



# Bystanders



Bullying situations usually involve more than the bully and the victim. They also involve **bystanders**—those who watch bullying happen or hear about it.

An important new strategy for bullying prevention focuses on the powerful role of the bystander. Depending on how bystanders respond, they can either contribute to the problem *or* the solution. Bystanders rarely play a completely neutral role, although they may think they do.

## HURTFUL BYSTANDERS

- **Some bystanders . . . *instigate*** the bullying by prodding the bully to begin.
- **Other bystanders . . . *encourage*** the bullying by laughing, cheering, or making comments that further stimulate the bully.
- **And other bystanders . . . *join in*** the bullying once it has begun.
- **Most bystanders . . . *passively accept*** bullying by watching and doing nothing. Often without realizing it, these bystanders also contribute to the problem. Passive bystanders provide the audience a bully craves and the silent acceptance that allows bullies to continue their hurtful behavior.

## HELPFUL BYSTANDERS

- **Bystanders also have the power to play a key role in preventing or stopping bullying.**
- **Some bystanders . . . *directly intervene***, by discouraging the bully, defending the victim, or redirecting the situation away from bullying.
- **Other bystanders . . . *get help***, by rallying support from peers to stand up against bullying or by reporting the bullying to adults.

## EXAMINING THE EFFECTS ON THE BYSTANDER

### Why don't more bystanders intervene?

- They think, "It's none of my business."
- They fear getting hurt or becoming another victim.
- They feel powerless to stop the bully.
- They don't like the victim or believe the victim "deserves" it.
- They don't want to draw attention to themselves.
- They fear retribution.
- They think that telling adults won't help or it may make things worse.
- They don't know what to do.

**Bystanders who don't intervene or don't report the bullying often suffer negative consequences themselves. They may experience:**


- Pressure to participate in the bullying
- Anxiety about speaking to anyone about the bullying
- Powerlessness to stop bullying
- Vulnerability to becoming victimized
- Fear of associating with the victim, the bully, or the bully's pals
- Guilt for not having defended the victim

## Preparing Children to Become Helpful Bystanders

Adults can prepare children to become helpful bystanders by discussing with them the different ways bystanders can make a difference, and by letting them know that adults will support them, if and when they step forward. Adults can also provide examples of how helpful bystanders have shown courage and made a difference in real-life situations and in their own experiences.

Source: [www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html](http://www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html)

# Be a Helpful Bystander



Be a friend

Be assertive, not aggressive

Remove the audience

Rally support

Seek help

Provide an out

