

Alternative Aggression

What is Alternative Aggression?

Alternative Aggression is aggression that cannot, for one reason or another, be directed physically or verbally at its target. Some examples of Alternative Aggression include: Relational Aggression; Social Aggression; and Indirect Aggression.

- **Relational Aggression** is emotional violence that involves using friendship—or the threat of losing it—as a weapon. It can begin in young children as seemingly harmless as, “Give me that toy or I won’t be your friend anymore.” But it can grow into “Be friends with her/him and we won’t be your friend anymore.”
- **Social Aggression** involves attacking another’s self-esteem and social position by taking away her/his friends, telling secrets, convincing others not to like her/him or spreading rumors to damage her/his reputation. The Internet and text messaging on cell phones has made this form of relational aggression more accessible and more devastating.
- **Indirect Aggression** is hurting someone by making it seem as though physical injury was “just an accident” or by saying, “just kidding” or “no offense” while delivering an insult. It can manifest as spreading rumors about someone or being nice to them in front of adults, and acting mean in private or when adults aren’t around.

Dynamics:

Alternative Aggression occurs among both girls and boys. Boys more often demonstrate physical aggression when they feel angry or upset. Girls, on the other hand, are not given the same opportunity in society to freely express feeling angry or upset. Instead, girls are expected and told to always be nice.

Girls experience the full range of healthy emotions as boys, but are not encouraged to allow necessary confrontations between friends. Because they still have these feelings, they come out in other ways or “alternative aggressions.” Most girls will avoid an honest confrontation for fear of losing a friend or group of friends. Instead, they will turn on someone in a more covert and indirect way.

What is the Impact?

Like other forms of bullying, impacts include: increased depressive symptoms, maladaptive eating patterns, loneliness, increased suicide risk, externalizing behavior such as acting out behavior and substance abuse.

Kids who experience high levels of relational aggression are less connected to their schools, experience more intense feelings and participate in fewer activities.

What Can You Do as a Parent?

Before you look for signs of Alternative Aggression in your children, look for signs in yourself. Be aware of your own desire to have your child be friends with the popular or “right” kids. Children will pick up on this and feel unintentional pressure from their parents.

Pay attention to your children—are they still talking with friends on the phone or emailing them? Listen to your children when they are around friends. Are they including or excluding current or

former friends? Ask your child how boys and girls express how they feel when they are upset. Ask them how they let a friend know when they are upset or angry.

If your child tells you he or she is being bullied or left out, you can do the following things:

- Empathize: don't dismiss the situation as a phase.
- Stay calm so your child doesn't see this situation as worse than it is.
- Find out where the bullying is taking place and brainstorm ideas of how to help, such as arriving early or changing classes.
- Don't try to fix the problem, but instead offer to role-play ways your child could handle the situation.
- Be nonjudgmental about their social choices.
- And finally, speak to another parent or a teacher only if your child wants you to or if their well-being is in danger.

For more information, contact KCSARC's 24-hour Resource Line at **1.888.99.VOICE** or visit our website at www.kcsarc.org.