

Bullying situations usually involve more than the aggressor and the target. They also involve bystanders—those who watch bullying happen or hear about it. Depending on how bystanders respond, they can either contribute to the problem or to the solution.

Hurtful Bystanders

Some bystanders encourage the bullying by laughing, cheering, or making comments, and other bystanders join in the bullying once it has begun.

Passive Bystanders

Most bystanders passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing. Without realizing it, these bystanders also contribute to the problem. Passive bystanders provide the silent acceptance that allows people who bully to continue their hurtful behavior.

Why don't more bystanders intervene?

- They think, "It's none of my business."
- They are afraid of getting hurt or becoming a victim.
- They feel powerless to stop the bully.
- They don't like the victim or feels the victim "deserves" it.
- They don't want to draw attention to themselves.
- They fear retribution from the bully.
- They think that telling adults won't help or it may make things worse.
- They don't know what to do.

Bystanders who don't intervene or don't report the bullying often suffer negative consequences themselves. They may experience:

- Pressure to participate in the bullying.
- Anxiety about speaking to anyone about the bullying.
- Guilt for not having defended the victim.

Bystanders have the power to play a key role in preventing or stopping bullying by:

- Discouraging the aggressor from continuing the behavior.
- Reporting the bullying to adults.
- Working with a group of students to help prevent bullying at school.



Preparing children to become helpful bystanders

Adults can prepare students to become helpful bystanders by talking to them about the different ways bystanders can make a difference and by letting them know that adults will support them when they step forward.

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<http://www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html>