Recently, developmental researchers have begun to examine the effects of relational aggression. Relational aggression is a type of aggressive behavior that intends to damage another person’s relationships with his or her peers (friends and classmates). This behavior is seen at all ages but is believed to peak in early adolescence. Additionally, although this sort of aggression is often seen in girls, it is important to note that boys may exhibit these behaviors as well.

Research on relational aggression suggests that it can harm the relationally aggressive child and the victim. Relationally aggressive children are at risk of being rejected by their peers and experiencing problems with depression and anxiety. In addition, relational aggression is associated with higher levels of alcohol use in older adolescents. Victims of relational aggression report higher levels of loneliness, higher levels of depression, and lower self-esteem.

Here are some examples of relationally aggressive behavior that parents can watch for in adolescents:

- Gossiping or spreading rumors about peers.
- Intentionally excluding a peer from a group activity.
- Revealing secrets about peers to others in order to damage their reputation.
- Telling a friend that unless they do what he/she wants, their friendship will be over.
- Giving peers the “silent treatment” when there is a disagreement.
- Deliberately attempting to embarrass a peer in front of others.
- Attempting to steal a peer’s dating partner.

If you notice these behaviors occurring or your child reports being a victim of these behaviors, it is a good idea to contact your child’s school counselor so that the appropriate steps toward intervention can be taken.