The Bystander Effect:

Tips to Prevent Bullying in Schools

Lauren Milne

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Many programs and organizations have stepped in to reduce and prevent bullying in schools. However, even with all of the effort, it still occurs. It’s not just the students themselves that need to step up. In order to overcome this epidemic, the students, teachers, parents, administrators, law enforcements, and local organizations need to come together.

This means we have to educate the entire town as well as surrounding area. What’s more, we have to each do our part, but *individually*. The message that bullying behavior is wrong does not always get across to the youth because the “bystander effect” is too powerful. What is the “bystander effect?” It is this idea that the larger the crowd the less likely a single individual will step in to help someone out of a troubling or dangerous situation. We unconsciously fear going against the norms. These norms make us follow the crowd; do what everyone else is doing.

That is why popular-prosocial youth seem to have so many friends. They represent a *societal norm* that attracts other people to follow them. In the same way other individuals follow the popular-antisocial youth. They represent an *appealing, entertaining nature* that others are drawn toward. However, both types of popular youth have the potential of hurting another individual’s feelings—either intentionally or not—and get away with it because of their appealing nature. This is another piece to the “bystander effect” in which we don’t correct the actions of those we follow. In order to prevent bullying from occurring with the popular youth, one must stand apart from the bystanders and speak their dissatisfaction; help the bullied youth off the ground; contact a teacher; etc. Withdrawn-rejected youth and aggressive-rejected youth can overcome bullying in a similar fashion. Aggressive-rejected youth are the *stereotypical bully*. Anger seems to full them more than entertainment. Withdrawn-rejected youth more closely resemble the *stereotypical victim*. No one stands up for them and they do not seek support because they believe none exist. Their fellow peers need to break away from the “bystander effect” and stand up for the bullied and against the bully—regardless of their appearance, personality, or any other stereotype separating them from “popular” youth.

By breaking away from the crowd, youth that stand up for this group in particular encourage their peers to become proactive against the bullying. When a group works toward justice is when strength shines through. Being a simple bystander in the crowd is not strength. The youth need to see this through the actions of those that surround them on a regular basis. Parents and teachers can encourage this through reinforcement, but especially through example. Youth cannot by the only proactive stand against bullying. During school, teachers have hundreds of opportunities to show proactivity toward bullying all day long. By bring it up at home, parents can discuss and encourage the youths true feelings while they are away from the bystanding crowd. But one does not have to be present in the youth’s daily life to have an effect on ending bullying. Administrators can set ground rules against bullying and enforce them. They also have the ability to set up curriculum that focuses on the need to stop bullying. They can encourage and allow local law enforcement and organizations to work one-on-one and in groups with all the youth in the school. Training and classes can be administered to teachers, parents, administrators, local business, and, especially, the youth. Events and activities to promote anti-bullying can be set up.

Bullying can be prevented. As individuals, cohorts, schools, and communities, everyone has the ability and the support system to stand up for what is right. The step that needs work is proactivity and breaking away from the “bystander effect”. Once you break away, strength you didn’t realize you already had can be fully realized and utilized for the good of all.