



**INFORMATION PACKET
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**Questions:
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These are real words from real people across the country who have been impacted by the troubling presence of relational aggression in our society, and who have found an ally in the work and mission of The Ophelia Project.

“Every day I went to my locker, I would see the word ‘slut’ scrawled on it in chalk. Every day I wiped it off. This went on all year. I hated going to school. I hated myself and everyone around me.”

“Why was I singled out? Why me?”

“As a parent, I felt so helpless and I didn’t know what to do...”

Who We Are

Founded in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1997, The Ophelia Project is a national nonprofit organization that began as one community’s decision to increase parental and community support for adolescents. Today, we have grown to become one of the nation’s leading experts in identifying relational aggression and creating safe social climates in schools and communities.

Over the years, our message of creating safe social climates has resonated nationally and internationally with tens of thousands of parents, school and community professionals, adolescents, and young adults. As a result, by early 2004, with the necessary support in place and demand for our services sufficiently evident, we established our national headquarters in Erie.

Our goal is to create systemic change within our culture by providing youth and adults with the capabilities to reduce aggression and create safe social climates. Our organization provides research-based, prevention-oriented services and programs for youth ranging from elementary school through high school. We also educate and train teachers, administrators, parents and other concerned adults who are committed to helping create safe social climates that promote emotional health and academic success. We provide school climate assessments, consulting, original curricula for grades K-12, multi-media educational packages and informational workshops throughout the country.

With programming in more than 20 states, during a single year, we impact more than 10,000 adults and children across North America. But there is so much more to be done to create safe climates where youth can thrive academically and socially.

The Ophelia Project

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WHY THIS MATTERS

The girl who has just been humiliated in the cafeteria because her friends left the table en masse after she sat down isn't going to focus on the math problem on the board...

The boy who has just walked to class while listening to his classmates cluck like chickens, knowing that the display was intended for him, isn't going to participate in class discussion during social studies...

THE CRITICAL NEED

Relational aggression is a mainstream problem; it is in every school and affects all students, whether they are the targets, aggressors or the bystanders who witness peer aggression. It exists in the workplace, as well, and can significantly undermine employee morale and company productivity. The consequences of relational aggression can be devastating and have life-long implications. For example, and at the most basic level, students who feel emotionally unsafe at school are not available for learning. This can easily translate into decreased academic success and affect a student's entire school career and even into his/her professional life.

PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Research has shown the prevalence of bullying and relational aggression and its harmful effects; it has also shown, however, that successful intervention is possible. In surveys of student populations conducted by The Ophelia Project, we have found that incidences of relational aggression decrease after successful intervention. What this means is that it is possible to successfully address bullying and relational aggression, but it requires an ongoing effort to create long-term systemic change. Just as proficiency in mathematics or any other academic area requires continuous study and practice, the establishment of safe social climates requires an ongoing effort of social awareness and education.

The Ophelia Project addresses these issues by providing prevention-oriented services and programs for youth ranging from elementary school through high school. We also educate and train teachers, administrators, parents, and other concerned adults who are committed to helping create safe social climates that promote emotional health and academic success.



WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE?



We strive for long-term systemic change.

The Ophelia Project's school and community-based services are not a "quick fix" for the problems children face today. Our mission focuses on long-term cultural change, which can be achieved by standing up against destructive social norms that perpetuate the cycle of covert aggression in children, youth and adults.

We train youth as leaders.

We recognize that older youth can and need to act as role models and agents of change for younger children. We train youth as mentors to deliver programs focused on efficacy and building empathy skills. Research has proven that the results of peer mentoring relationships are overwhelmingly positive. In fact, mentoring programs are increasingly recognized as a leading strategy for improving achievement of children and adolescents who are at risk for academic failure (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2004). Researchers examining the Big Brothers Big Sisters program found that those adolescents who were mentored through intentional discussion about school, careers and life in general had fewer unexcused school absences, improvements in classroom performance and more positive relationships with parents and other adults (Tierney & Grossman, 1995).

All of our programs are designed around the latest academic research.

We diligently evaluate our programs each year to determine their effectiveness and make changes when required. We have expanded our research and evaluation staff over the past year, and have also expanded our method and management of data collection. We work closely with staff and faculty at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, to enhance our research efforts and insure the highest standards in research collection, analysis and interpretation.

We choose to work collaboratively with schools and existing community organizations.

We develop programs where there is a void and a need, and cooperate with organizations that already have expertise. Collaborative relationships have been formed with local Girl Scout councils, YMCAs, and other youth-serving organizations across the country.



The Ophelia Project serves youth and adults who are affected by relational and other nonphysical forms of aggression by providing them with a unique combination of tools, strategies, and solutions. To achieve long-term systemic change, we help build capabilities to measurably reduce aggression and promote a positive, productive environment for all.

We are dedicated to creating safe social climates.

SPOTLIGHT ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

- > Relational aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to hurt someone by harming their relationships with others. Examples of relational aggression include exclusion, gossiping or rumor spreading, alliance building and cyberbullying.
- > An article in The Washington Post reported that “U.S. researchers who have studied bullying say part of the problem is that such behavior is often accepted, even encouraged by adults...adult approval and the influence of television, video games, and movies teach [kids] that being mean is not only acceptable, but good.” (August 23, 2005)
- > Technology is allowing relational aggression to become more covert and seemingly consequence-free. According to a new poll commissioned by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, of 1,000 students surveyed from across the country, one in three teens and one in six preteens have been bullied in cyberspace. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids estimates that more than 13 million children ages 6 to 17 have been victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is an increasing concern today, because the aggressor does not actually witness the humiliation and pain their target feels, and the aggressor does not internalize remorse or empathy for the target.

THE CURRENT STATE OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

- > As of today, 36 states in the U.S. have passed anti-bullying legislation requiring school districts to adopt policies in regards to bullying (www.bullypolice.org).
- > An Indiana University School of Medicine study published in the January 2007 issue of the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine said that a whole school program is the best way to create a safe social climate. The study's author, Rachel Vreeman, says, “Whole school interventions involving teachers, administrators and social workers committed to culture change are most effective and are especially effective at the junior and senior high school level.”
- > The Ophelia Project's national relational aggression study now includes data for nearly 3,000 students across the country. Our research demonstrates that 27%, or more than one in four students, do not feel emotionally safe at school, thus indicating the need for significant changes within our nation's schools and communities.
- > After The Ophelia Project school programming, students previously labeled as aggressive engaged in relational aggression 26.5% less. Students previously labeled as targets reported being victims of relational aggression 27.4% less. Also, both targets and aggressors report an increase in school connectedness.



THE OPHELIA PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

The Ophelia Project was the first national organization to systemically address relational aggression. We know from our research and experience that emotionally, socially and physically safe climates are critical for children and adolescents to succeed in school and in life. Through awareness, education and advocacy, we work with youth, families, schools and communities to build safe social climates by promoting healthy character development and addressing relational aggression.

The Ophelia Project partners with educational, civic and community leaders to assess social conditions and advocate healthy peer relationships. Through school programming for boys and girls, professional development and the Speakers Bureau, The Ophelia Project educates and empowers children and adults across North America.

School Programming

The Ophelia Project's school programs are designed to help schools reduce relational aggression. CASS: Creating a Safe School®, The Ophelia Project's signature school program, is an intervention program that positively influences the climate in schools and reduces the frequency of relational aggression.

School services and programs are prevention-oriented, research-based, result in long-term, systemic change and may include: school climate assessments, expert consulting, original curricula for grades K-12, multi-media packages, adult and student mentor training and CASS workshops.

Professional Development

The Ophelia Project offers educational workshops and trainings for adults who work in community organizations and other youth serving non-profits. These workshops and trainings provide tools and strategies for adults to create safe social climates within their organizations.

Speakers Bureau

The Ophelia Project's nationally recognized staff of presenters travel the country and give public lectures on issues including relational aggression, adolescent development and steps to creating safe social climates. Lecture topics can be selected and tailored to specific community needs.





LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

You can help. Join the growing number of dedicated professionals, volunteers and philanthropists working to be the catalysts for long-term systemic change. Get involved with your local schools and community organizations and encourage these leaders to connect with The Ophelia Project.

You can also support The Ophelia Project's important work with a tax-deductible contribution. The Ophelia Project is a not-for-profit, 501 (c) (3) organization, and we rely on the financial support of friends who share our commitment to positively change social climates. Although there are fees for the services we provide, the fees do not cover all of the expenses incurred in providing those services. If we were to charge for the actual cost to Ophelia for operating the programs, such programming would simply be beyond the financial capacity of most schools and organizations.

We depend on the generosity of friends such as you to keep our fees affordable for all schools and organizations who want our help.

Visit our website, www.opheliaproject.org, or email ophelia@opheliaproject.org, for more information about bringing Ophelia programs to your area. You can also make your contribution online, or mail your gift to The Ophelia Project, 718 Nevada Drive, Erie, PA 16505



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