardian of a victim, encourage your child to keep a journal of RA. What happens, who is involved, and what -if any -actions are taken? What is the response? This is an invaluable instrument if a situation warrants parental intervention. Documentation enables schools to act.

Research has shown that so-called 'expressive writing'--journaling traumatic events--has all-around health benefits. It is theorized that by writing about traumas, an individual actually begins to process them by breaking them down in a meaningful way--one that can be incorporated (for example, 'I was a victim...'). This may help loosen the 'traumatic' impact many incidents have.

Don't minimize your child's pain. Phrases like 'you'll get over it'; 'no-one will remember this by next week'; 'you'll make other friends'; 'she wasn't a good friend to you anyway'; 'why do you let this nonsense bother you?'; 'it isn't the end of the world,' etc. all miss the point. They only prove to your child how 'out of touch' you are. Empathize with your child -

and keep the conversation going. (Remember when school was Your Whole World?)  
Trivializing these aspects of their lives encourages them to shut down.

Monitor situations. Your daughter/son needs to learn to handle things. Strategize with them (can you help your child make a joke of the teasing?), empathize with them (commiserate and share your own stories, while spending a day doing something with them), and only intervene as a last resort. S/he doesn't need the added abuse of having mommy have to fight her/his battles until things are clearly out of control.

If situations require intervention, consider short-term professional counseling for your child. Among other things, the situation often involves losses that need to be grieved, and positive perspectives that need to be brought out and emphasized.

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