

The Roles of Bystanders and Upstanders

Our students are taught that being a witness to an act of unkindness requires them to respond by becoming an upstander to this behaviour. Research shows that peers are present in 85% of bullying incidents at school and bullying has been shown to stop within ten seconds when bystanders take positive action. Witnesses to bullying have the power and certainly a big responsibility to step in. A bystander might enlist the help of an adult, and/or give a strong message to the perpetrator, hence becoming an upstander. If your child reports an incident of bullying please don't hesitate to contact the class teacher in the Junior School or the Deputy Principal in the Senior School.

www.bullyingnoway.gov.au is a website jammed packed with information for parents on the topic of bullying and answers questions such as What is bullying? Why does bullying happen? What are the signs my child might be being bullied? What are the signs my child might be bullying others? Tips to help your child if they have seen bullying take place as well as videos and other resources are under the Parents tab on this site.

A bystander to bullying requires support to deal with what they may have seen or know is taking place and the website quotes the following as bystander concerns:

- not knowing what to do or not wanting to make the situation worse
- not knowing if their actions will make a difference
- feeling worried about their safety if they intervene
- feeling worried about the impact of taking action on their friendships
- being anxious that they will be bullied as a result of intervening.

Depending on how bystanders respond, they can either contribute to the problem or the solution. Bystanders rarely play a neutral role, although they may think they do. Some bystanders instigate the bullying by encouraging the bully to begin, others continue this encouragement by laughing, cheering or making further stimulating comments and most bystanders passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing, providing an audience the bully craves.

There is no one size fits all approach to being a supportive bystander and becoming an upstander. Here are some ideas to convey to your child in order for them to take safe and effective action:

- Make it clear to your friends that you won't be involved in bullying behaviour
- Never stand by and watch or encourage bullying behaviour
- Do not harass, tease or spread gossip about others, this includes on social networking sites like Facebook
- Never forward on or respond to messages or photos that may be offensive or upsetting
- Support the person who is being bullied to ask for help e.g. go with them to a place they can get help or provide them with information about where to go for help
- Report it to someone in authority or someone you trust e.g. at school to a teacher, or a school counsellor; at work to a manager; if the bullying is serious, report it to the police; if the bullying occurs on Facebook, report it to Facebook.

A very informative link in the Resources section of the bullyingnoway website that you might find interesting is http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets/bullying/

which is a parent guide by the Australian Psychological Society to helping children manage conflict, aggression and bullying.

You can prepare your children to become helpful upstanders by discussing with them the different ways bystanders can make a difference, and by letting them know that adults will support them, if and when they step forward. Adults can also provide examples of how helpful upstanders have shown courage and made a difference in real-life situations and in their own experiences.

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