

# *Safeguarding at More House*

## Parent Bulletin February 2017

### Managing Friendships

One of the topics that girls are studying as part of the PSHEE (personal, social, health and economic education) programme this term is 'friendships'. The approach to this topic varies from one year group to another as follows:

- Year 7 are learning to understand that there are different types of positive relationships and discussing how to maintain healthy friendships.
- Year 8 are focussing on family relationships, the pressure of relationships, intimacy and consent.
- Year 9 are dealing with discrimination, the emotional aspects of relationships and how to manage pressure from those around you.
- Years 10 and 11 are studying equal relationships and the ability to be assertive and resist pressure.
- They are exploring the effects and impact of family breakdown and bereavement and discussing strategies to help cope with these changes.

Through the work in PSHEE we try to demonstrate how to build healthy and positive relationships and to avoid behaviours that could be described as 'relational aggression' – which unfortunately is common amongst teenage girls.

Writing on an educational blog, Linda Stade puts it thus:

The adolescent years are a crucial time for adolescent girls as friendships become far more important to them. Many worry about friendships and their social status. Relational aggression has a profound effect on self-esteem, anxiety levels and depression.

Relational aggression may include:

- Exclusion
- Gossip
- The silent treatment
- Belittling (Often hidden behind the expression 'just joking')
- Conditional friendship

Girls learn from a very young age that when you create exclusion you create inclusion. And if you can knock someone else off balance emotionally, it defines you as balanced. It is an interesting, if not disturbing, phenomena to watch in a school. From the cliques of socially elite 'it' girls to the mixed mob of outsiders, there is a power dynamic constantly at play. None of this has anything to do with friendship. Hence the creation of the term 'frenemies'.

## How can parents help?

It isn't all hopeless. This is learned behaviour and learned behaviour can often be unlearned. But there are commitments that need to be made by parents. We need to:

1. Make friendship cool. Modelling by adults is the most powerful way of doing that. Talk about the great qualities of your friends to your kids. Too often we niggle at our friends' weaknesses instead of verbally celebrating their greatness.
2. Explicitly teach kindness, compassion and empathy. We know kids have the capacity for these qualities. They are often evident at home or with people of different ages, but they are not being engaged in their relationships with peers.
3. Explicitly teach emotional intelligence. Help kids recognise who is loyal and who is safe. Talk to them about relational aggression. They should be able to recognise it and name it.
4. Teach kids to be:
  - Upstanders – These are people who stand up for victims. It's been proven that if you can stand up to a bully for 8 seconds, they are likely to back down. Some kids are stronger than others. We need to make it cool to be strong and able to defend others.
  - Distracters – It is important that kids be able to recognise when a mean moment is coming and distract participants away from it. It's a skill that adults eventually learn themselves, but if kids are given instruction on how to do this it can be learnt more quickly.
  - Supporters – Kids can be encouraged to do something as small as make eye contact with a victim while aggression is happening. That shows the victim that the behaviour is seen and acknowledged. It makes the victim seen and acknowledged. They aren't alone.
5. Carefully manage on-line activity. A lot of relational aggression happens out of school hours, in cyberspace. Kids need a break from their friendship groups.
6. Create opportunities for children to meet lots of new people outside of school and get to know them well. Sport is a good way to achieve this. Team mates are people you have to understand and communicate with. Assumptions about people get tested.
7. Please.... Never say, "That's just girls", or "boys will be boys" for that matter. We can be better than that. Or at least we can try.

## Support mechanisms in school:

- Peer mentor system - The year 10 Peer Mentors are available every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in LB7. The mentors have received training from Childline and are able to provide support and advice for younger pupils who may be struggling with friendships.
- Concern form - All girls can report concerns via the 'concern form' which is available under the pupil area on Firefly.
- Talk to your tutor or other member of staff.
- Talk to the DSL (designated safeguarding lead) – Mr Keeley and Miss Brown are responsible for safeguarding in the school.
- Counsellor – girls can be referred to the school counsellor via Miss Brown.