

# IT'S A GIRL'S WORLD

A Documentary About Social Bullying



## Resource Guide for Teachers and Parents



*"Girls' social bullying is common but unacceptable. 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*

### Introduction

**I**t's a Girl's World is an unprecedented look at the hidden culture of girls' social bullying. Candid first-hand accounts by pre-teen and teenage girls, parents, and researchers reveal how the power of cliques can turn girls' friendships into a turbulent social dynamic of intimidation, pain, and exclusion.

Drawing on the documentary, this Resource Guide assists facilitators to open discussion with parents, teachers and youth group leaders on social conflict in girls' friendships and strategies for change. Recognizing and addressing social bullying, particularly among girls, is as important as developing school and community policies around more overt forms of bullying.

### Format

The guide can be adapted to various venues including parents' meetings, community workshops, and professional development seminars for educators and youth service providers. Viewers are invited to expand their awareness of social bullying, share experiences and expertise, and relate insights from the documentary to their own work with girls.

To increase flexibility, two broad areas of discussion are offered, each followed by a list of suggested topics. Discussion can be opened either mid-way through the documentary or at the end. If using the documentary with teenagers, a caution about the segment on suicide should be provided in advance.

- FOCUS ONE: "The World of Social Bullying"  
(parallels the first 30 minutes of the documentary)
- FOCUS TWO: "Consequences, Strategies, Insights"  
(parallels the remaining 35 minutes of the documentary)

### Content & Discussion

#### FOCUS ONE

##### The World of Social Bullying

Understanding the dynamics of girls' social bullying is important to counter perceptions that girls are either predisposed to meanness or going through a rite of passage. Increased awareness can open dialogue with girls, help prevent aggression from escalating, reveal the complexity of girls' needs to have control in their lives, and lead to awareness of more positive leadership skills.

In the first half of the documentary, we learn about the dynamics and consequences of clique behaviours from two groups of girls: preteens in

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Montreal, and teenagers in British Columbia, following the suicide of one of their friends through bullying. Issues are raised about choices girls can make, the role of bystanders, and difficulties faced by parents.

### **TOPIC ONE**

#### ***What are the social dynamics of girls' cliques?***

Ask participants to identify the clique behaviours they see in the documentary and compare to what they already know from their own experiences teaching, parenting or working with girls. Questions might include:

- What do we learn from the perspectives of girls who bully, girls who are targeted, and those who are bystanders?
- What are the girls doing to hurt their friends? How do these tactics change as girls get older?

### **TOPIC TWO**

#### ***What issues do parents & educators face?***

Observing how Marina's and Katie's parents respond to their daughters' bullying can help us, as educators, parents, and youth leaders, examine our expectations of girls. It can also help us reflect on our own experiences of bullying, the negative social behaviours we may be modelling and how these might impact on our discussions with girls.

- How do you respond to the scene where Doug explains his direct approach to telling Brigeen about her daughter's bullying? What is going on for Jessica when she replies to her husband: "so you're saying that my training as a girl was successful and I've been brought up to be too nice?"

This could open discussion about how social constructions of masculinity and femininity lead to different ways of handling confrontation, and how the pressure to be 'nice' is a source of struggle for girls and women. How can this awareness help us, as educators and parents, to facilitate discussions with girls and boys about social bullying?

- How do you explain Brigeen's reaction: "It's like I was being introduced to another child"? What expectations does Brigeen have of her daughter? To what extent do they play a part in Katie's behaviour?
- "The girls are very skilled and they have it down to a science. They know exactly what they have to do so that [bullying] won't be detected" (Principal Mary Reynolds). As a parent, teacher or school administrator, how informed do you feel about girls' clique behaviours? What actions do you presently take?

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*"The point is to make the other person feel bad and make yourself feel better. You feel more powerful. But, like sometimes, you feel worse."*

Marina's explanation of why girls bully from *It's a Girl's World*.

### TOPIC THREE

#### **How to explain girls' social bullying?**

How we understand the motivation for girls' social bullying will influence the strategies for change we advocate as parents, educators, and youth group leaders. Ask participants to discuss the mindset of girls in the aggressor, target and bystander roles, and reflect on their own experience.

Possible topics include:

- Psychologists Debra Pepler and Wendy Craig state "this is a universal process. It transcends country, it transcends socio-economic status. It is a process that unfolds when girls come together." Discuss how this relates to the girls you teach, parent, or work with.
- "We're moving from the sort of girl as the sweet, petite, quiet, obedient stereotype to a real advocacy I'm seeing in girls of being a bitch is cool."

Psychologist Shelley Hymel's perspective could open various avenues of discussion. Sample questions include: To what extent is this shift apparent among the girls you teach, parent, or work with? How has popularity become equated with being mean? What do girls themselves say about their use of the word 'bitch' and what they are aiming to achieve? Is it a new phenomenon and, if so, why now?

- In her public statement after the trial in British Columbia, Judge Rounthwaite conveys her dismay that "none of the bystanders had the moral strength or the courage to stand in front of Dawn-Marie Wesley, to tell the bullies to stop, go away, leave her alone." As a parent, educator or group leader, how do you handle discussions with girls who are bystanders? What are the consequences if parents and teachers are also bystanders?

### FOCUS TWO

#### **Consequences, Strategies, Insights**

In the second half of the documentary, prompted by Cindy Wesley's comment that "we want to see something good come out of this," we are introduced to a variety of parental perspectives that are also relevant for teachers and youth group leaders. Yet these strategies also reflect the complexities of personal and social change, and the long-term emotional consequences of social bullying. What new insights can be gained?

*"They're always looking for a new person to beat up and these are the toughest girls. If I ratted, I would get them kicked out of school, and then there's nothing stopping them."*

FROM Dawn-Marie's suicide note

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Questions used by Rachel Simmons to open discussion with girls on social bullying:

- What do you do when you get mad at someone?
- How do you handle it?
- What makes me feel powerful with my friends?
- How do you know who to trust?
- Are there ways that friends can be mean to each other?

### **TOPIC FOUR** **Strategies for Change**

Ask participants to identify strategies (below) featured in this part of the documentary. Based on their own experiences and what they see in the documentary, which work well? What other strategies could be added?

- education (book club, invited speakers)
- sharing information (with other parents, with schools, with girls)
- community activism (Parents Against Violence Everywhere)
- recreational activities (Girl Guides, school choir)
- relationship-building (family meetings, apologies, tough love)
- *"Girls don't know how to have healthy, productive conflict with each other. Almost every perception they have is deeply flawed, is wrong and it's causing their fights to be longer and worse than they have to be because no one teaches them how to do it."* (Rachel Simmons)
- Simmons' observation invites us to question our silences in educating girls. How can we help girls challenge their beliefs that social bullying is an acceptable way to express negative feelings, power and control? What tools can we give girls to replace those strategies with ones that are more positive? Teachers and youth group leaders might benefit from a handout of the questions Simmons uses to open dialogue.

### **TOPIC FIVE** **Challenges and Insights**

*"We have to stop thinking of this as a disciplinary problem and start thinking of it as a teaching moment. I'd love to take some of these extremely aggressive girls and show them what they look like, show them what impact they have on people."*

Shelley Hymel, from the CBC Radio *Ideas* series

*"Bullying is a learned behaviour. You have to be taught to bully. It isn't about a conflict, it isn't even about anger. It's about contempt for another human being ... It's a deliberate, hostile activity intended to harm."*

Barbara Coloroso, author of *The Bully, The Bullied, and the Bystander*

Consider what Barbara Coloroso's definition of bullying means for the road to healing. How to help girls own their behaviour, make amends and move on in a positive way with their lives is an enormous challenge for parents, educators and youth leaders in addressing social bullying.

- Invite participants to discuss the effectiveness of Katie's apologies to the girls in Montreal. How involved should parents and educators be? In what circumstances do apologies and forgiveness work best?
- The interactions between Cindy, D.W., and her grandmother reveal competing needs and beliefs in the work of healing. What is your view of Cindy's efforts to reach out to D.W.? What is your view of D.W.'s comment: "I don't really want to be a part of her life anymore"? Under what circumstances might they have a future relationship?

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- “Tell me something I can do differently to make my daughter not want to go to bed saying she’s invisible.” Hilary’s distress at her daughter Amy’s suffering as a result of bullying leads her to question the effectiveness of counselling strategies and her skills as a parent. How would you respond to Hilary? In what ways can parents and educators support each other?

### Selected Resources

#### Books

*The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School – How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence.* Barbara Coloroso (HarperCollins, 2004)

*Girl Wars: 12 Strategies That Will End Female Bullying.* Cheryl Dellasega & Charisse Nixon (Fireside, 2003) Practical advice, true stories, guidance on community actions for parents

*Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls.* Lyn Mikel Brown (NYU Press, 2003) Critical approach with good strategies for social change. For teachers, parents, counsellors

*Making a Difference in Bullying* (article). Debra Pepler & Wendy Craig (LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, 2000) ([www.arts.yorku.ca/lamarsh/pdf](http://www.arts.yorku.ca/lamarsh/pdf))

*Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls.* Rachel Simmons (Harcourt, 2002) Target and bully perspectives set in social context. A good primer on social bullying.

*Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence* Rosalind Wiseman (Crown, 2002) A look at the world of girls’ friendships, with practical advice for parents

*Social Aggression Among Girls.* Marion Underwood (Guilford, 2003) Accessible academic review of research on girls’ social bullying, and prevention

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Following the 1999 high school shooting in Taber, Alberta, teacher Bill Belsey created [www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) in collaboration with students from Grades 1-8. Internationally recognized, it is now the number one site about bullying on the Internet.

### Websites

[www.nfb.ca/itsagirlsworld](http://www.nfb.ca/itsagirlsworld)

Comprehensive companion site to the documentary.

[www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/girlsworld](http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/girlsworld)

*It's a Girls World* CBC *Ideas* series & resources.

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org)

Large site & multimedia forum.

[www.opheliaproject.org](http://www.opheliaproject.org)

Good on relational aggression; for teachers, parents, organizations.

[www.clubophelia.com](http://www.clubophelia.com)

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

[www.empowered.org](http://www.empowered.org)

Extensive curricula, programs, speakers, stories.

[www3.telus.net/morehal/pave](http://www3.telus.net/morehal/pave)

Cindy Wesley's community advocacy site.

[www.kidsareworthit.com](http://www.kidsareworthit.com)

Barbara Coloroso's strategies for home, school, community.

[www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org)

Candid advice, good extracts from Joe Kelly's book.

[www.wehavebrains.com](http://www.wehavebrains.com)

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

*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 among women in the workplace.

*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 version., additional scenes called "Living in a Girl's World", and excerpts from the *Ideas* radio documentaries. [Used by permission from CBC Radio]



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