GIRLFIGHT

STUDENT EDITION

GIRL FIGHT ABOUT:

Internet "hits" take on a whole new meaning in the Lifetime Original Movie, *Girl Fight*. Inspired by a true story, *Girl Fight* follows the story of 16-year-old Haley Macklin (Jodelle Ferland) as she attempts to navigate the intimidating halls of high school and discovers getting "in" with the popular senior girls is harder than she expected.

Frustrated by feeling left out, Haley thinks nothing of it when she criticizes the seniors by posting a note about them on a social network site. But when she comes to one of the senior's aid one afternoon, they strike up an unexpected friendship and Haley soon becomes wrapped up in being part of their crowd, straining her relationship with her parents Melissa (Anne Heche) and Ray (James Tupper) when she begins to come home late, talk back and disobey their rules.

Ultimately, the girls discover Haley's online comments about them. Betrayed, they decide to make her pay by ambushing her and beating her up on camera with plans to post the video online to gain some internet fame. Devastated by their daughter's brutal beating and footage of it surfacing online, Melissa and Ray put their hope into the authorities for justice in punishing Haley's former friends to help their daughter get her life back on track in this story about peer pressure, media scrutiny and forgiveness.

For more about the movie, visit mylifetime.com

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FACT:

VIOLENCE AMONG TEEN GIRLS IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY SEVERE.

A generation ago only 1 in 10 episodes of violent bullying behavior by teens was perpetrated by girls. Today that number has grown to 1 in 4.

TALK ABOUT IT

1. Haley is the youngest person in her senior class in high school. **Have you experienced situations where you felt excluded or singled out because of your age?** What are the pros and cons of skipping a grade?

2. Apart from her friend, Dana, Haley feels isolated from the members of her class. **What are some current songs that you relate to which express how stressful life as a teen can be?** What are some useful ways to deal with feeling isolated?

3. Haley is inducted into Alexa's posse after taking care of the girls' bill at the café. **In your school, how do the various social groups form and what "rites of initiation" are involved?** Did Haley feel used or accepted by Alexa and her friends? What else did she feel?

4. As the story develops, Haley's relationship with Dana changes, as does the relationship between Alexa and some of her friends. **What causes such sudden shifts in friendships and alliances?** What are some qualities that define a true friend?

5. Throughout this movie, Haley's parents struggle with how best to support her and communicate with her while also setting limits. **Looking at it through your parents' or caregivers' eyes, how have they struggled with you?** If you decide to have children, how do you want to parent them when they are teens?

6. Alexa and her friends (except for Becca) enjoy the notoriety they receive when they return to school after being released from juvenile detention. **When have you witnessed bad behavior being rewarded by schoolmates, the media or your community?** How do you feel about what Alexa and her posse did to Haley?

WHEN HAVE YOU WITNESSED BAD BEHAVIOR BEING REWARDED BY SCHOOLMATES, THE MEDIA OR YOUR COMMUNITY?

7. Of all the girls, Becca is the most reluctant to go along with the plan to physically hurt Haley. **Why do some people act as bystanders to behavior that they do not approve?** What could Becca have done differently and how could it have changed the outcome?

8. Haley places her relationship with Dana "on hold" when she becomes friends with Alexa, and yet, in the end, Dana remains true to her friendship with Haley. **Who in your life has remained a true friend to you?** What risk was Dana taking in insisting that Haley watch the video of the violence against her?

9. Haley makes an extremely difficult decision about prosecuting the girls who assaulted her. **Do you feel Haley made the right choice in the end? Why or why not?**

10. Alexa and her posse face the possibility of prison for their actions. **What consequences have you seen imposed for acts of violence by teens?** What do you think is the appropriate consequence for Alexa and the group of girls?

FACT:

AS MANY AS 900,000 STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL ARE CYBER-BULLIED BY THEIR PEERS EACH YEAR IN THE UNITED STATES ALONE.

THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

Being the target of emotional and physical violence has many consequences. A person can become perpetually afraid, engage in self-blame, have difficulty sleeping and experience a host of other negative thoughts and behaviors. **WITHOUT ADEQUATE SUPPORT, THE PAIN FROM THIS KIND OF AN EXPERIENCE CAN LEAD TO RAGE AND TO A DESIRE FOR REVENGE.**

THE ESCALATION CYCLE

PAIN
Physical and emotional hurt resulting from mistreatment or violence against you.

RAGE
Anger which can be directed at oneself or toward others (not just those who have hurt you).

REVENGE
Thinking about or acting on the desire to get back at those who hurt you, which leads to more pain and the cycle beginning again.

A NEW MEDIA WORLD

Cell phone video recordings, web postings, and a frenzied media all play parts in this movie.

REMEMBER THAT ONCE YOU HIT "SEND," YOUR WORDS AND IMAGES ARE NO LONGER YOUR OWN.

THEY CAN BE USED AGAINST YOU IMMEDIATELY OR AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE, PERHAPS EVEN YEARS LATER.

You may have little control over what is printed, aired or posted by others, but you alone are responsible for your own actions.

BEFORE YOU HIT "SEND" OR UPLOAD IMAGES OR VIDEO TO THE WEB, THINK ABOUT WHO MIGHT SEE IT AND THE EFFECT IT CAN HAVE ON YOUR LIFE AND THE LIVES OF THOSE YOU LOVE.

POP QUIZ — WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF...

- a friend sent you a text or posting containing information about someone that you knew was NOT true?
- a group of friends were gathered around a video showing schoolmates fighting and everyone was laughing and cheering?
- you witnessed a fight in the hallway at school?
- you were aware that friends were planning to ambush someone with whom they had a grudge?
- a group of friends started picking on another student in your school?

KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT

Violence and mistreatment can take many forms. Some (like cyber bullying) are often nearly invisible when they are happening. **MISTREATMENT GENERALLY FALLS INTO FIVE CATEGORIES, DEFINED BY HOW THEY MAKE THE TARGET FEEL:**

EXCLUSION:

Anything that is said, done (or not done), texted or posted online that **makes someone feel left out.**

PUTDOWNS:

Using words, rumors and gossip, looks, gestures and/or electronic means in ways that **make someone feel sad, scared or hurt.**

BULLYING:

Using words, postures, gestures, electronic messages, and/or position to **make someone feel afraid.** It can also be an implied or explicit threat to hurt. Bullying is generally repeated over time.

UNWANTED PHYSICAL CONTACT:

Touching (in any manner), pushing or hitting that **makes someone feel violated.** It doesn't have to be painful to be a violation.

ACTS AGAINST CAMPUS:

Acts that affect large groups of people, not just a specific few, such as vandalism and graffiti (racial or ethnic slurs, for example). **These acts may leave people feeling hopeless or scared.**

ACT NOW

1. DON'T JOIN IN AND/OR ENCOURAGE THE MISTREATMENT WITH YOUR LAUGHTER OR SILENCE.
2. GET HELP FROM A TRUSTED ADULT.
3. ASSESS THE SITUATION AND ASK YOURSELF:

- Do I know the aggressors well enough that I can say something to them without putting myself in danger? If so, speak up! If not, get help!
- Is the environment such that if I do speak up and the aggressors do not respond in a positive manner, I can easily get away from the scene? If not, get help.

BULLYING OR BEING A BYSTANDER TO ACTS OF MISTREATMENT IS NEVER OKAY.

BY THE NUMBERS

In the past twenty years, the rate of **VIOLENT OFFENSES BY GIRLS HAS RISEN 157%** in the United States, compared to a rise of 71% among boys.

ALMOST 33% of all girls are involved in bullying, either as the aggressor or a target.

43% of girls fear harassment in **SCHOOL BATHROOMS.**

A girl is bullied every **7 MINUTES.**

DID YOU KNOW?

7,000 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL EVERY DAY.

10% of these students report that it is because of bullying-related incidents.

When bullying among girls occurs:

IN 85% OF INSTANCES THERE IS NO INTERVENTION;

in 11% there is peer intervention; and in only 4% there is teacher intervention.

CLEARING UP THE MYTHS

MYTH #1 – Despite all the recent media attention around the issue of bullying and mistreatment by teens, bullying is rare and not the norm at most schools.

FACT: Every day in the United States, 160,000 students stay home from school because they are afraid of the treatment they will receive from peers.

MYTH #2 – Bullies are mostly loners with few social skills.

FACT: Most teen aggressors are highly sophisticated youth who are trying to climb the social ladder in school. Girls who bully tend to be "popular" girls who are well-liked by adults.

MYTH #3 – Girls mostly mistreat others through "relational violence," which includes exclusion and saying or posting hurtful and humiliating things about each other.

FACT: Relational violence often leads to physical aggression. Violence among girls has increased in the last generation from only 10% of all teen violent episodes to 25%.

GET HELP

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COPING WITH PEER AGGRESSION VISIT:

- www.opheliaproject.org
- www.seversonsisters.org
- www.daughters-sisters.org
- www.smartgirl.org
- www.desiretoinspire.org
- www.safeschoolambassadors.org

These materials were developed in association with

Community Matters

Community Matters is a 501c3 non-profit organization that serves schools and youth serving organizations throughout the nation by providing consulting, speaking and training in the areas of bullying and violence, prevention, whole school climate improvement and youth empowerment.

For more information visit: www.community-matters.org

SOURCES

The National Institutes of Health | The US Department of Justice
The Department of Juvenile Justice | www.community-matters.org
The Society for Research in Child Development | www.relationalaggression.com
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