

Bystanders to Bullying

On the far side of a playground, an older boy beat up a younger boy. Many students saw it. Many wondered why no one did anything. Some students just stood and watched. Others tried to act like nothing was happening.

Bullying often occurs in group settings in which other children are witnesses, or *bystanders*. Children learn from each other how to act in these situations.

Bystanders have tremendous power in any bullying situation. An individual witness can choose to be part of the solution or part of the problem. Naturally, though, fear for one's safety can keep a bystander from taking action. A bystander may also fear:

- Retaliation or becoming the target of bullying.
- Losing friends.
- Being called a tattletale.
- Going against a more popular student.

Research shows that when bystanders—the often-silent majority—do intervene in bullying situations, they can help stop bullying. Peer pressure can be a positive thing, and bystanders can exert peer pressure on others to stand up safely for those who are being bullied. In the *Steps to Respect* program, students learn to evaluate when it is safe to intervene in a bullying situation. They also learn when to report bullying to adults and get help from them.

You can help your child use safe bystander behaviors. Try the following ideas.

- Discuss school and family rules with your child. This will help her know how to decide when a group is doing something bad or unsafe.
- Talk with your child about the importance of paying attention to “gut feelings.” He will be better able to tell when something is wrong.
- Together, think of ways your child can say “no” to the group. Practicing this will help her find the courage to say she doesn't like what the group is doing, and it will help her refuse to take part.
- Encourage your child to talk to you or adults at school about all bullying situations. He needs to feel sure that turning to an adult is the right thing to do, whether he feels unsafe or simply doesn't know how to handle a situation.

By working together, students, parents, and school staff can create a safe, respectful, caring school for all children. Please contact your child's school if you have additional questions, comments, or concerns about bullying or to find out how you can help.