

# WHEN YOUR STUDENT IS A BYSTANDER/WITNESS TO BULLYING BEHAVIOR

*Although definitions of bullying vary, most agree that bullying involves:*

- **Imbalance of power:** People who bully use their power to control or harm. The people being bullied (the targets) may have a hard time defending themselves.
- **Intent to cause harm:** Accidental actions are not bullying. The person bullying has a goal to cause harm.
- **Repetition:** Bullying happens to the same target over and over by the same person or group.

*Suggestions for ways a “bystander” can help:*

- ✓ **Don’t join in.**
- ✓ **Refuse to watch.** Walk away.
- ✓ **Take a stand.** If your student has equal power to the student who is bullying (for example, if they are friends), suggest that your student
  - Ask the bully to “stop it,” “knock it off,” or “cut it out”
  - Create a distraction
  - Change the subject
- ✓ **Be a friend to the target.** Support the target of the bullying behavior by
  - Guiding them away from the situation
  - Inviting them to join your group
  - Writing them a note telling them that you don’t agree with the bully’s mean words or
- ✓ **Report the behavior.** As a school, we cannot effectively address bullying unless we are aware of

Please encourage your student to let a trusted adult know what happened.

As you encourage your student to help others in a difficult situation, acknowledge that the choice to help others is not always easy. Compliment your student when you see them take a stand for what is right.

For young students, there are some excellent children’s story books which address how bystanders can help. After you read a book with your student, try role playing with them. The school may be able to provide a recommended list of books or you can do a simple Internet search for “children’s books about bullying.”

**Researchers have repeatedly found that bystanders have the greatest power to make bullying behavior stop.**

Bolton, J. & Graeve, M.A. (2005). *No room for bullies*. Boys Town, NE: Boys Town Press.

Senn, D. (2008). *Bullying in the girl’s world: A school-wide approach to girl bullying*. Chapin, SC: YouthLight, Inc.