

Managing Gossip and Rumors Michelle Anthony, MA, PhD

Like cyberbullying, rumor-spreading is an anonymous way for girls to wield devastating social power. Some ways the Four Steps can help:

Steps 1 & 2: Observe and Connect:

Whether your daughter comes to you or you notice concerning behaviors, *observe* and *connect* before acting.

- *Listen* to how your daughter feels, what about the rumor upsets her, what *she* feels the scope or consequence is, etc. Your blood may be boiling, or you may want to help her brush it off, but first—just listen and *empathize*.

Steps 3 & 4: Guide and Support to Act:

As a team, help your child understand her situation and how she wishes to respond, letting her practice with you and choose her own actions.

- Highlight your child's role and choices:
 - Emphasize that relationships are between individuals, not groups. However many people know the rumor, solutions come from connecting and talking with peers she cares about. Help her decide what actions to take, and with whom.
 - If she started a rumor or passed one on, help her understand (without judgment) how this makes her part of the mean-girl cycle.
 - If her friend is hurting, help her know how to support without fanning the flames or starting a “friend war.” by listening and helping her friend choose actions *she* wants to take.
- Provide outside supports:
 - Involve your daughter in a unifying, non-competitive activity (e.g., Girl Scouts, theater). She'll make friends outside of school (where rumors are less likely to be spread or known) and be part of a team-building process.
 - Practice assertiveness skills: head up, shoulders back, neutral voice, etc.
 - Role play what she might say, and how.
- Depersonalize:
 - Help her understand that all children have difficulty keeping secrets, and friends often change in elementary school. Emphasize the importance of only sharing information she is comfortable with many people knowing.
 - Point out that jealousy is often at the root of rumor spreading.