

**The Girl Bully: Under the Radar and Under the Skin
Parenting Workshop with Jann Murray-García
Sponsored by Cesar Chavez Elementary School Climate Committee
April 24, 2012**

The CCE Climate Committee would like to thank Dr. Jann Murray-García for presenting this workshop on girl bullying. We also thank Principal Beck and Jann's daughter, Canela, for their assistance with the audio/visual needs of the presentation. A gracious thank you to SIPAT for providing refreshments and to all the parents and teachers who attended the workshop!

Workshop Highlights

This workshop detailed the case of girl bullying and the long term mental health consequences over time. Dr. Murray-García discussed that girl bullying is often due to a power imbalance and not a lack of assertiveness. She discussed the definition of bullying as the conscious and deliberate act of hostile activity and that there is a threat of further aggression. When bullying escalates unabated it can cause terror in a child. Girls are taught a certain script of behavior in society in which they are not supposed to be aggressive or show aggression.

Dr. Murray-García presented several YouTube videos and movie clips to illustrate the effects of girl bullying and the unfortunate outcomes including the suicide of Phoebe Prince who was bullied both in person and online. Cyberbullying is instant, permanent, wide reaching, and elicits little empathy or regret from the bully because they are that much more removed from the victim.

In girl bullying the relationship is often the weapon. Girl bullies set the rules and can be two faced but still best friends with their victims. Girls have a tendency to switch roles as victim/bully on a regular basis and the bully often has the cooperation of the victim. Rumors are a powerful weapon in the arsenal of the girl bully and often fly under the radar of parents and teachers. *There is a curious attraction to power in the bully/victim relationship. The victim knows they are being hurt but will continue to tolerate the abuse to keep the relationship going.* Bullies often have charismatic personalities that attract others to them and use this to manipulate.

Girls can be excellent friends but terrible bullies because they are so willing to share so much information with each other and this provides ample amount of ammunition for bullies to use. There is a particular script to behaving like a girl and they all know it from an early age. By the time girls get to late elementary or middle school they have scripted themselves into this tiny box of acceptable behavior and social expectations. The mantra is often that girls are addicted to being "nice." This can happen for multiple reasons including the social scripts they are taught and observe, social stratification, the attraction to power, and the need to belong. Children have different goals than adults - they desperately want friends and they don't necessarily have to be good ones. Children desire power and may be bully or a social climber who never becomes a queen bee.

It takes a community to change social behavior and reinforce positive models. Dr. Murray-García asked the audience to consider their own relationships and scripts as adults. Do we model appropriate behavior for our children including how we speak to one another and the way we treat our own friends?

Suggested Strategies for Parents

Dr. Murray-García suggested several strategies for addressing girl bullying for parents:

- Create & communicate a family narrative. Assess your current family narrative - is it one of positive and open communication?
- Remember that there are no innocent by-standers. Raise kids to intervene when they see a child being hurt. Talk to your children about appropriate ways of intervening and when to seek help from an adult.
- Model and encourage caring and demonstrating empathy. Ask questions to help kids reflect on their experiences and choices (ex. Is that a group that everyone can participate in? If not, then we don't belong to that group.) Kids need strategies to be equipped to witness for others. Role play: "How would you feel if...?"
- Talk about friendship vs. being drawn to big, powerful personalities. Friends make you feel good about yourself and want what is good for you. Coach kids through their attraction to power: "Help me understand why we are still dealing with/talking about ____ when she is clearly showing that she doesn't care about you?"
- Create a community/network of families: Have a "will call" list of families committed to picking up the phone and calling each other as soon as they start hearing about problems.
- Adolescents need adults outside of their family to serve as role models and provide support. Nurture unrelated relationships; fill in what you can't relate to in your child's experience by inviting others to build a positive, caring relationship with your child/adolescent. By rallying around each other and communicating with each other, we can break the cycle of bullying.

Where do we go from here?

The Climate Committee is committed to continuing the conversation on bullying and other topics of interest to CCE parents and staff. Please contact us if you have a suggestion or idea for future workshops.

Bullying and Parenting Resources

1. [The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to HighSchool--How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle \(Updated Edition\)](#) by [Barbara Coloroso](#)
2. [Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls](#) by [Mary Pipher](#) and Ruth Ross
3. [Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls](#) by [Rachel Simmons](#)
4. [Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write about Bullies, Cliques, Popularity, and Jealousy](#) by [Rachel Simmons](#)
5. [My Secret Bully](#) by [Trudy Ludwig](#) and Abigail Marble
6. [Say Something](#) by [Peggy Moss](#) and Lea Lyon
7. From The Community To The Classroom [Riki Gonzales](#) (Actor), [Cliff Garibay](#) (Director), [Ryan Gonzales](#) (Director) | Format: DVD. <http://communityclassroom.wordpress.com/>
8. Barbara Coloroso's website: www.kidsareworthit.com