Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Think about this group of teenage girls in Salem.**

**What might be the best way for them to exert power over each other?**

**Where do peer-pressure and aggression meet?**

***Relational Aggression***

**Youth & Family Resource Center, Inc., 326 West Eleventh Street, Shawnee, Oklahoma 74801, 405.275.3340, Fax 405.275.3343
URL:** [**http://www.hopehouseonline.org/**](http://www.hopehouseonline.org/)

Definition: Relational aggression is manipulation calculated to hurt or control another child's ability to maintain rapport with peers. Relational aggression is behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming his or her relationships with others (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Relational aggression is not typical bullying either physical or verbal but a more subtle form of aggression that uses relationships to damage or manipulate others.

Boys and girls engage in aggression, but girls are more likely to express aggression in a relational sense, including behaviors such as rumors, gossip and social exclusion. Girls purposefully ignore or exclude other girls, spread rumors, and tell peers not to associate with another girl as a means of retaliation. Girls use their relationships to inflict harm, manipulate peers, and injure others' feelings of social acceptance.

For example, a relational aggressive girl may insist that her friends ignore a particular child, exclude her from their group, form secret pacts to humiliate the child, call her names, and/or spread rumors about her. Examples of such manipulation include, "If you don't do what I say, I won't play with you." Children in preschool have been observed excluding peers by saying, "Don't let her play," or using retaliation, "She was mean to me yesterday, so she can't be our friend." In older girls, the gossip can be more vicious, for example, "Her dad's a druggie," "I saw her cheat," or "She think she's all that."

The consequences are serious. Both victims and aggressors are at risk for serious adjustment problems that can have far-reaching effects on their lives, including depression and suicide. Relational aggression creates a social environment in schools that is hostile and affects a girl's ability to learn and grow. Three groups are involved in relational aggression: the aggressor or bully, the victim, and the bystander.

# *Relational Aggression: Every Day or No Way?*

**By Cheryl Dellasega, PhD**

***Cheryl Dellasega, PhD: Helping Women Turn Conflict into Connection,* Copyright © 2005**

Relational aggression (RA) seems to be “news” these days. Despite an incredible awareness-raising through books and movies over the last two years, it’s not unusual for a reporter, a parent, or a teacher to ask me, “So what is relational aggression?

The definitions vary from source to source, but my answer is pretty standard: “It’s the use of behaviors, rather than fists, to deeply hurt another.” Each time I speak to a group of girls I learn new ways that RA occurs: on websites, through text messaging, via “hate contracts”—the list goes on and on. At the heart of each situation is wounded girls: the bully or aggressor, the bystander or witness, and the victim. Each, in their own way, suffers from the fallout of RA.

Of course RA has “been around” forever (think about Sarah and Hagar in the Bible) and yes, boys are involved in RA (sometimes with other boys, and sometimes with girls), but girls (and women) are more prone to the dynamic, in my opinion. More and more, I’m convinced that some of our instinctual biological drives to “protect our own” and a media and culture that encourage female to female competition is fueling the fire of “women wars.” Men may go to battle with mortar and guns, but women young and old have their own arsenal of destruction.

The “whys” of RA are less clear to me than the outcomes. Too many girls grow into women who can’t interact with her peers in a positive and healthy way, whether she’s the target of aggression or the instigator. Studies are finding links between RA and eating disorders, depression, somatic symptoms, teen pregnancy, and even suicide. Clearly, it impacts profoundly on the lives of females.

The good news is that behaviors can change. Girls and women can learn a better way to interact with each other, and even the most hardcore “bully” can change her relationship style. I’ve seen it happen many times.

After one talk I gave to a large audience of mostly women, one attendee came up to me, her expression distraught. “You were talking about me,” she said. “I was the classic bully in high school, and now I realize how many girls I hurt. I wish I could call each one and apologize.”

Awareness—it’s the first step to changing behavior. As women across the country learn how damaging something as trivial as gossip can be, there is a mindshift in attitudes and beliefs. The next important step is having a process in place for “walking the talk” of ending the destructiveness of RA in our lives. For girls, my Club and Camp Ophelia programs help guide this transformation. Hopefully, my books, talks, and workshops point others in the right direction.

If you grew up in the era of Romper Room like I did, you remember the “do be’s” and the “don’t be’s.” It’s time for women of all ages to revisit the should’s and should not’s of their lives, and to make a decision to help, rather than hurt, their sisters.

I hope you will not only make that decision, but will spread the word to others: don’t be a mean bee.

**Reflection Questions** (respond in complete sentences, paragraph form)

1. What is the main idea of this article? What is the author’s opinion about the topic? (Fill the space)
2. Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why or why not? (Fill the space)
3. What are the main highlights that you will remember about this article? (Fill the space)