**South Row School**

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Dear Parents and Caregivers,

In the month of November, I presented a lesson to the 2nd grade classrooms on the topic of “relational aggression”. I read the book My Secret Bully by Trudy Ludwig to the 2nd graders and their teachers. Trudy Ludwig wrote My Secret Bully in 2002. The year 2002 was the year that she first became aware of the term “relational aggression” when her daughter, a second grader at the time, became the target of aggressive behavior from her friends. In doing some research on her own, Trudy Ludwig found only a few children’s books that addressed the topic of relational aggression. She wrote My Secret Bully to help fill this information gap.

My Secret Bully is a touching, inspirational story that instantly draws the reader into Monica’s world, where she is emotionally bullied by a friend and learns how to cope with the situation. With the help of supportive adults, Monica is given the tools to handle the situation and goes on to thrive after experiencing relational aggression.

*What is relational aggression*? Relational aggression is using relationships to control and hurt others. Using relationships to control and hurt others is by nature covert, secretive, and difficult to detect. Adults struggle to even be able to identify it, let alone deal with it. Common examples of relational aggression or emotional bullying include, but are not limited to, silent treatment, rumors, intimidation, humiliation, exclusion, teasing and manipulation. These types of behaviors can be devastating, resulting in serious damage to the target’s self esteem and feelings of social unacceptability. Stomachaches, headaches, depression, anxiety, and school avoidance are often telltale signs of victims of relational aggression. Unfortunately, many children-both boys and girls-experience relational aggression at one time or another in their lives. But as Monica in My Secret Bully comes to find out, “That doesn’t make it right. And that doesn’t mean this is the way it has to be.”

*Why do kids bully*? The reasons are diverse. The desire for social connection, recognition, and power are primary

elements used to the aggressor’s advantage.

*Who are the targets of relational aggression*? The profiles of the targets run the gamut—from those who are noticeably different in some way from the aggressor (race, physical appearance, personality) to others who outwardly appear to have much in common with the friends who are bullying them. Often, there is no apparent reason why a particular target is chosen; it may simply be the aggressor’s need to pick on whomever happens to be in his or her line of vision.

*Is bullying a growing epidemic*? According to Internet safety advocates and experts, most youth aren’t bullying their peers. In fact, researchers report that bullying has decreased in the last ten years. That’s not to say that bullying isn’t a significant issue. The minority of kids who are bullying can cause real harm to both the targets of bullying AND the many bystanders who witness the bullying. Because most youth are decent, caring, and responsible when it comes to how they treat others, let your children know that you expect no less from them.

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Parents often ask, *“How can I help my child understand what bullying is and isn’t?”* First and foremost, it is important for kids (and adults) to understand that *not all hurtful behavior is bullying*. One helpful way of understanding the different tiers of hurtful behavior can be:

* When someone says or does something unintentionally hurtful and they do it once, that’s RUDE.
* When someone says or does something intentionally hurtful and they do it once, that’s MEAN.
* When someone says or does something intentionally hurtful and *they keep doing it*-even when you tell them to stop or show them that you’re upset-that’s BULLYING. (Ludwig, 2004)

*What can we do to break the cycle of relational aggression*? “The first step is to bring the secret of emotional bullying out in the open. The second step is twofold: 1) provide targets with coping tools and 2) prevent further acts of aggression by taking the appropriate measures to quash all forms of overt and covert bullying.” (Ludwig, 2004). Holding aggressors accountable, “as well as recognizing the roles and responsibilities of targets, bystanders, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community are key to the success of any anti-bulling program.” (Ludwig, 2004).

References

Ludwig, Trudy (2004) My Secret Bully , Random House, Inc., New York.

[www.trudyludwig.com/author\_bullybasics.html](http://www.trudyludwig.com/author_bullybasics.html)

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