

Four Strategies for Teachers and Parents to Pass on to Kids who Witness Bullying



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Parents and teachers are sometimes unsure of what to say when a child or youth asks, “What should I do if I see someone being bullied?” Kids often want to do the right thing but are unsure of what they can do that might help instead of making the situation worse. This article will present research findings that point to four concrete strategies you can pass onto children and youth.

Stop! You’re Bullying!

Most bullies stop [bullying](#) within 10 seconds, when someone tells the bully to stop (1). A child or youth who witnesses bullying is very likely to make a positive difference simply by saying something like, “What you’re doing is bullying and it isn’t fair!” or “If you don’t stop I am going to report you!” It is important, however, that the witness keeps his/her own safety in mind too.

- If your child feels unsafe approaching the bully, then one of the other strategies would be more appropriate.
- Keep in mind that a child who witnesses bullying may feel more comfortable finding a friend or two and confronting the bullying together.
- Witnesses should be cautioned that if they do decide to say something to the bully, it is very important to be assertive and not aggressive. · Acting aggressively towards the bully will often make matters worse.

Support the Victim

If the witness feels uncomfortable saying something to the bully, then they may choose to focus on supporting the victim instead.

- Having good friends can help protect children from being bullied at school (2).
- A witness could say something like “Come and play basketball with us over there” to the child who is being bullied. This may help to get the victim out of the immediate bullying situation, and help them make friends.

- Encourage witnesses to comfort the child who was victimized and make it known that the bullying was not fair or deserved.

Reduce Attention to the Bully

Research indicates that bullies need an audience, and that passively watching, which may seem harmless, actually encourages the bullying to continue. If the witness feels uncomfortable intervening in a bullying episode, then they can help by just walking away.

- Research conducted within school playgrounds has shown that bullying episodes tend to last longer when there are more students watching (3).
- Tell children that they can be part of the solution by walking away and refusing to give bullies the audience they desire. The Concerned Children's Advertisers have a short commercial entitled "Walk Away" that illustrates how silly bullies actually look when they don't have an audience. You can download this clip and its lesson plan at http://cca-kids.ca/tvandme/english/educators/intermed_bully.html. This is a great resource for educators and parents.

Report the Bully

Tell witnesses that they should report any bullying they see to a responsible adult such as a teacher, principal, playground supervisor, or bus driver. Bullying is a relationship problem in which one person, who has more power than another person, is using their power aggressively to cause distress.

- Because the victim lacks power, it is often necessary to involve someone with greater power (e.g., an adult) to help balance the power and stop the bullying (4).
- If children don't feel comfortable speaking directly with an adult, then they can try writing a letter. For help with writing the letter, parents and children can visit PREVNet, a network dedicated to addressing bullying problems in Canada, www.prevnet.ca. This site contains lots of resources including letters that kids can complete to tell their principal or teacher about any bullying that is happening at school. If kids don't want the principal or teacher to know who wrote the letter, they don't have to sign their name. Just letting someone know what's going on can make a big difference.

Conclusion

So to review, the following four strategies are recommended for those who witness bullying:

1. Tell the bully to stop.
2. Support the victim.
3. Reduce attention to the bully and walk away.

4. Report the bullying to a responsible adult.

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