

Creating Safer Schools by Turning Bystanders into Upstanders

Empowering Students to Recognize and Respond to Unsafe Situations

As educators, you play a vital role in shaping safe, inclusive learning environments where every student feels seen, heard, and protected. Taking action not only helps prevent the escalation of harmful behavior but also provides meaningful support to victims. By modeling and teaching these principles, you contribute to building safer communities both inside and beyond the classroom.

Bystander



A bystander is a person who witnesses an unsafe or problematic situation and can affect the situation by their actions. Bystanders often do not intervene.



Upstander



An upstander is a person who notices a situation and chooses to act in a way that could stop the situation or positively impact the victim and overall outcome.

Common Barriers to Bystander Intervention

- Social backlash of intervening
- Fear of not being taken seriously by others
- Believing that it is not their responsibility to intervene
- Believing someone else will intervene
- Desire to avoid conflict
- Viewing the perpetrator as having high status
- Not intervening being seen as normal
- Believing that their actions could not impact the situation
- Not interpreting a situation as harmful or dangerous

How to Intervene

To prepare students for bystander intervention, educators can:

- **Foster a supportive classroom culture** where empathy, respect, and responsibility are regularly modeled and reinforced.
- **Model upstander behavior** in everyday interactions by demonstrating how to respond to conflict, exclusion, or unsafe situations with courage and compassion.
- **Teach the steps and methods** of safe intervention, including how to assess situations and select the most effective strategy.



Intervention Steps

- 1** Notice the situation.
- 2** Determine if the situation is problematic.
- 3** Decide to intervene.
- 4** Identify the best way to intervene.
- 5** Actively intervene in the situation.

Intervention Methods



Disrupt

Interrupt the situation in some way.



Delegate

Ask someone else to help, such as a teacher.



Document

Create evidence for an investigation.



Delay

Support the victim by helping them or checking in.



Direct

Actively intervene to stop the situation.

How to Teach Students about Bystander Intervention

- **Awareness Campaigns** – Use posters, videos, and social media to highlight the importance of speaking up and supporting others.

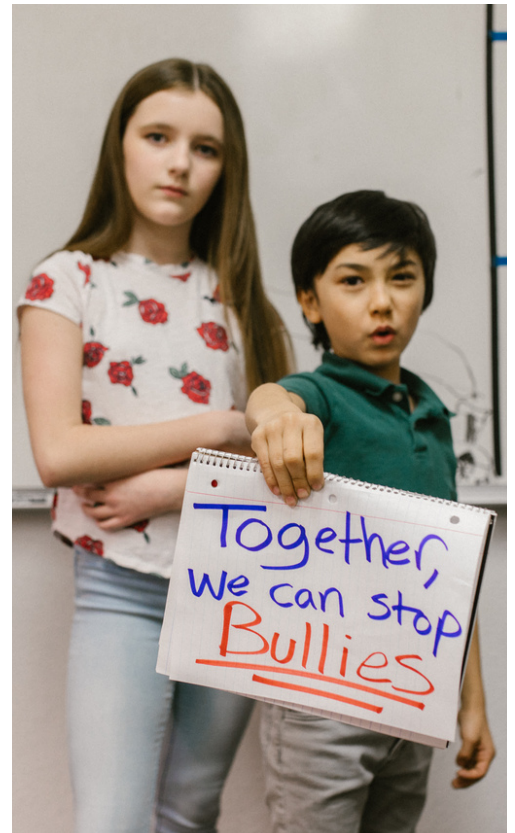
Example: Create a school-wide campaign with the slogan “Be the One Who Steps Up” featuring student testimonials and statistics about the impact of intervention.

- **Discussion Prompts** – Facilitate open conversations that encourage reflection and critical thinking about intervention.

Example: Use prompts like “What would you do if you saw someone being bullied?” or “Have you ever wanted to help but didn’t know how?” to spark dialogue and explore barriers to action.

- **Role-Play Scenarios** – Engage students in practicing responses to real-life situations involving bullying, harassment, or safety threats.

Example: Set up small groups where students act out scenarios like witnessing name-calling or exclusion and then discuss different intervention strategies.



Role-Play Scenario Example

Scenario Description: During lunch at school, a group of students is sitting together. One student, Jordan, begins teasing another student, Alex, about their clothes and appearance. The teasing escalates into name-calling and laughter from others at the table. A few students nearby notice what’s happening but don’t say anything.

Roles: Jordan, Alex, Bystanders, Upstander

Instructions: Act out the scenario with no upstander. Discuss what could be a helpful intervention. Repeat the scenario with the upstander and the intervention. Discuss the outcome of the intervention.



Resource: American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Bystander Intervention Tip Sheet. American Psychological Association.
<https://www.apa.org/pi/health-equity/bystander-intervention>

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