



What Do You Do If ...

You Suspect Your Daughter is a Victim of Relational Aggression?

- Watch for hidden signs that your daughter may be victimized (changes in behavior, sadness, decline in grades). Not all kids will tell their parents because so much of relational aggression is covert. Your daughter may not trust that you will believe her or understand, or she may fear you will overreact. Your daughter may be embarrassed or feel shame.
- Make home life your daughter's sanctuary. It may be the difference between her surviving adolescence psychologically intact, or emotionally damaged. Spend quality time with your daughter. She needs to know that whatever is happening out "there" may be hurtful, but at home, she is safe and loved.
- Be a keen observer of all forms of aggression.
- Actively listen and take her seriously.
 - Help your daughter to identify her own feelings about a given situation as opposed to immediately offering your own reaction. Listen for and respond to the emotions expressed not just the content.
 - Do not panic or overreact as that can limit her feelings of confidence, independence, and her willingness to confide in you. Get all the facts. Help her to process what happened.
 - Respond with non-verbals such as "Oh?", "Hmmm?" and "And then what happened?". Try to understand the problem from her perspective.
 - Be careful not to bombard her with questions.
 - Discuss a related situation from your own personal experience but only after you have had a chance to really listen to her.
 - Be empathic. Make genuine attempts to listen to and understand how she feels, how she is experiencing her situation.
 - Do not minimize, rationalize, or explain away the bully's behavior. Say: "It must feel horrible to be treated so badly," instead of "You're just fine the way you are, Do not let them upset you" or "Don't worry about it, it will go away... It's a phase."
- Be aware of your own negative feelings and memories of adolescence which can interfere with your ability to support your daughter.
- Do not rush to give advice, moralize or solve the problem. Help her discover her own personal solutions, as opposed to giving her solutions.
 - Do not say how she should or should not be feeling.
 - Do not overreact or pity: "Oh, you poor thing!" Instead, say: "That must be so hard to cope with."
 - Do not philosophize: "Life isn't always fair."
 - Do not question her about what she did to bring this upon herself (she's already doing that!). Chances are good that she did nothing.
 - Do not lecture or preach; when in doubt of what to say, less is more.

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Did You Know?

- Media messages often reinforce the concept of relational aggression as funny or normal. Look out for examples on TV and in magazines and use them to spur discussions with your daughter and her friends.
- The era of technology—especially electronic communication—has ushered in a new wave of relational aggression and it can be more vicious than ever. Cyber-bullying is the use of electronic information and communication devices, —instant messages, emails, text messages and websites— to willfully harass or personally attack an individual or group.
- One-third of youth report having been targets of cyber-bullying; 9% of victims report cell phone bullying (Hinduja & Patchin 2004)
- Cyber-bullying can be particularly damaging because 1) the victim and perpetrator typically know each other or are already in each other's network, 2) it can be done anonymously, 3) postings can spread rapidly and are impossible to retract, and 4) it can occur 24/7.
- Parents play a key role in teaching youth about safe and responsible use of all forms of technology.



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Continued ...

- Teach assertiveness and help build her confidence:
 - Role-play with your daughter to give her practice how to respond and to help her find a wider spectrum of possible responses to the bully.
 - Discuss responses that could potentially exacerbate the problem. Help her determine when it is helpful to ignore a bully and when it is helpful to respond.
 - Recommend that she be assertive one-on-one versus to the whole group.
 - Talk to other adults in her life (teacher, other parents, scout leader, coach): What is the social climate? What are their attitudes about social behavior?
 - Provide activities that your daughter can feel passionate about and gain confidence in.
- Be a GREAT role model. Practice what you preach. Our children watch us constantly. Model what it is like to be a partner in a healthy relationship (male and female). Avoid gossip and putting others down.
- Provide a variety of social outlets for your child. Make sure she knows that she has the opportunities to have friends at many places—school, in the neighborhood, church, sports, band, art and music classes, etc.
- It is generally not a good idea to contact the parents of the bully.
- Do not confront the bully or the bully's parents alone.
- Take bullying seriously and ensure that the school does as well.
 - Report bullying incidents to school personnel. Be cooperative but firm. All children have a right to attend school in a safe environment.
 - Find out what the school is aware of and what can be done to address bullying.
 - To avoid putting staff on the defensive, present your concerns as a more general issue about school policy around relational bullying, rather than making demands for your daughter's particular situation.
 - Work with the administration or PTA to arrange a workshop for parents and teachers to increase everyone's awareness of bullying.
- Be aware of her emotional needs. Get her professional help if necessary.
- Your daughter has much more control over how she reacts to a given situation than trying to control the behavior of others. Teach her coping strategies for deflecting, rather than internalizing negative things that have happened.
- Be firm, but patient. Keep the big picture in mind. Learning to navigate relationships is an important life skill but it takes time. There are no quick fixes.