

“Mean Girls” Can Start Early

The movie “Mean Girls” portrayed relational aggression in high school girls. This is one form of bullying that we typically don’t think of as bullying behavior. A recent study found that this kind of aggression or bullying can occur in children as young as four and five years of age. These children have a mix of positive and negative characteristics; socially skilled, popular and conscientious while also being aggressive, dominant and even arrogant. They are “controversial” children who are well liked by some peers and disliked by others.

A few of the relational aggressive tactics used by these preschoolers, especially girls, include:

- Not allowing a specific child to play with the group.
- Demanding other children not play with a specific child.
- Threatening not to play with a child unless certain needs or demands are met.
- Refusing to listen to someone they are mad at. The aggressive child may even cover their ears.

The research even found that preschoolers are capable of even more sophisticated strategies such as spreading a rumor or telling secrets.

Providers can do their part by re-directing children to other behavior, encouraging children to think of what the other child is feeling and having them tell the other child they are sorry.

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Source: **Marriage & Families**, Brigham Young University.*