



November 2002

# School Safety Update

National School Safety Center

## Fear of Isolation: The Hidden Culture of Girls' Aggression

*The following selected excerpts from Rachel Simmon's **Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls** (© 2002, Harcourt Inc.) describe the secret world of girls' relational aggression. The author sheds light on the subtleties that often are ignored by adults at school but yet are harmful to a healthy learning environment. (The authentic voices of the girls who were interviewed for this book have been omitted from these selected excerpts.)*

For many if not most girls, every day can be unpredictable. Alliances shift with whispers under cover of girlish intimacy and play. Many girls will not tell each other why they are sad or angry. Instead, they will employ small armies of mediators, usually willing friends who are uncomfortably caught in the middle or eager for the moments of intimacy

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## Relational Aggression: Subtle, Harmful and Hard to Recognize

Aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to harm others. While aggression can take many forms, physical forms of aggression (getting into physical fights, dating violence, violent crimes) have received the most attention from researchers, educators, and parents. They understandably are interested in protecting their children from the serious harm that physical aggression often inflicts.

Because most females (except toddlers) engage in comparatively low levels of physical aggression, the focus on physical aggression has led to the notion that females are "less aggressive" than males. However, school-aged girls are far more aggressive than has been previously believed. The preferred expression of aggression among such girls is relational rather than physical.

Relational aggression encompasses behaviors that harm others by damaging (or threatening to damage) or manipulating relationships with peers, or by injuring a person's feelings of social acceptance. Examples of relational aggression include:

- Purposefully ignoring someone when angry (giving the "silent treatment");
- Spreading rumors about a disliked classmate; and
- Telling others not to play with a certain classmate as a means of retaliation.

### The Ophelia Project

The Ophelia Project™ was founded in 1997 by a group of dedicated parents from Erie, PA, who were inspired by Mary Pipher's book, *Reviving Ophelia*. In her book, Pipher contends that in spite of the women's movement, which empowered adult women in many ways, teenage girls today have a harder time than ever before because of higher levels of violence and sexism.

The Ophelia Project is dedicated to creating a culture that is emotionally, physically, and socially safe, where girls are respected and nurtured. Through awareness, education, and advocacy, The Ophelia Project promotes positive change in families, schools, and

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### Relational Aggression...

communities. The project has created "Creating a Safe Social Climate in Our Schools," a multi-faceted training program that brings together a community of caring adults and high school students to work together to change the social culture in a school or school district. Its primary goal is to positively impact the social norms in a middle school community by recognizing the hurtful, covert behaviors of peer aggression and by identifying a more positive set of normative behaviors for educators, students, and parents.

#### Relational Aggression Facts

Relational aggression is a fairly new concept. It has only been in the last 10 years that researchers have begun to pay attention to these kinds of harmful behaviors that are currently a cause for great concern in schools in the United

States and beyond.

Here are a few facts gathered from The Ophelia Project about relational aggression:

- Children as young as preschool age use relational aggression, usually as a means to an end (e.g., getting a desired toy from a peer), rather than as retaliation.
- Relational aggression is not linked with socioeconomic status, meaning that children from all social classes use relational aggression.
- Boys are also relationally aggressive, although relational aggression is more common in girls' social circles than in boys'. Relationally aggressive boys may, in fact, be "worse off" than girls in terms of their social adjustment, so it's important not to label relational aggression as "girl aggression."
- Children who are highly relationally aggressive feel lonely and depressed, and they

are likely to be disruptive in the classroom and, according to their teachers, to get into trouble frequently. They are also highly disliked by many of their classmates, although they do have friends. These research findings suggest that, even though relational aggressors appear to be the social "leaders," they feel badly about themselves and their social situations. Researchers predict that such children are "at-risk" for serious problems, such as delinquency and early substance use.

- Children who are the frequent victims of relational aggression are rejected, depressed, and submissive, and they have a poor self-concept in the areas of social relationships and physical attractiveness.

For more information, contact The Ophelia Project, P.O. Box 8736, Erie, PA 16505-0736 or visit [www.opheliaproject.org](http://www.opheliaproject.org).

### Odd Girl Out ...

that result from lending a hand to someone in trouble.

Alternative aggressions, and the nonassertive behavior they suggest, are embedded in the daily lives of girls. A girl learns early that to voice conflict directly with another girl may result in many others ganging up against her. She learns to channel feelings of hurt and anger to avoid [confronting her opponent], internalizing feelings or sharing them with others. She learns to store away unresolved conflicts with the precision of a bookkeeper, building a stockpile that increasingly crowds her emotional landscape and social choices. She learns to connect with conflict through the discord of others, participating in group acts of aggression where individual ones have been forbidden.

#### Fear of Isolation

In my conversations with girls, many expressed fear that even everyday acts of conflict would result in the loss of the people they most cared about. They believed speaking a troubled heart was punishable. Isolation, they cautioned, was irreversible, and so too great a price to be paid.

In a world that socializes girls to prize relationships and care above all else, the fear of isolation and loss casts a long shadow over girls' decisions around conflicts, driving them away from direct confrontation. By taking uncomfortable feelings out of everyday relationships, girls come to understand such feelings as dangerous to themselves and others, worthy of being carefully shielded or perhaps not disclosed at all.

The need to consider others' feelings at the expense of their

own was a theme that ran through my interviews. No matter how upset they were, these girls said they would rather not hurt someone else's feelings. Their own needs seemed to them utterly expendable. They described [reducing] problems and feelings into "little things," calling them "unimportant," "stupid," "not worth a fight," stowing them somewhere inside, an inner room that would one day be too small to contain them.

Because so many girls lack facility with everyday conflict, expressions of anger make listeners skittish and defensive and fearful of impending isolation.

Absorbing anger is just as frightful as voicing it. The idea that they may be "at fault" or "wrong" makes them uneasy, and it can breed panic and impulsive decision making. In many cases, they grasp for whatever will move the harsh

## From The Ophelia Project™

## Tips for Dealing with Relational Aggression

**Parents**

- Involve girls in activities outside of school so they are exposed to different groups of people. Girls need people who won't judge them by the "popularity standard" of their middle and high school peers.
- Encourage relationships with adults who will appreciate them for who they are.
- Always be available to talk to girls; never make them feel like their issues aren't important.
- Remember that girls will tell you about being the victim of aggression, but won't tell you when they initiate or participate in it. Talk to your daughters about both sides of the issue.
- If your daughter is the "girl in the middle," firmly but lovingly encourage her to take the high road and support the victim, or at least NOT to take part in the aggression. This approach is hard for girls to take because they may be the next target if they don't go along, but that doesn't change what is the "right" thing to do.

**Girls**

- Remember that everyone feels that his or her social life is missing something — you are not the only one.
- You can help other girls when they are the victims. Do what you think is right, not what's cool.
- Reject the idea of revenge —remember that you are a bigger person for being able to do what's right, rather than trying to gain more popularity.
- Look for someone who is feeling left out and reach out a helping hand.
- Serve as a volunteer with The Ophelia Project.

**Teachers**

- Work inside your school to examine your school procedures.
- Form an advisory group with your colleagues to begin discussing techniques to defuse relational aggression.
- "Name it" in class. Make sure all your students know what relational aggression is, how it hurts, and that it is not acceptable in your class.
- Develop a behavioral contract with the students to stop hurting each other.
- Elicit students' help in developing a motto for the positive treatment of everyone.
- Be a positive role model of values, behaviors, etc.
- Don't ignore children hurting each other.
- Don't give up.

spotlight away from them and onto someone else; sometimes, using alliance building, they grasp for the girl who will stand with them and assure them of continuous, unconditional friendship.

Raised in a culture that prizes sweetness, what feels right to these girls is an anxious scramble to remain the "good" girl; to hold up a mirror to their friend and, instead of listening, point out a past infraction. Needless to say, such conflicts escalate swiftly, often leaving both girls filled with regret and fear.

**Fighting and Making Up**

Girls approach the rituals of fight-

ing and peacemaking with an eerie rigidity. For many, the shared knowledge that they are "in a fight" is much easier than actually going to the trouble of having one.

When the fight is concluded, one girl has usually surrendered and apologized — via note, messenger, e-mail, instant message, or in person — while the other has "won." It is not uncommon for girls, especially preadolescents, to avoid processing what happened beyond the immediate apology and relief. Many sit on the sidelines of their own discord, skirting the substance of conflict and instead clinging to process — to the rituals of a fight's beginning, middle, and

end.

The prime directive for girls is to maintain the relationship at any cost; this, along with the accompanying fear of a lost relationship, is what drives almost every step of a fight. "Sorry" may be a universal code word for a truce, but it is often perfunctory and swift, casual and automatic, like saying "bless you" when someone sneezes. However it is delivered, via written, cyber, or human medium, sorry is a razor-sharp, clean slice through a fight, shutting it down abruptly. And because this perfunctory apology often comes when a fight has not yet played itself out, because it is driven more by the fear of a lost

**Odd Girl Out ...**

relationship than the need to clear the air, sorry is often a purely procedural event, calling for peace while the source of the conflict still festers, stewing unresolved until the next trigger comes.

Under these social conditions, a cycle gets put into motion. Old conflicts are printed indelibly into memories and, unresolved, are summoned for use in the next conflict. One of the most common grievances I heard from girls was: "We remember everything. We never forget." One girl explained why: "Boys duke it out. Girls, they don't finish [the fight]. It grows bigger. And there's another fight and the next one's huge. That's what leads to people not being friends anymore."

**"Just Kidding"**

Girls who want to bypass conflict entirely may turn to other behavioral pathways. Humor is an especially popular way to injure a peer indirectly. Joking weaves a membrane of protection around the perpetrator as she jabs at a target [and then responds with an automatic "Just kidding."]

Rarely, if ever, does the targeted girl disagree. The fear of being called hypersensitive — "Can't you take a joke?" — is enormous. Nobody wants to hang out with someone like that, and everyone knows it. "What's the big deal?" can sting when you're trying to act cool.

The feeling of being crazy plagues the target of these "jokes," as she must choose between the sting of her own feelings and what she wants to believe about her friends.

**Alliance Building**

Nothing launches a girl faster, or takes her down harder, than alliance building, or "ganging up." The ultimate relational aggression,

alliance building forces the victim to face not only the potential loss of the relationship with her opponent, but with many of her friends.

It goes like this: Spotting a conflict on the horizon, a girl will begin a scrupulous underground campaign to best her opponent. Like a skilled politician, she will methodically build a coalition of other girls willing to throw their support behind her. Friends who have "endorsed" her will ignore the target, lobby others for support, or confront the target directly until she is partly or completely isolated.

Ganging up is the product of a secret relational ecosystem that flourishes in an atmosphere where direct conflict between individuals is forbidden. By engaging in conflict as a group, no one girl is ever directly responsible for her aggression. Anger is often conveyed wordlessly, and the facade of the group functions as an eave under which a girl can preserve her "nice girl" image. The loser usually ends up isolated from others, giving her exactly what she fears conflict begets: relational loss.

During alliance building, discussions spread like wildfire through circles of friends, growing in intensity until they dominate the day. Alliance building also conforms to girls' tendency to stockpile old conflicts. The perpetrator's strategy is to appeal to those who have a history with the target. Particularly where girls have known each other for many years, the perpetrator can plumb a rich history of relational trouble.

Girls have multiple incentives to become embroiled in each others' conflicts. First, alliance building offers a chance for girls to belong, even briefly, to an ad hoc clique. Jumping on another girl's bandwagon to show support in her time of conflict affords a rare moment of inclusion and comfort. Indeed, popularity itself is in large part defined by the ability of one girl to

turn her friends against someone else. If isolation is trauma for girls, there is power to be found in relationships. Having girls on her side offers a girl a sense of personal strength.

Of course, there are troubling social and individual costs to this activity. Alliance building encourages other alternative aggressions, including rumor spreading and secret telling. Alliance building can distort the conflicts, and it makes fights last longer than they would have if they had been played out directly.

Most fascinating about the ritual of alliance building is how it validates the experience of aggression for girls. Girls understand that face-to-face, one-on-one aggression with another girl is unacceptable. Together, however, it's another story. A plurality creates a safe space for girls to be mean in a culture that refuses to allow girls individual acts of aggression, making alliance building a rare intersection of peer approval with aggression.

**"Middlegirls"**

Even if a girl manages to avoid being on either end of a conflict, she may end up stuck in the middle of it, a position just as perilous. When it's clear girls have no choice but to be drawn into conflict, many adapt by resorting to a skill they know well, one they have long observed in the adult women around them. Over the treachery of taking a side, they choose to be mediators, or "middlegirls."

When a girl's friends are the two people fighting, being in the middle is often the riskiest place. With both girls lobbying for a friend's support, both friendships can become endangered, or destroyed.

Since girls often refuse to talk to one another when they're mad, middlegirls are critical players in the conflict process. By the time a middlegirl enters the lives of girls in conflict, the foes are usually run-

ning scared. The middlegirl's prime directive is to broker a compromise between the rival parties. By acting as an affectionate diplomat of sorts, she effectively rescues both girls from their isolation.

The warring girls face uncertain outcomes. A middlegirl holds their social future in her hands, and she knows it. She can just as soon gut a friendship as she can stitch it back together. A middlegirl may have her own agenda with one of the girls. Or perhaps she will lie to avoid being caught in a crossfire that is getting dangerously close. Forced to prioritize others' relationships at the expense of their own, middlegirls can quickly become part of the conflict itself.

The increasing importance of the middlegirl is a result of a social community in which open conflict is feared and forbidden. The middlegirl helps filter and tamp down the anger that would otherwise flow freely between girls. She is a human tool girls use to avoid the possibility that they will say something the wrong way, or speak words they don't mean.

### Expulsion from a Clique

In 2000, the television show "Survivor" gripped America with a contest of 16 "real" people vying to be the last one standing on a precarious deserted island. At the end of each weekly episode, viewers watched the disturbing spectacle of once-chummy survivors coldly voting one of their own off the island. Every week, fans waited eagerly to see who would be next.

"Survivor's" rite of expulsion resembles a disturbing ritual in cliques of girls. With little or no warning a clique will rise up and cut down one of its own. For the targeted girl, the sheer force of this unexpected expulsion can be startling, unpredictable, and even devastating.

In clique expulsions, punishments range from pretending the

girl never existed to embarking on campaigns of scorching cruelty. These expulsions may seem sudden, arbitrary, and just plain mean. Bystanders may well wonder how a group could turn against one of their own with such intensity. Yet if we listen to the voices of girls, it does not take long to understand the intensity. Because these girls lack the tools to deal with everyday feelings of anger, hurt, betrayal, and jealousy, their feelings stew and fester before boiling to the surface and unleashing torrents of rage.

The salience of relationship in girls' lives makes their practice of imposing isolation worthy of our attention. Girls experience isolation as especially terrifying. Since girls earn social capital by their relationships with others, isolation

cuts to the core of their identities. For most girls, there is little more painful than to stand alone at recess or lunch.

In discord between girls, gestures of conflict often contradict speech, confounding their intended targets. In such a universe, for a girl to trust her own truths, her own version of events, can be excruciatingly difficult. At the cusp of their most tumultuous years of development, girls cling tightly to one another to know, as one told me, "that we're not crazy." Yet it is their close peer relationships, and the rules against truth telling, that often trigger these feelings.

*Excerpts from **Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls** by Rachel Simmons, © 2002, courtesy of Harcourt Inc.*

## Resources on Alternative Forms of Aggression

**Behind the Mask: Destruction and Creativity in Women's Aggression** by Dana Crowley Jack, Harvard University Press, 1999.

**Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut** by Emily White, Scribner, 2002.

**Men, Women and Aggression** by Anne Campbell, Basic Books, 1991.

**Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls** by Rachel Simmons, Harcourt, Inc., 2002.

**Of Mice and Women: Aspects of Female Aggression**, edited by Kaj Bjorkqvist and Pirkko Niemela, Academic Press, 1992.

**One of the Guys: Girls, Gangs, and Gender** by Jody Miller, Oxford University Press, 2000.

**Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and**

**Other Realities of Adolescence** by Rosalind Wiseman, Crown Publishers, 2002.

**Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls** by Mary Pipher, Ballantine Books, 1995.

**The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do—Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt** by Sharon Lamb, The Free Press, 2002.

**Woman's Inhumanity to Woman** by Phyllis Chesler, Avalon Publishing Group, 2001.

"Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment" Crick, N. R., & Grotpeter, J.K. (1995). *Child Development*, 66, 710-722.

"The role of overt aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior in the prediction of children's future social adjustment" Crick, N. R. (1996). *Child Development*, 67, 2317-2327.

Gender Issues:

**What About Girls? Are They Really Not Aggressive?**

Many of the books or papers on aggression in children focus primarily on boys. People often assume that boys are more aggressive than girls. In fact, many of the research studies that examine aggressive children only include boys.

**A More Subtle Aggression**

In her recent work, Dr. Nikki Crick of the University of Minnesota has challenged the assumption that girls are not aggressive. Dr. Crick argues that girls have not been found to be aggressive in previous studies because researchers have been looking at the wrong kind of aggression.

Most of the previous research, as well as interventions with aggressive, peer-rejected children, define aggression as either physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt another person. Crick believes that girls, in general, do not engage in this type of aggression against their peers. They do, however, employ relational aggression.

Relational aggression is behavior specifically intended to hurt another child's friendships or feelings of inclusion in a peer group. It is deliberate manipulation on the part of a child to damage another child's peer relationships.

Crick's work with elementary school children has demonstrated that the degree of aggressiveness exhibited by girls has been underestimated, mainly because it is difficult to measure. Clearly, when one child hits another, that child is behaving in an overtly aggressive way. In contrast, how do you tell when one child has started a rumor about another?

Because adults are not always privy to the comings and goings of children's peer groups, they may be unaware of any relational aggression. Although Crick detected

overlap in teachers and children's reports of relational aggression in the classrooms where she conducted her research, she did not detect complete overlap: Relational aggression occurred without the knowledge of the teacher.

**Links to Peer Aggression**

Using measures completed both by teachers and children, Crick found that girls engaged in higher levels of relational aggression than boys. Girls who engaged in relational aggression exhibited a number of adjustment difficulties, and had self-reported higher levels of depression, loneliness, and social isolation than their peers. In addition, peers disliked relationally aggressive girls more than other girls.

Girls who engaged in relational aggression early in the school year were more likely to be rejected by their peers later in the school year than girls who did not engage in relational aggression early on. Not surprisingly, children who demonstrated relational aggression at one time point were likely to continue using it throughout the school year.

Because research finds relational aggression to be a relatively stable behavior in children, Crick's research has implications for practitioners who conduct interventions with peer-rejected children. Clearly, children who engage in relational aggression are candidates for peer relationship intervention programs to prevent future peer rejection.

**Friendship Characteristics**

Previous research on children's peer relationships has shown that having at least one friend buffers a child from some of the negative effects of peer rejection. Because relational aggression involves ma-

nipulating friendships, Crick and her colleague, J.K. Grotperter, were interested in examining the friendships of relationally aggressive children. Friendships of relationally aggressive children did not differ from those of nonaggressive children on measures of caring, companionship, and helping one another. Relationally aggressive children's friendships did differ from nonrelationally aggressive children in several ways, however.

First, relationally aggressive children and their best friends reported higher levels of intimacy in their friendships than did other children. This high level of intimacy probably puts the nonaggressive friend at risk because the relationally aggressive child has ready access to important, private information about the other child. A relationally aggressive child could easily use threats to disclose the information to manipulate her friend. Second, a high level of exclusivity exists in the friendship with the relationally aggressive child. Again, this may put the other friend at risk to be manipulated because she may have limited friends to turn to as alternatives.

A final feature of these friendships is their high degree of internal relational aggression. Relationally aggressive children direct many of their aggressive behaviors toward their friends. These findings are dramatically different from those of overtly aggressive children and their friends. Overtly aggressive children tend to behave aggressively toward those external to the friendship rather than toward each other. The aggressive behavior is directed outside the dyad.

*From the Human Development and Family Life Bulletin, A Review of Research and Practice, Summer 1997, by Nina S. Mounts, Ph.D.; www.hec.ohio-state.edu/familife/bulletin/volume.3/bull26b.*

**Gender Issues:****What About Boys? Are They Really Not Emotional?**

While girls often live behind a fear of isolation and loss of relationships, many boys live behind the fear of shame. According to William Pollack, Ph.D., co-director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School and author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, “Many boys live behind a mask of masculine bravado that hides the genuine self in order to conform to society’s expectations.”

Pollack contends that schools, parents, and society fail boys by demanding that they fit into an unwritten “Boy Code.” The code challenges boys to be self-reliant and confident, risk takers, powerful and dominant, and unemotional. The toughening process begins as early as preschool, and continues into adulthood. Boys can become confused, frustrated, lonely, sad, and disconnected as they learn to bury feelings and behavior that would lead to taunts or teasing.

The negative feelings or problems that are often buried below the surface become obvious only when boys go “over the edge” and get into trouble at school, start to fight with friends, take drugs or abuse alcohol, are diagnosed with clinical depression or attention deficit disorder, or erupt into physical violence.

**How to Get Behind the Mask**

In his book, Pollack offers five practical steps for parents to learn how to understand a boy’s deepest feelings and experience, to come to know who he really is, and to help him love and feel comfortable with his genuine self. The starting place for parents — as well as for teachers and other mentors — is to become sensitive to the early signs of masking feelings. These signs include everything from bad grades to rowdy behavior, from

“seeming quiet” to manifesting symptoms of depression, from using drugs or alcohol to becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence.

The second step to getting behind the mask is finding new ways to talk to boys so that they don’t feel afraid or ashamed to share their true feelings. The third step is to learn to be aware of and accept a boy’s personal emotional schedule. Boys who do share their feelings often take longer to do so than girls do. If parents learn to become sensitive to a boy’s unique timing, they become better at respecting how he copes with emotions and make it more possible for him to be honest about the feelings behind the mask.

The fourth step involves “connection through action.” This means that rather than nudging a boy to sit down and share his feelings, the parent or other significant adult begins by simply joining him in an activity that he enjoys. Often by simply doing something with the boy, a connection is forged that then enables him to open up and reveal his feelings in the middle of the activity.

Finally, parents or other adults can often help boys discuss their inner thoughts and emotions by telling them stories about their own experiences. By discovering that adults too have felt scared, embarrassed, or disappointed, the boy begins to feel less ashamed of his own vulnerable feelings. He discovers that significant adults in his life understand, love, and respect the real boy in him.

**How Schools Can Help**

For schools, Pollack suggests that getting behind the mask to help a boy requires several specific additional steps. First, teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, and others need to learn

about how the “Boy Code” operates. They need to be trained to understand how this code restricts boys from being their true selves and how it pushes them to mask their true selves and feelings.

Second, Pollack recommends that schools assign to each boy an adult mentor who is sensitive and empathic to that boy’s unique personality and whose interests mirror those of the boy. By assigning a mentor, the boy gains an adult friend with whom he can talk — somebody with whom he might feel comfortable sharing his deepest feelings and thoughts.

Third, schools need to monitor closely those areas where the Boy Code operates most intensely. These include bus rides (where boys are often completely unsupervised), gym class, recess, and extracurricular sports. In such situations, teachers and other supervisors need to be especially vigilant.

Fourth, when teachers or others do intervene to help, it is important that they use an approach that does not cause additional shame, embarrassment or humiliation for the boy. For example, when a boy is the victim of a lot of teasing, the adult supervisor might take aside the boys involved individually to investigate what’s happening in the particular situation rather than calling attention to the problem in front of other students.

Finally, schools need to give boys a “report card” that covers not only their academic progress and classroom conduct but also their social life. By keeping an eye on a boy’s social adjustment, schools are much better able to stay in touch with a boy’s genuine emotional experience.

From *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by William Pollack, Henry Holt & Company, Incorporated. See also [www.williampollack.com](http://www.williampollack.com).

## America's Safe Schools Week 2002 proclaimed by 29 Governors

This year, 29 governors joined the National School Safety Center in proclaiming October 20-26 as **America's Safe Schools Week**. In doing so, they encouraged the citizens of their states and commonwealths to join the effort to provide safe and peaceful schools that promote the development of knowledgeable, responsible and productive citizens.

In the words of Texas Governor Rick Perry:

America's future depends on how well its children are prepared to assume the reins of leadership and forge a future of success. Like the generations that came before them, tomorrow's leaders will be challenged to pave the way for the generations to come by building upon a foundation of excellence.

Our schools help our children strive for such excellence as they seek to realize their full potential. It is therefore incumbent upon us to ensure that schools are safe, secure settings for academic and personal enrichment, where fair and effective standards for discipline and good citizenship are practiced and reinforced.

Progress on this issue will continue to demand community-wide cooperation. Such coordination must include ongoing attention to the wide ranging issues that affect school safety, from substance abuse and gangs to poor discipline and absenteeism.

Across the nation, an education campaign will be conducted in the month of October to focus attention on this important issue. In support of this endeavor, I urge all [citizens] to join in the effort to ensure that our children's schools are the safest they can be. In nurturing, positive environments, young [people] will have every opportunity to learn and mature into responsible adults, equipped with the necessary foundation for success.

**NSSC wishes to acknowledge and applaud the following governors who formally adopted resolutions and proclamations to promote America's Safe Schools Week 2002 within their states:**

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