



A Bystander Leadership Approach to Safer Schools

Philosophy of the Bystander Leadership Program

Building more positive relationships and social awareness among kids can only be accomplished within the youth culture itself, led by the children themselves. To enact a positive social climate change in our schools, kids, supported by adults at school and in the community, must take ownership of that change. Bystander Leadership Groups have proven to be a key component in creating that sense of ownership and responsibility that empowers kids to change their social climate to one in which respect, kindness, and personal standards and character are the norm rather than the exception.

Creating safer schools and communities requires a multi-faceted approach. Bullying, relational aggression, depression, cutting, and so on are symptoms of underlying issues such as a breakdown of positive leadership skills, ethics, school connectedness, and accountability. Each school or community will have special needs and strengths, and will, therefore, create a unique program tailored to best serve its own population. Keep in mind that no packaged curriculum or set of lessons will ensure a safer school. Social climate change and student empowerment requires systemic, continuous, broad-based restructuring of social norms as an on-going, dynamic process.

Why the Bystander Leadership Approach Works

The majority of bullying occurs in the presence of other students; rarely are teachers present, and rarely do they even find out what has happened.

When students have ownership of the program, it means more to them; they take it more seriously, and it empowers them to be more positive leaders.

If bystanders ignore the bullying, the bullying simply continues, according to a 2006 Australian schools study by Rigby and Johnson.

Rigby and Johnson (2006) found a significant correlation between tendency to intervene and expectations of friends; those who felt that their friends expected them to step in and support a target were much more likely to do so.