



Girls United: Helping Girls Connect in Healthy Ways

Girls today need to know how to get along with others, how to build strong connections with each other, how to be a support for each other and how to build strong rewarding friendships with other girls.

Girls United is a Girl Guides of Canada initiative that promotes healthy relationships and prevents bullying. It was developed in 2007 with the support of PREVNet, a coalition of researchers and NGOs dedicated to anti-bullying and the promotion of healthy relationships among children.

Girls United consists of training for leaders and challenge for girls:

- Training - On how to identify bullying and the critical steps that leaders can take to create a sense of caring, belonging, and mutual responsibility between all girls.
- Challenge - Activities to create healthy relationships and an understanding of the negative impact of social aggression and bullying. Girls will receive a challenge crest when they participate in these activities.

For more information go www.girlguides.ca – Member Zone

Here are some facts and tips to help you get started in addressing bullying and creating Girl Guides as a safe place for girls.

A Guide on Social Aggression Facts for Girl Guide Leaders

What is bullying?

Bullying is a form of abuse at the hands of peers that can take different forms at different ages. Bullying is defined as repeated aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the person who bullies and the person who is victimized. Through PREVNet research, we understand bullying as a disrespectful relationship problem:

- People who bully are learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others.
- People who are victimized become increasingly powerless and find themselves trapped in relationships in which they are being abused.

Read on to learn about how you can make a difference in bullying. Remember, addressing bullying means your unit will be a better learning environment for all girls.



What does bullying look like in girls?

Most commonly a girl who bullies others will use social aggression as their means of bullying. Girls also use other forms of bullying (e.g., verbal bullying, physical bullying, etc) but social aggression is more often the form they use.

What is social aggression and what does it look like?

Social aggression is any purposeful act intended to hurt another girl's social relationships and/or social status within the group. Social aggression can take the form of giving someone dirty looks or "the evil eye", excluding someone from group activities, writing mean notes about a person, spreading nasty rumours about them, talking behind their back, hair flips, giving someone the cold shoulder, giving someone the silent treatment, avoiding eye contact, purposefully staring at someone, saying something mean to a person's face, telling someone's secrets, teasing and name-calling, rejecting someone from a group, withdrawing friendship, turning others against a person, ditching someone, and even saying something like "just kidding" after insulting or being mean to someone.

What to do and say to the girl who is bullying

- Focus on teaching rather than punishing.
- Identify the behaviour as hurtful.
- Explore motivations.
- Discuss the use of negative interpersonal power: Girls who bully have the ability to affect others due to their capacity to exercise control over another in a hurtful way.
- Make a plan for ways to use power positively.
- Discuss negative emotions and positive ways to express them.
- Recognize that conflict is an ordinary part of life.
- Listen without judging.
- Develop ideas to repair harm.

What to do and say to the girl who is being bullied:

- Listen without judging and without rushing to fix the problem. Say something like, “I am so glad you talked to me about this. It must be really hard for you. I promise we will keep on talking about it and figure out what to do to make things better for you.”
 - Indicate that what happened to the girl was not OK. Say something like, “What happened to you is not OK. I am sorry this happened to you.”
 - Continue to listen and guide her understanding of the situation. Say something like, “Tell me more about this.”
 - Discuss strategies for action.
 - Ensure the girl is not re-victimized.
 - Check in to ensure the problems have not continued.
- It’s also very important to mobilize bystanders. Girls who are observing social aggression have the ability to help curb the behaviour. Encourage girls to stand up whenever they observe social aggression and other kinds of bullying, not to participate in the behaviour in any way, and to actively speak out against the behaviour.

Ten Critical Steps to creating a Safe Social Climate for Girls

1. *Learn the signs and language of social aggression*

Social aggression is any purposeful act intended to hurt another girl’s social relationships and/or social status within the group. Often this form of aggression occurs in the context of a relationship and sometimes even a “best” friendship. In these situations the relationship is used as a weapon and the secrets and intimate knowledge known about the person is used as ammunition. Social aggression is also used online with messaging programs, networking websites and other blogging tools – this is known as “cyber bullying”.

2. *Understand the role of power in social aggression and offer opportunities to feel powerful in positive ways*

Girls who bully are using power and aggression to control and distress others. Girls who are victimized become increasingly powerless and find themselves trapped in relationships in which they are being abused. Maximizing opportunities for girls to feel free to use their power in positive ways allows them to experience and value the positive feelings that come with empowerment and leadership. Encouraging girls to take initiative and assume responsibility for group activities within the unit, to engage in community activities, to help others, to lead by positive example and to mentor younger girls are all ways you can provide positive experiences of power. Maximizing those opportunities will minimize the need or desire to engage in negative uses of power (such as social aggression).



3. Establish a positive climate of equality

Your unit needs to have a climate where girls feel safe and supported by one another and by you. A positive climate depends on the girls seeing and valuing each other as social equals. Remember that in order for bullying to occur an imbalance of power between the girls must be present. Girls' perception of each other as equals minimizes the likelihood they will engage in bullying behaviour.

4. Identify hidden bullying behaviours

Socially aggressive bullying behaviours are concealed, secretive and discreet so as to hurt the person they are intended to hurt while remaining mostly hidden from even the most well-meaning Girl Guide Leader. One of the main motivations for the use of social aggression is to be mean without looking mean to an outside eye. Now that you know what social aggression can look like, keep an eye out for these subtle behaviours. They may be discreet but they're there!

5. Don't let girls use social aggression to build connections

Social aggression can be used to strengthen relationships within girls' groups. Leaving others out, talking about them behind their back and gossiping builds strong feelings of intimacy and belonging for those girls who are not the focus. It's important to take an active role in discouraging social bullying by educating girls that social aggression is in fact a kind of bullying so that they appreciate the harm it can do and the many forms it can take. Teaching the negative impact of social aggression to your unit and ensuring it is not used to control, manipulate or hurt others is an important step for preventing social aggression in your unit.

6. Set clear expectations for the rights and responsibilities of each member of your unit

Involve girls in the development of rights and responsibilities within the Girl Guide Unit. If children are responsible for creating these guidelines, they are more likely to follow and enforce them. It is a good idea to have the girls design a poster outlining them and post it when the unit gets together as a reminder and reference.

7. Team build early in the development of the unit

Girls may try to use social aggression to develop a sense of intimacy and alliance amongst some members of the unit by ostracizing or excluding others. This behaviour can be avoided through the use of positive team building strategies that foster inclusiveness and respect. There is a set of 25 activities (Girls United) designed by Girl Guides of Canada to help girls build positive connections that you can use to foster a sense of community and acceptance in your Girl Guide Unit.



8. Foster inclusiveness

Excluding others is a mode of social aggression very often used by girls within a group context. If girls value the concept of including others in activities and discussions and realize the hurt that may come with exclusion they will be less likely to engage in this behaviour. Activities designed to help all the girls in your unit find commonalities (e.g. a scavenger hunt to find something in common with every girl in the unit) will foster a sense of belonging. Ensure you use random strategies when you are forming smaller groups or partners within the unit to ensure particular individuals are not being left out and that everyone has the chance to work with everyone else.

9. *Hold girls accountable*

When you see the behaviour happening, identify it as hurtful and harmful for those involved. Hold girls accountable and get them to come up with a solution to ameliorate the hurt that's been done. Focus on being hard on the behaviour and soft on the person. Look to the girls for solutions to any problems that arise. Hold a discussion about social aggression and its use when bullying within the unit and review the rights and responsibilities of the group that they themselves came up with.

10. *Empower girls*

Be aware of the stereotypes girls are bombarded with on a day-to-day basis. It is important to realize how these stereotypes may be affecting the girls in your unit and may be influencing the behaviours they choose to engage in. Girls are socialized to look nice and kind, but also to be manipulative and mean — these are the key ingredients to social aggression. Girls are more likely to use social aggression because of its discreet and hidden nature; this allows them to inflict the harm, usually without getting caught. Focus on empowering girls to fight against these socially mandated stereotypes! Encourage them to behave in ways that reflect empathy and respect for one another and for themselves.



This information was developed by Tina Daniels, Ph.D. & Danielle Quigley, B.A., Carleton University, as result of a partnership between Girl Guides of Canada and PREVnet (Promoting Relationships, Eliminating Violence Network). PREVNet is an active network of Canadian researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments working together to promote safe and healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth. PREVNet is sponsored by the Networks of Centres of Excellence, Queen's University, and York University. Find out more about PREVnet at www.prevnet.ca

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