

# Bystander Intervention - The Role of Bystanders in Bullying Prevention

Did you know that in Nebraska 41% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 34.3% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 27.2% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report being bullied? Nationally, amongst all age groups, 1 in 4 students report being bullied. Students who are bullied are more likely to feel disconnected from school, have lower academic outcomes and lower attendance. Likewise, bullying is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use and suicide. While the prevalence and impact of bullying can leave us feeling disheartened, there is something we can do to help prevent the bullying epidemic. And while attention is often focused on bullies and targets, we often overlook a third role, that of the bystander.

Bystanders refer to those individuals who watch the situation happen and who avoid stepping in to intervene. While there are many reasons bystanders may refrain from speaking up or intervening, including fear of retaliation or becoming another victim, helping empower others to take action is one of the most important strategies we can do to help stop bullying. In fact, the single most effective tool for stopping a bullying attack is intervention by bystanders. When bystanders intervene, bullying stops in half the time.



Bystanders can be active or passive. Active bystanders may encourage the bully by cheering him/her on or organizing a ring of spectators. Passive bystanders allow bullying by looking the other way, without intervening or reporting. While intervention is the most effective tool for stopping a bullying attack, experts **caution** educators and parents against encouraging a child to single handedly step up to a bully or group of bullies during an attack. Rather, they advocate for a “team approach”, creating environments that stand against bullying. To accomplish this, adults must lead the way, showing no tolerance for bullying, and empowering kids and teens by teaching them ways to intervene that won't place themselves at risk for harm. Such strategies may include:

- Using positive peer pressure to intervene before an act of bullying escalates and giving the victim an outlet for refuge. For example, rather than standing by and watching an incident unfold, a group of students might say to a victim of bullying, “Hey, why don't you come hang with us.”
- Tell an adult that they trust will take appropriate action
- Talk to the one who was being bullied after the fact and offer support
- Enlist friends to help resolve the conflict

Studies show that the positive influence and support of peers can be one of the most helpful forms of action provided to a victim of bullying. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center:

- Students who experience bullying report that allying and supportive actions from their peers (such as spending time with the student, talking to him/her, helping him/her get away, or giving advice) were the most helpful actions from bystanders.
- Students who experience bullying are more likely to find peer actions helpful than educator or self-actions.

Parents and educators can assist kids and teens in becoming “bullying-prevention” agents by making bystanders aware that their own behavior can encourage or discourage bullying, teach skills that bystanders can use to intervene when they witness bullying and by encouraging bystanders to develop positive relationships with potential victims.

# New Synthetic Drug “Flakka” Surfacing

Flakka is a new synthetic drug that's use is on the rise; hitting hard in many states and causing a rash of emergency room visits and overdose deaths. It has a chemical makeup that is similar to other drugs commonly known as “bath salts”. Flakka also goes by the street name "gravel" because it looks like the colorful gravel pebbles used in the bottom of an aquarium.



It typically comes in a white or pink crystalline form and is foul-smelling. It can be eaten, snorted, injected, smoked, or vaporized in an electronic cigarette device. It is particularly potent when vaporized, sending the drug into the blood stream quickly, and making the user particularly susceptible to overdose.

Flakka is made from a compound called alpha-PVP, a chemical cousin of cathinone, the amphetamine-like drug found in bath salts that acts as a stimulant and leaves the user with feelings of euphoria. The chemicals used to make them are always changing and can vary widely from batch to batch, making them even more dangerous, as the user doesn't always know what they are taking.

Use of the drug has been linked with serious — and sometimes deadly — behavioral problems. Alpha-PVP can cause a condition called excited delirium that involves hyper-stimulation, paranoia and hallucinations that can lead to violent aggression and self-injury. Police have reported arresting a man running naked to escape the imaginary people he said were chasing him; a man who impaled himself on a metal fence; and one man who gnawed on and disfigured another man's face. One Kentucky sheriff said it was the worst drug he had ever seen in his 18 years of law enforcement.

The drug has been linked to deaths by suicide as well as heart attack. Flakka may also cause the body to reach high temperatures. This excessive temperature can lead to severe physical complications like kidney damage/failure and muscle breakdown. They may also experience rapid weight loss due to increased physical activity and a decrease in appetite. Users also report an inability to sleep and may be up for 10-12 days at a time.

Flakka is easily accessible and can be purchased on line from China. It can cost as little as \$5 and is easy to buy in bulk; however, despite the claims of those who sell it online, it is illegal in the United States.

Since flakka is so new, researchers aren't sure exactly how it affects the brain, or how addictive it is; however users report the drug provides a more rewarding and pleasurable effect than meth and is highly addictive. Flakka comes with a comedown, the period when the drug leaves the body and the person is left feeling fatigued or depressed. This sensation often results in users returning to the drug to get rid of the negative comedown feeling, jump-starting a cycle of use that can lead to abuse and altering the brain chemistry in a way that makes users require increasingly larger doses to get the same high.

# What is Good Mental Health?!?

Mental or emotional health refers to your overall psychological well-being. It includes the way you feel about yourself, the quality of your relationships, and your ability to manage your feelings and deal with difficulties.

Good mental health is more than the absence of mental health issues. It goes well beyond not having depression, anxiety, or other psychological issues. More than the absence of mental illness, mental and emotional health refers to the presence of positive characteristics. For example, not feeling bad is not the same as feeling good.

Individuals, kids and adults alike, who are emotionally healthy, are able to manage their emotions and behavior. This allows them to handle life's challenges, build positive relationships, and bounce back and recover from minor and not so minor setbacks.

Of course, just like it takes effort to build and maintain good physical health, it also takes effort to build and maintain good mental and emotional health.

People who are mentally and emotionally healthy have:

- A sense of happiness
- A passion for life and are able to laugh and have fun
- The ability to deal with stress and bounce back from adversity
- A sense of meaning and purpose in the things they do
- The ability to learn new things and adapt to change
- A balance between work/school and play, rest and activity, etc.
- The ability to have and maintain meaningful relationships
- Self-confidence and high self-esteem

Developing and having these positive characteristics of mental and emotional health allows individuals to participate in life to the fullest extent possible through productive, meaningful activities and strong relationships.

These positive characteristics also help you cope when faced with life's challenges and stresses. Being emotionally and mentally healthy doesn't mean never going through bad times or experiencing emotional problems. We all go through disappointments, loss, and change. And while these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety, and stress. The difference is that individuals with good emotional health have an ability to bounce back from adversity, trauma, and stress.

## **Good Physical Health is Part of Good Mental Health!**

Physical health is connected to mental and emotional health. Taking care of your body is a great step towards good mental and emotional health. The mind and the body are connected. When you improve your physical health, you'll automatically experience greater mental and emotional well-being.

## **Tips for Good Mental Health!!!!**

- **Get enough rest.** To have good mental and emotional health, it's important to take care of your body. That includes getting enough sleep. Most people need seven to eight hours of sleep each night in order to function well.

- Learn and practice good nutrition and eating habits. The good nutrition can be complicated and certainly is not always easy to put into practice, but the more you learn about what you eat and how it affects your energy and mood, the better you can feel.
- Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood. Exercise is a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression. Look for small ways to add activity to your day, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or going on a short walk.
- Get a dose of sunlight every day. Sunlight lifts your mood, so try to get at least 10 to 15 minutes of sun per day. This can be done while exercising, gardening, or socializing.
- Take care of yourself by paying attention to your own needs and feelings. Don't let stress and negative emotions build up and fester inside of you. If you take care of yourself, you'll be better prepared to deal with challenges when they occur.
- Do things that positively impact others. Being useful to others and being valued for what you do can help build self-esteem.
- Practice self-discipline. Self-control leads to a sense of hopefulness and can help you overcome despair, helplessness, and other negative thoughts.
- Manage your stress levels. Stress takes a heavy toll on mental and emotional health, so it's important to keep it under control. While not all stressors can be avoided, stress management strategies can help you bring things back into balance.
- Limit unhealthy mental habits like worrying. Try to avoid becoming absorbed by repetitive mental habits – negative thoughts about yourself and the world that suck up time, drain your energy, and cause feelings of anxiety, fear, and depression.
- Make leisure time a priority. Do things for no other reason than it feels good to do them. Go to a funny movie, take a walk on the beach, listen to music, read a good book, or talk to a friend. Doing things just because they are fun is no indulgence. Play is an emotional and mental health necessity.

Everyone is different; not all things will be equally important to all people. Some people feel better relaxing and slowing down while others need more activity and more excitement or stimulation to feel better. The important thing is to find activities that you enjoy and that give you a boost.

(Source: [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org))