

IT'S A GIRL'S WORLD

A Documentary About Social Bullying



User's Guide



"Social bullying is common but it is not acceptable behaviour. Without effective intervention, girls may rely on these negative social patterns for the rest of their lives."

FROM THE CLASSROOM VERSION
"It's a Girl's World"

CURRICULUM LINKS

Unit titles will vary regionally:

Junior/Intermediate

Drama & Dance

Health & Physical Education

Guidance & Career Education

Intermediate/Secondary

Social Sciences

Family Studies

Introduction

It's a Girl's World is a dramatic and unflinching look at the hidden culture of girls' social bullying. Through first-hand accounts by teens and pre-teens, we learn how the power of cliques can turn girls' friendships into a terrifying social dynamic of intimidation, exclusion, and humiliation. Recognizing and addressing social bullying, particularly among girls, is as important as developing school policies around more overt forms of bullying.

Teachers may wish to use the feature version of the documentary with senior classes. *It's a Girl's World* is also a CBC Radio One *Ideas* documentary series, useful as background for facilitators or for student research. www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/girls_world

Format

Divided into six modules, this classroom version (based on the feature documentary) encourages discussion of social conflict in girls' friendships, as well as strategies for change. Each 5-10 minute module identifies a different clique behaviour from the perspective of girls who bully, girls who are targeted, bystanders, parents, and researchers. On-screen questions invite brainstorming on the choices girls can make, on the role of power, and on school/community responses.

Modules 1-4 "Clique Behaviour in Girls"

Suitable for Grades 4 and up, especially for Grades 4-8, when social bullying among girls tends to peak

Modules 5-6 "Consequences of Social Bullying in Girls"

Intended for students 14 years and older due to mature content and language.

Note: Some students may find these two modules disturbing as they deal with a child's suicide. Teachers are advised to enlist the support of school counselling services, notify parents and invite them to see the documentary.



Content and Follow-Up Activities

Module #1 "The Rules" (4:52 minutes)

Girls' cliques tend to have unspoken rules set by the leader and enforced by her followers. The rules tend to be very clear-cut: "You're either with us or against us." Girls say this is more hurtful than being hit, pushed or shoved. In this schoolyard scene, Marina and Diana view their friend Amy's playing with girls outside the clique as a betrayal. Amy is caught in a bind. What would you do to support Amy more if you were her friend?

Module #2 "Power Plays" (6:44 minutes)

Social bullying is designed by girls to be hidden from adults. The motivation is to harm, but not to get caught. In this scene, viewers are invited to guess what happens on the schoolyard before learning what actually took place. We watch as Marina shuts down other girls who challenge her perceptions, and how the clique gets swept up in acts of intimidation. What could you do to stop this from getting worse?

Module #3 "The Secret Language of Girls" (7:33 minutes)

Because girls have learned from an early age that they are supposed to be nice, they can have difficulty handling situations with friends when angry or upset. In this scene, we hear a discussion between girls and Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. We learn how girls use sophisticated codes to humiliate friends, seek revenge and play mind games. These tactics escalate into hurtful behaviour and long-lasting fights. How can you express your feelings without hurting your friend?

Module #4 "Making Up and Moving On" (8:54 minutes)

Apologizing is one way of addressing the consequences of bullying, but it must be handled carefully. In this scene, the focus is on one mother's efforts to change her daughter's behaviour, with mixed results for Katie, the girls she has hurt and their parents. When do you think an apology works best? How involved do you think parents should be?

Suggested Follow-up Activities (Junior/Intermediate)

Recent studies show that 85 per cent of the time, children will watch aggressive behaviour without acting to stop it. When they do intervene in appropriate ways, the bullying stops. Bystanders are key to pre-empting bullying incidents or preventing them from escalating. In small groups, develop role-plays about interventions that work and don't



work. For example, calling the bully names doesn't work, but saying "that's really uncool, let's all do something that's fun" does work and is inclusive of the aggressor and the target. Have a class discussion about the difference between ratting and reporting. Brainstorm ideas on how your school can create a safe climate for students to talk about bullying they witness or experience.

Develop a survey about experiences of bullying at your school. Make sure to include questions about rumours, exclusion and body language. Use the results for class discussion, for the school newspaper, or as a basis to develop new school policies. A sample survey can be found in *Let's Stop the Bullying: A Resource for Elementary School Communities, 2003* (Toronto District School Board).

Letting students know that you as teachers are aware of social bullying and find it unacceptable is an important first step. Read a story, book or website about girls' clique behaviour. Design questions. Use the story and questions to work with a reading partner from a younger class. (see "Tell Me More," www.nfb.ca/itsagirlsworld for a list of fiction books).

Analyse a popular magazine for girls or a film like *Mean Girls*. What images of girls are being promoted? What values and behaviours are expected of pre-teen and teenaged girls? Ask students to write about their responses, present them to the class or do an art project for display in the school.

Module # 5 "I Never Knew It Would Go This Far" (9:16 minutes)

This module introduces the case of 14 year-old Dawn-Marie Wesley who committed suicide as a result of social bullying. It depicts a tragedy that could have been avoided if those involved had had the tools to stop the bullying from happening and escalating. We hear testimonials from friends, family, and one of the teens convicted of criminal harassment. What would you do differently if you were Dawn-Marie's friend?

Module #6 "The Blame and Shame Game" (11:22 minutes)

This module delves deeper into the circumstances following Dawn-Marie's suicide. It shows the long-term costs of social bullying for all involved – friends, aggressors, family members, bystanders – including erosion of trust, and difficulties reconciling blame, guilt, and responsibility. What can we do as a school to prevent a tragedy like this from happening?



Suggested Follow-Up Activities (Secondary)

Researchers have found that the development of empathy in children is a strong strategy to combat bullying. The Ophelia Project (see website below) uses two classroom exercises that are highly effective. One is called "What's My Bag?". Get a cardboard box or gym bag and fill it with a variety of emblematic things like bubble paper, a Halloween mask, cotton balls stuffed into a plastic egg etc. Each student pulls an object out and talks about how it might represent the feelings of someone who is a target, an aggressor or a bystander. The other exercise is called "The Coat of Security". The teacher puts on a coat and plays the role of a social aggressor. The class divides into two groups. They are given sticky-sided labels. One group writes words on the labels that describe the aggressive behaviour (mean, snotty, scary etc.) and sticks those on the coat. The other group writes down the reasons why she might be behaving this way (problems at home, insecure, jealous etc.) and sticks those on the coat. Then as a class, discuss ways the social aggressor can feel better about herself without hurting others.

Develop a peer mentoring system in your school board. Train high school girls to talk to junior high school girls; train junior high school girls to talk to elementary school girls about social bullying using role-plays and small group discussions. Students sometimes hear important messages more clearly if they come from someone closer to their own age and experience.

"Efforts to reduce social aggression among girls will be most effective if they build on girls' relationship strengths and their own efforts to resist gender stereotypes." (Marion Underwood, *Social Aggression Among Girls*). What makes girls' relationships strong? Explore how stereotypes of girls as "sugar and spice and everything nice" and as "catty" contribute to the social bullying dynamic. Discuss films like *Heathers* or *Mean Girls* or books like *Fast Girls* and *Slut!* or popular TV shows about teens. How do media messages, popular culture and institutional practices limit girls' understanding of themselves?



Selected Resources

Books & Articles

Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls. Rachel Simmons (Harcourt, 2002) Insightful and well-researched target and bully perspectives set in a social context.

Social Aggression Among Girls. Marion K. Underwood (Guilford, 2003) A comprehensive and accessible academic overview of the topic.

Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying. Cheryl Dellasega & Charisse Nixon (Fireside, 2003) True stories, practical solutions, popular media resources on girls and bullying.

Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls. Lyn Mikel Brown (New York University, 2003) Not your typical anti-bullying book. A critical focus with excellent strategies for change.

Sticks, Stones and Bullies. Martin O'Malley & Amina Ali (www.cbc.ca/national/news/bully) An overview of publicized cases of teen bullying in Canada.

Theatre & Documentary Resources

"The Shape of a Girl" (Joan MacLeod) A play about the pressures of surviving adolescence, loosely based on the 1997 death of British Columbia teen Reena Virk.

"Ctrl Alt Delete: Internet & Emotional Bullying Among Girls" (Ralph Small; www.stagekids.com) A play exploring manipulation, gossiping, and teasing through cyberspace and girls' cliques.

"What is Bullying? Can Theatre Affect Social Change?" Richard Markle; (www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca) A thoughtful teaching activity using student drama to expand awareness of social bullying.

"Reena Virk: A Senseless Death" (May 2000) CBC News in Review A multifaceted look at the causes & consequences, and students taking action through theatre.

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Websites

www.nfb.ca/itsagirlsworld

Extensive companion site to the documentary

www.wehavebrains.com

"And we use them." Spirited discussion & resources for teens

www.bullying.org

Multimedia chat forum on *It's a Girl's World*, and much more

www.opheliaproject.org

Excellent resource on relational aggression; for teachers, parents, organizations

www.clubophelia.com

A site for junior and high school girls to talk about social bullying



Credits:

It's a Girl's World is also a CBC Radio *Ideas* series. Produced by Lynn Glazier, this three-part series explores the context of social bullying among girls, and in the workplace among women.

It's a Girl's World is available in VHS and DVD formats. The DVD contains the feature (with French & English sub-titles), the classroom interactive (module) version, plus additional scenes called "Living in a Girl's World" and excerpts from the *Ideas* radio series [used by permission from CBC Radio]

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