

# BEING PART OF THE SOLUTION TO BULLYING

by Katherine McKenney, M.A.

**Bullying** on the playground, in the classroom, or in a Scout group is like the theatre... it requires an audience. For bullying, peers form the audience. In fact, peers are present in 85% of bullying incidents. A small portion of this audience spends their time actively encouraging the bullying or

joining in. A much larger portion of the audience passively supports the bullying by smiling and laughing, paying attention to the child who is bullying, or merely observing from the sidelines without intervening or standing up for the child being bullied. In this way, bystanders can be part of the problem of bullying.

Just like children who are victimized and children who bully, bystanders are at risk by becoming desensitized to the pain of others after watching repeated incidents of bullying unfold. They are also at risk for feeling anxious that they will become the next target of bullying.

Many children who see others being bullied are reluctant to intervene. These children may not feel that they are responsible for intervening since they are usually only one of the many peers present. Some children, however, want to stop the bullying but are unsure of how to intervene appropriately and effectively. In fact, 90% of children report that it is at least somewhat unpleasant to watch someone being bullied and 50% of children report that they try to help. In this way, peers can be part of the solution to bullying.

When bystanders have the courage to speak out, they are able to successfully stop the bullying 50% of the time *within ten seconds*. Unfortunately, many children intervene in a negative manner by threatening or physically assaulting the child who bullies. In other words, bystanders may try to "bully back". Positive intervention strategies can help children take control.

## Three Steps For Success

Encouraging children to intervene requires three steps:

- 1) raising children's empathy for victimized children and awareness of their own responsibility;
- 2) coaching children in effective intervention strategies; and
- 3) creating cooperative learning and play opportunities.

To increase children's empathy for others, leaders can incorporate various activities into their meetings. For example, younger children could create a poster, collage, or drawing of what they think it must feel like to be bullied while leaders can talk about the feelings that children who are bullied might experience. (See November 2007 *Leader Magazine*, page 14 for more suggestions.)

When coaching children to intervene effectively, leaders can role play what to say to children who bully to convey the message that their behaviour is wrong and unacceptable. Children should also be encouraged to help the victimized child leave the

situation by inviting the child to play with them elsewhere.

Most importantly, leaders should be clear that children should tell an adult as soon as they think someone is being bullied. If children are scared to come forward, encourage them to bring a friend with them when they talk to a leader or an adult.

Finally, bystanders will be more willing to intervene when they feel they are part of a cooperative and supportive group where all members are included and valued. This can be accomplished by having the children participate in cooperative, rather than competitive activities, which require input and participation from all members. If all members are made to feel valued and important, peers will be less tolerant of behaviour from each other that is inconsistent with the principles of inclusion and respect.

With guidance from leaders, peers can be part of the solution and not part of the problem of bullying. X

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## Tips to Share

- ✓ Talk to someone who can help, like a parent or a teacher... remember that telling is not tattling.
- ✓ If you walk away and get help, you are part of the solution... if you stay and watch, you are part of the problem.
- ✓ Stand up for children who are bullied... they can't do it themselves.
- ✓ Invite kids who are bullied to play with you somewhere else.
- ✓ Comfort the person who was hurt and make it known that what happened was not fair or deserved.
- ✓ The best thing you can do for kids who are bullied is to be their friend.
- ✓ If it is hard for you to speak out against bullying on your own, ask a friend to do it with you.
- ✓ Help kids who bully, don't hurt them... Speaking out helps; bullying back doesn't help.