

Bully bystanders: Are bystanders being hurt more than bullied victims?



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Teen witnessing bullying from window
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Over 2,000 kids aged 12 -16 years of age, attending 14 schools in the U.K. were included in a study by researchers at Brunel University in London about bullying.

They “bystanders” said that they’d witnessed someone being bullied through name-calling, hitting or kicking, being ignored, having rumors spread about them or being pressured to smoke, drink or use drugs. One-third (34 per cent) said they’d been victims of bullying, while one in five (20 per cent) admitted being perpetrators, and many students fell into more than one of those categories.

The witnesses reported higher rates of depression, anxiety, and drug abuse than kids who are actual victims of bullying.

Why does watching violence do such harm?

Thirteen-year-old New York City tween Angie R. said “I really want to help my friend. She’s bullied a lot and the girl who bullies her really scares me. What can I do?”

April West a 16-year-old from Manhattan said” I really do try to not be a bystander, but sometimes it’s not easy.”

Studies have shown that 60% of kids and teens witness bullying at least once a day. Very often witnesses --- the “bystanders” do nothing.

They’re afraid of being called tattletales, they’re afraid of getting involved. But then who suffers and how?

Experts say that violence has many effects. One important factor is that it makes it difficult for students to learn. Their intellectual, social and emotional development is affected if they're scared. And they are scared!

Girls were found to be slightly more likely than boys to say they'd witnessed bullying, they found, and girls seemed to suffer more psychological fallout as a result.

Bystanders might be further harmed by bullying because they want to do something to help their peers but hold back out of fear that they'll become targets.

Teens say the problem has become so severe because they feel no one is taking responsibility – not the schools, not the parents and not the witnesses.

"Bullying happens all the time, and it just takes one person to stand up and say, 'That is not OK and you need to knock it off,'" said Danny G. from Queens, NY.

Seventeen year-old Karim T. from Brooklyn, NY asked "How are we ever going to learn how to be loving adults without loving adults to help us?"

Shaki Q. a 15-year-old teen from Manhattan wants to be an "upstander" ...not a "bystander" but is afraid he might chicken out if the bully gets nasty.

Six out of 10 American teens witness bullying in school once a day or even more frequently, but most just stand by in fear.

The U.S. Department of Education cites the following ways in which bystanders and peers of victims can be negatively affected by acts of bullying:

- They may become afraid to associate with the victim for fear of lowering their own status or of retribution from the bully and becoming victims themselves.
- They may fear reporting bullying incidents because they do not want to be called a "snitch," a "tattler" or an "informer."
- Some experience feelings of guilt or helplessness for not standing up to the bully on behalf of their classmate.
- Many may be drawn into bullying behavior by group pressure.
- They may feel unsafe, unable to take action or a loss of control.

It's a difficult situation but we need to help and empower our kids who witness the bullying, we need to help the victims and we have to get help for the bullies.

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