

Aggression among children and young adults has been a national concern for years. Almost 30 percent of young people in the United States (more than 5.7 million children) are estimated to be involved in bullying, either as a bully, a target, or both.<sup>1</sup>

## What is Relational Aggression?

Bullying can take many forms, but girls are more likely to use subtle, indirect, and emotional forms of aggression than boys. Relational aggression encompasses behaviors that harm others by damaging, threatening, or manipulating one's relationship with peers, or by injuring a girl's feeling of social acceptance. Because relational aggression is not as overt as "traditional" schoolyard bullying, it has not received the same attention from researchers, educators, and parents. However, relational aggression (including online cyberbullying) is just as harmful as physical bullying to a student's ability to learn, grow, and succeed.<sup>2</sup>

Relational aggression is often tied to popularity and cliques. While the traditional bully is able to assert his or her dominance in lower grades, this more manipulative and subtle form of bullying is often found among popular girls in middle and high school.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly half of all girls (46 percent) define safety as not having their feelings hurt. Their number one concern, noted by 32 percent of girls, was being made fun of or teased.<sup>4</sup>

## Cyberbullying, a Growing Crisis

Cyberbullying is widespread among today's teens, with over one-third having experienced it, engaged in it, or know of friends who have done either. Most teens think that bullying online is easier to get away with and to hide from their parents than bullying in person.<sup>5</sup>

However, nearly half of those who have been bullied say the bully was caught – far more than the 28% of bullies who admit to having been caught.

A substantial amount of teens agree bullying online is worse than bullying in person. Two-thirds think it's a serious problem (especially among those who are bullied) and even more think there should be stricter rules about online bullying, even though half already think that there are serious legal consequences for those who get caught.

Teens who have been cyberbullied most commonly think it was to be mean or for fun or entertainment. However, cyberbullies are most likely to say they did it to get back at someone or because someone deserved it.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, about one in five teens have engaged in sexting - sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos through text message or email - and over a third know of a friend who has sent or received these kinds of messages.<sup>7</sup>



*With the advent of the internet, communication has been changed forever, relating has taken on a new life and bullying has found new homes.*

## Girl Scouts' Research

The Girl Scout Research Institute has brought much-needed attention and understanding to the issue of relational aggression among youth. Its study, *The New Normal? What Girls Say About Healthy Living*, tells us that girls have a view of safety and health that includes emotional and social well-being. Findings suggest that policies solely punishing individual bullies may miss the mark with girls, yet when there is a school-wide commitment to end bullying, it can be reduced by up to 50 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Comprehensive approaches that include preventative and confidence-building measures are the most effective in encouraging healthy relationships among girls. Collaboration between schools, families, and communities is most likely to successfully prevent and stop bullying.

## Advocacy Champions

In 2009 the two Girl Scout councils in Louisiana were selected by the national organization, Girl Scouts of the USA, to become an Advocacy Champion, joining forces on a new *Live Healthy, Lead Healthy Policy and Advocacy Initiative*. We are in the process of looking for community partners to join us in building awareness and educating the state's residents about relational aggression and cyberbullying, looking for policy solutions to the problem as well as ways to stop and/or prevent this serious problem.

## A Call to Action

We believe solutions should be developed and implemented on a community-based level. Please join us in making a positive impact on the health of Louisiana's children, their relationships and their future.

## Footnotes

1,2,8 "Bullying Facts and Statistics." National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center. [www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/bullying.asp](http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/bullying.asp) (July 31, 2008).

3 "Mean Girls and Bullies: Research Sheds Light on School Cliques," University of Alabama Birmingham Press Release, March 7, 2008.

4 Judy Shoenberg, Toiija Riggins, and Kimberlee Salmund, "Feeling Safe: What Girls Say," *A Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute* (New York, NY: Girl Scouts of the USA, 2003)

# FACT SHEET - RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

## About Girl Scouts

Girl Scouting is a premier voice for girls and a leading expert on their development into leaders. Together with committed adult volunteers who partner with girls to guide and inspire their growth and achievement, the organization builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

Since its founding in 1912, Girl Scouts has offered remarkable opportunities for girls to develop positive values and to contribute to society as leaders, thinkers, and responsible citizens. Today, Girl Scouts remains a highly regarded, contemporary organization and a steadfast advocate for girls.

Membership in Girl Scouts is open to all girls ages 5 to 17 who accept the Girl Scout Promise and Law; women and men 18 and older can join as adult members. Membership is \$12 per year, but no girl will be denied membership for financial reasons. All girls are encouraged to become Girl Scouts, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, creed, national origin, socioeconomic status or ability.

## The Girl Scout Mission

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

## The Girl Scout Promise

On my honor, I will try:  
To serve God and my country,  
To help people at all times,  
And to live by the Girl Scout Law.

## The Girl Scout Law

I will do my best to be  
honest and fair,  
friendly and helpful,  
considerate and caring,  
courageous and strong, and  
responsible for what I say and do,  
and to  
respect myself and others,  
respect authority,  
use resources wisely,  
make the world a better place, and  
be a sister to every Girl Scout.

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