

The Role of Bystanders in Bullying

This activity is for pupils from Year 5 upwards and should take about an hour.

Aim:

To highlight strategies and interventions that young people (YP) can use if they witness a bullying situation.

Intended learning outcomes:

- An increased knowledge of the role of bystanders in bullying situations
- An understanding of techniques to enable young people to safely intervene in a bullying situation
- An increased awareness of sources of support available to young people who witness bullying or who are being bullied

Suggested Success Measures:

- Over a period of time more young people are reporting bullying they have witnessed to adults and adults are intervening.
- Young people report that they feel much safer in their school.
- A mapping exercise before the lesson and two months later shows that young people feel there are fewer unsafe areas in school.
- Young people report (either verbally or in a questionnaire) that they are more likely to support someone they see being bullied and know the range of strategies they can take that will be the most effective.

You will need:

Post it notes

Pens

Flipchart paper or notice board

Photograph(s) of bullying situations (enclosed)

Intervention cards (enclosed)

How to do it: There are 5 exercises in this session:

1. What is bullying?

Ensure young people understand the term 'bullying'. Key features of bullying are the intention to hurt, repetition and imbalance of power. The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as the intentional, repetitive or persistent hurting of one person by another, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power.

Bullying can take different forms, such as:

- **Physical**, e.g. kicking, hitting, taking and damaging belongings
- **Verbal**, e.g. name calling, taunting, threats, making offensive remarks
- **Indirect**, e.g. spreading nasty stories about someone, gossiping, excluding people from social groups
- **Cyber**, e.g. sending nasty or threatening texts or e-mails, phone call bullying via mobile phone, picture/video clip bullying, chat-room bullying, bullying through Instant Messaging (IM) and bullying via websites.

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2. What is a Bystander?

Ask the group to think of other words to describe a bystander. Examples are witness, onlooker and observer.

3. Would you support the bullied person?

This activity asks YP to consider reasons why they would or would not support the person being bullied and in what circumstances. *(Please note: this part of the session is not discussing how you could support the bullied person, as this is considered in part 4).*

Split the YP into small groups. Provide each group with a photograph(s), which illustrates a bullying incident. Ask the YP to consider reasons why they would not support the person being bullied in the photograph and write these on post it notes. These should be placed on flipchart paper or a notice board under a heading 'No support'. Allow 10 minutes for this activity. Facilitate a discussion on the reasons they have given on why they would not support the bullied person.

Next, ask the YP to consider reasons why they should intervene and ask them to write these on post it notes and put under a heading 'Support'. Allow a further 10 minutes for this activity. Facilitate a further discussion on the reasons they have given in favour of supporting the bullied person.

4. What could you do?

This activity is to give YP some ideas of interventions they could use to stop a person being bullied.

In small groups again ask the YP to order the 9 statements provided based on their likely effectiveness. Allow 10 minutes for this activity. Facilitate a discussion on why the group have decided that some strategies may be more effective than others.

5. Hot Spots!

Offer the YP the chance to tell you where the bullying hot spots are at their school, youth club etc. You could provide a box or similar, so they can put their suggestions in anonymously. Make sure you follow up on this activity by informing the school or club of the YP concerns. It may also be useful to have a drawing or plan of the school/club and people mark with coloured stickers for severe, mild etc where the hotspots are.

Suggestions to help discussion:

Bystanders play a very important role in bullying situations. Bullying will stop in less than 10 seconds nearly 60% of the time when peers intervene (Pepler).

See attached sheet entitled 'Role of Bystanders in Bullying'. Ideas to consider on the intervention strategies are also included.

Issues to consider:

Support sources available, e.g. ChildLine, Kidscape (see Role of Bystanders information sheet)

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Final Message to YP: Don't just stand there – do something! It could make a difference. Some young people have come up with the following straplines, which could also be discussed: 'If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem'

'Get help, do not look on, do something'

'Your help can make a difference'

The photos below could be copied either to show on white board or as photos for children to look at and discuss (use the ones relevant to ages).





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Ideas for discussion – copy these on to card

Tell an adult.

Tell an older child.

Encourage the bullied person to tell someone.

Show your disapproval to the bully.

Walk away and ignore the bullying.

Tell the bully to stop, if it is safe to do so.

Use violence against the bully to make them stop.

Go and get a group of mates to help you stop the bullying.

Form a friendship group for the person being bullied to make sure they are not isolated.

As a bystander 'What could you do?' - Ideas to consider

- **Tell an Adult:**

Most adults will want to know about anything that is worrying. You may need to be persistent to ensure that the adult recognises that something needs to be done. If necessary ask them what they are going to do.

- **Tell an older child:**

It may be a good idea for a young person to talk to someone older to tell them about the bullying. They may be able to support in stopping the bullying or advising what to do next.

- **Encourage the bullied person to tell someone:**

It is important that the bullied person talks to someone that they can trust and tell about the bullying. It is hoped that this person will help the bullied person think of ways of making the bullying stop.

- **Show your disapproval to the bully:**

You can do this by your lack of interest shown in your face or saying something to them. By telling the bully that you do not think what they are doing is right, you can make them think twice about their behaviour. It may make the bullying stop.

- **Walk away and ignore the bullying**

If you see someone being bullied, it may be tempting to ignore it. However, young people should always try and stop it. If they do nothing then they are saying that the bullying is ok. However walking away does deprive the bully of an audience.

- **Tell the bully to stop, if it is safe to do so:**

Be assertive and tell the bully to stop. It may make them think twice about their actions. It is important to make sure that the young person is safe and the bully does not take action against them for speaking out.

- **Use violence against the bully to make them stop:**

It is important to understand that using violence against the bully could get the young person into trouble. This is not the answer to stop bullying!

- **Go and get a group of mates to help you stop the bullying:**

This can be a very effective way of stopping bullies. A young person and a group of mates can tell the bully that what they are doing is wrong. By acting in a group it can be less scary than speaking out alone. This is the power of the bystander.

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- **Form a friendship group for the person being bullied to make sure they are not isolated**

This is a very effective way of stopping the bullying because it limits the power of the bully who is more likely to target people who do not have friends. Friends tend to stick up for each other so the group immediately supports the bullied person.

Role of Bystanders in Bullying – some research.

85% of bullying takes place with bystanders present (Craig and Pepler, 1997, O'Connell and others, 1999)

Research by Pepler should the following reasons why students did not intervene:

- Fear
- It's only a bit of fun
- Ignore it and it will go away
- They deserve it

Bullying will stop in less than 10 seconds nearly 60% of the time when peers intervene.

In playground observations, peers intervened in significantly more episodes than adults did (11% of episodes versus 4%).

A study by Rigby and Johnson (2004) assessed factors, which *incline* or *disincline* bystanders to help a child who is being bullied.

Factors that *incline* students to say they help someone who is being bullied:

- Empathy
- Perception that friends expect them to help
- Some experience of helping a victim in the past
- Age – primary age are more likely to help than secondary.

Factors that *disincline* students to help:

- A belief that people should look after themselves
- Fear of consequences of intervening e.g. embarrassment
- Feeling that one only has responsibility for one's friends
- Enjoyment of conflict
- Sadistic desire to hurt

Research in Finland by Salmivalli (1995,1999) found that witnesses of bullying incidents can adopt particular roles. The following 'participant roles' were identified:

- **Assistants** who join in and assist the bully

- **Reinforcers** who do not actively attack the victim but give positive feedback to the bully, providing an audience by laughing and making other encouraging gestures
- **Outsiders** who stay away, not taking sides with anyone or becoming actively involved, but allowing the bullying to continue by their 'silent approval'
- **Defenders** who show anti-bullying behaviour, comforting the victim, taking sides with them and trying to stop the bullying.