

# Bullying Abuse: The Role of Peers

## Did you Know?

- Students report that bullying happens much more often than do school staff and parents.
- Peers see 85% of bullying!
  - Most join in, some ignore, and a small number intervene<sup>1,2</sup>
- Common reasons peers do not do something include:<sup>3</sup>
  - “Not my business” or the person should handle it alone
  - Fear of retaliation for being a “rat”
  - Belief that intervening will not help or make it worse
- Friends can help protect against the negative effects of bullying.<sup>4</sup>

## The Bystander Experience

- A bystander is someone who witnesses one child bully another.
- A bystander can also suffer negative effects from witnessing bullying, including anxiety, depression, guilt, or helplessness.<sup>5</sup>
- The “bystander effect:”
  - Described by psychologists as a diffusion of responsibility (when surrounded by people, one person is less likely to take responsibility during a negative situation)
- Studies have revealed that when bystanders intervene, bullying behavior stops more than half of the time.<sup>6</sup>

## Behaviors of a *Hurtful* Bystander

- Instigate the bullying by prodding the person bullying to begin.
- Encourage the child doing the bullying by laughing, cheering, or making comments.
- Join in the bullying.
- Passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing, providing the audience the child doing the bullying craves and the silent acceptance that allows that person to continue his or her hurtful behavior.<sup>8</sup>

## Behaviors of a *Helpful* Bystander (or *Upstander*)

- Directly intervene by discouraging the person bullying, defending the target, or redirecting the situation away from the bullying (for example, getting students to participate in another activity on the playground rather than watching the bullying).
- Get help by rallying support from peers to stand up against bullying or by reporting the bullying to adults.
- Reach out to a peer who has been bullied or who is isolated to check in, spend time with, and/or see if he or she is OK.

## Five Things a Bystander Considers before Intervening<sup>7</sup>

- Notice the event.
- Interpret the situation as one that requires help.
- Accept responsibility for intervening.
- Know how to help.
- Implement the decision made about intervening.

## How Adults can Help Students take a Stand Against a Peer who Bullies

- Maintain an open, supportive and trustworthy relationship with the child.
  - Children who defend their peers that are bullied are more likely to describe having an open, supportive relationship with their mothers<sup>9</sup>
- Help child recognize difference between bullying, playful teasing, and everyday conflicts.
- Talk about bullying and relationships frequently; include expectations for how he or she treats other children.
  - For example, encourage child to eat lunch with others and organize recess games to include everyone
- Encourage the child to do something when he or she sees bullying! Teach him or her to tell a trusted adult, say something to the peer doing the bullying, band together with others to say it is not OK, or reach out to child who has been bullied.
- Role-play different bullying situations with the child and help him or her act them out.
- Encourage the child to report cyberbullying to an adult and save the bullying message.
  - Many social media sites have mechanisms for reporting abuse
- Teach the child to inspire empathy with the target (ask if they are okay, spend time with them, or simply say sorry that it happened).

## Helpful Resources

- **Stop Bullying Now Youth Leaders' Toolkit**  
[www.stopbullying.gov/teens/stand\\_against\\_bullying/youth\\_leader\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.stopbullying.gov/teens/stand_against_bullying/youth_leader_toolkit.pdf)
- **Education.com Bullying at School and Online**  
<http://www.education.com/topic/school-bullying-teasing/>
- **Cartoon Network Stop Bullying Speak Up!**  
<http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/promos/stopbullying/index.html>

## References

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