

## THE ROLE OF THE BYSTANDER - RESPONDING TO BULLYING

The power of one person cannot be underestimated and could be the difference between how the victim perceives the situation and the actual reality of the manageable behaviour. The largest most powerful group in a bullying situation is the **bystander**, yet 70% of Australians do nothing to help. Those who stand by and watch are a part of the bullying.

### BE an Upstander NOT the Bystander!

The largest and most powerful group in a bullying situation is the bystander, but the majority of onlookers remain as bystanders, failing to stand up, support or assist the victim. Bullying can end in under 10 seconds if a bystander intervenes. Often in bullying situations the bystander knows the behaviour is unacceptable and inappropriate but unless they are asked for help or made to feel they have a responsibility to act, they may silently collude or walk away.

### Why don't Bystanders intervene?

- Don't know what to do.
- Are scared.
- Afraid of being the next victim.
- Ignoring the situation because they believe it's not their business.
- Don't know the victim or perpetrator.
- No further action was taken when they last complained.

### Bystanders could be the cause as some:

- Instigate the bullying by prodding the bully to begin.
- Join in the bullying once it's begun.
- Follow and actively participate but don't initiate, which encourages the bullying behaviour.
- Supportive/passive bullies don't join in but actively and openly support the bullying by watching, laughing, cheering or making comments that further stimulate and encourage the bully, not realising they are contributing to the problem.
- Passive bystanders provide the audience with what the bully thrives on, the silent acceptance allowing them to continue the hurtful behaviour.
- Disengaged onlookers don't get involved, don't take a stand, don't participate actively – say it's none of their business and wait until someone else takes action.
- Passive defenders dislike the bullying and think they should help but do nothing.
- The defender dislikes the bullying and will try to help by rendering assistance.
- Observers see the bullying and may feel they're in an unsafe environment.

Bystanders that don't intervene or report bullying often suffer negative consequences themselves.

Some may experience:

- Pressure to participate.
- Anxiety about speaking to anyone.
- Powerlessness to stop the bullying.
- Fear of associating with the victim or bully.
- Guilt for not having defended the victim.

### The helpful Bystander could:

- Directly intervene by discouraging the bully, defend the victim or redirect the situation away from the bullying.
- Seek/get help and rally support from peers to stand up against and report the bullying behaviour.
- Approach the victim to let them know they're aware of the behaviour and that it's not acceptable. Support the victim by displaying empathy and validation of their feelings.
- Be a catalyst speak up for the victim by communicating assertive messages.
- Inform the victim that they're not alone – in most cases, bullied individuals have overwhelming feelings of isolation, alienation or loneliness.

### How to Become an Upstander?

Bullies prefer an audience as this provides them with attention, which they crave on. Attention empowers the bully, making them feel less guilty about their actions.

- Step in, tell the bully that their behaviour is unacceptable.
- Report their behaviour and actions to a teacher, parent, HR, employer, colleague, union or trusted adult.
- Change the culture by standing up against the bully with your peers in a reasonable non-aggressive manner. The power of the bully needs to be taken away thereby dis-empowering them of their inappropriate behaviour.
- Be friendly and approachable to the victim. Providing attention and expressing support, this is the behaviour a helpful upstanders demonstrates.
- Redirect the situation away from the bullying by focusing on other activities.
- See it, Hear it, then STOP IT!

### Are you the bully? What can you do?

- Admitting – that your behaviour is inappropriate and hurtful is paramount.

- Take responsibility of your actions and thoughts – acknowledge that your actions and behaviour are not funny and can be viewed as damaging.
- Talk to your friend, teacher, school or contact BULLY ZERO™™ Australia Foundation about what is/isn't bullying or appropriate behaviour.
- Stop and think – apologise to the victim and let them know you acknowledge your wrongdoing and/or unacceptable behaviour and that it will not continue.
- Openly talk – to a trusted friend, teacher, colleague, or adult for advice, guidance and support.

### Assess your behaviour:

- Ask yourself “Was I angry”? Do I want power, control, authority and attention?
- Do you bully others to amuse yourself and others?
- Have you taken on the behaviour because others expect it of you?
- Is what you're doing okay and normal?
- Do you bully because you have experienced bullying, violence at home, or at school and this is your opportunity for venting or revenge?
- Do you feel unworthy or unhappy – happy people don't bully others.
- Do you envy others or are you jealous of them?
- Why do you act as though you are self-catered and don't care for others?
- Do you think that your behaviour is a joke and you don't really mean it?

Bullies often find it difficult to empathise, sympathise and understand what the victim is feeling. Bullies don't care and argue that they didn't do anything.

**Think like a bullied individual** – empathise, put yourself in the shoes of the victim and imagine what they would be feeling.

### Bullied victims may feel:

- Scared, afraid, sad, worried, anxious, unhappy, emotionally hurt, confused, hopeless, upset, ashamed, disconnected, socially isolated/alone, quiet and bad tempered.
- Low morale, self-esteem and loss of self-confidence.
- Withdrawn and not wanting to attend school or work.
- Poor concentration, irritated, moody, depressed, miserable, angry, physically weak, powerless and guilty.
- Can have severe physical and mental health issues and outcomes.
- Alone with no friends or support around them.
- Ashamed or embarrassed about the way they look and feel.
- Confused about not knowing if it's their fault for being physically, racially, sexually and or emotionally different.
- Reserved as they don't want others to know, fearing revenge.
- That there is something wrong with them and everyone else is perfect.

## Difference is a beautiful thing.

No two hands are the same; we are different in physical appearance, personality, religion, spiritual beliefs, cultural background, the gender we are attracted to and our physical capabilities which may be enhanced or restricted due to certain personal conditions.

## Who do bullies target?

- Individuals they perceive as weak, vulnerable and less powerful.
- Shy and passive individuals.
- New students/employees, alone or not in a group.
- Those that perform poorly.
- Gay or lesbian individuals (homophobic bullying).
- Individuals that have noticeable physical differences, disability or impairment.
- Overweight or skinny individuals.
- Individuals from a different religious background, ethnicity or race.

## Role of parents – what can you do?

- Parents need to actively listen and empower their children to talk about the bullying behaviour and not be afraid to speak their mind.
- Speak openly and honestly, empathise, gather information and facts.
- Break the situation down – but don't turn a molehill into a big mountain.
- Take notes, record the responses, ask questions: what happened, who is involved, when did it occur, what did you do and who did you speak to?
- Deal with feelings first and reassure your support.
- Try to understand and learn about what is/isn't bullying and explain expected behaviour and suggest solutions if qualified.
- Early intervention is the best solution.
- Speak to the child care/kindergarten teacher, school or organisation involved (ask to see their bullying policy).
- Ensure your child develops resilience and empathy by being assertive and having good communication skills.
- Your child should understand the consequences of bullying as perpetrator or victim.
- Don't advise or suggest that your child react or retaliate – often bullies will want a reaction.
- Develop your understanding and skills of bullying and social media.