

Bullying Prevention with Upstanders

October is National Bullying Prevention Month, reminding us of the urgent need to address bullying in our schools. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, about 20% of students ages 12-18 experience bullying nationwide. This public health concern can lead to negative outcomes for all involved. Bullying takes many forms—physical, psychological, social isolation, humiliation, and cyberbullying. While cyberbullying is rising, most incidents still happen in person, with classrooms and hallways being frequent sites.

A secondary form of bullying occurs in our classrooms and hallways, through bystanders: a student or a group of students who witness the bullying but do not intervene. Bystanders are also susceptible to negative outcomes: increased stress, depression, and anxiety, and may also experience trauma in the bullying situation.

One study completed in Canada showed it only takes one person and ten seconds to stop a bully. So let's begin to empower those bystanders to stop the cycle of abuse that occurs in our hallways and classrooms, and be upstanders. Being an upstander takes courage, action, assertiveness, compassion, and leadership. Our students might feel overwhelmed by this role. As teachers and parents, we need to help upstanders feel more comfortable speaking up, more confident in their ability to take action, and role model upstander behaviors.

Teachers and parents can empower their students by opening up dialogue about those bullying issues within the school building. Ask students open-ended questions about bullying and talk through possible ways to address what they are seeing. Ask students their thoughts on what can be done to encourage kindness, create friendships, and build community. Try a role-playing scenario to help your youth know how to respond in a bullying situation. -Let the teacher or parent first role model the best responses to the situation, and then let the students try. Other key actions students can take to help the victim of bullying when they see it happening are: not laughing; not encouraging, ignoring or participating in the bully's behavior; not becoming an audience for the bully; supporting the victim, even if it is in private; inviting those being isolated to eat with you at lunch or involved in your friend group's activities; and lastly, and most importantly, telling an adult.

For students hesitant to intervene directly, stress the importance of telling an adult so the situation can be addressed, even anonymously. Promoting this approach allows students to help safely. When one person acts, others are encouraged to follow. Empower upstanders to change our school climate.

More resources for parents and teachers can be found from the National Bullying Prevention Center and the Boston vs. Bullies program. Please contact your SCIP coordinator for additional presentation and information.

