

Moving from Bystander to Upstander

In this activity participants look at the role of bystanders in instances of bullying and other unkind behavior and identify appropriate ways to respond by moving from being a bystander to being an “upstander.”

What to Know

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Bullying involves an imbalance of power. Someone who bullies might use his or her social clout or larger size or faster wit to put someone down and then keep him or her down. Often, the ones who have power are given it simply because of the groups to which they belong. Because some groups enjoy unique power and status, while others are disadvantaged, someone might be harassed simply because of who s/he is. Some students have been targeted because they are, or are perceived to be, gay; because they are Latino or Middle Eastern; because they have special needs; or because they are perceived to be “different: in some way.

By harassing someone believed to be “less than” themselves to enhance their own power, someone who bullies others helps maintain and reinforce bias in the larger society. In effect, people who bully spread hate and lead others who witness their harassment to believe someone of a certain race, size, sexual orientation, etc. deserves such treatment.

Over time, people who are bullied may begin to believe deep within themselves that they are not as good as others, simply because of who they are, what they like, where they live, etc. Often, they are being bullied for something about themselves that they cannot change. Or they might be targeted for something about themselves that, to remain true to themselves, they should not change (i.e., religious identity, getting good grades, etc.).

People who bully can seem powerful, but they gain their power through the response of those who witness bullying behavior. Our silence, laughter, or tacit encouragement of bullying gives power to the person exhibiting the behavior. That person can be stripped of that power when someone stands up for the person being bullied; and bullying can be stopped in its tracks. [Studies](#) show that peer intervention is effective in stopping bullying in a majority of instances.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. be able to identify ways to respond to unkind behavior;
2. practice assertiveness skills and "I" messages;
3. be able to decide when to intervene or not intervene; and,
4. commit to being an upstander.

Common Core Standard Alignment

- Anchor Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Anchor Standards for Writing: Range of Writing
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10 - Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
- Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3-Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Anchor Standards for Language: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Preparation and Materials:

- Chart paper or chalk board
- Index cards
- The Heart of the Matter chart from Exploring Bullying lesson
- Markers
- Variety of art materials for self-portraits
- Paper for writing Upstander Pledges

Gather Together/Warm Up/Bell Ringer: “We Care” Word Sculptures! (10 Minutes)

“Today we are going to explore more about bullying and really look at the ways we can be ‘upstanders,’ or people who stand up to bullying, and stop bullying in its tracks.” Start by giving the instruction that the whole group spells out the words, “We Care” using their bodies. Allow young people to self organize to do this.

Process: *“What was one thing that went well during this activity?”*

Main Activity: Being an Upstander (10 minutes)

“Raise your hand if you have ever witnessed someone else being bullied or treated unkindly by other people.”

(IMPORTANT: Remind students not to use anyone’s name in order to respect privacy.)

Pair students and ask them to respond to the following:

- *“Think of one of those times you saw someone being treated this way. What did it feel like to witness someone being treated that way?”*
- *“How did you respond when you saw that happen?”*

- *“How did you feel about your response?”*
- *“Would you do the same thing again?”*

Have a few volunteers share their responses.

Explain that you are going to turn your attention to what we can do when we see, or witness someone being treated unkindly.

“Sometime when a person witnesses something happen, we say that the person was a “bystander,” which can mean that the person is “standing by” or not taking any action.”

Direct students’ attention to “The Heart of the Matter” chart. Ask where they think a bystander, someone who is not taking any action, would be on this chart. Have a few students share their ideas with the whole group.

It could be argued that the person stays on the Outer Edge if they choose not to act, or that by not acting, they are implicitly supporting the bullying, and they move into the Inner Circle. There’s not a “right” answer, but it’s a good question to spark dialogue.

“You may think the person who is bullying has all the power, but witnesses or bystanders have tremendous power, especially if they work together and support each other. As we saw with our “Heart of the Matter” chart, the more people who make the choice to help, the greater the chance the bullying will stop.”

Write “Upstander” at the top of a piece of chart paper. Write the following definition: *Someone who takes action or stands up for someone when he or she witnesses someone being bullied or being treated unkindly or when he or she is being bullied or treated unkindly.*

IMPORTANT: Emphasize to students that if they see someone being hurt physically or see an interaction that might escalate into physical violence, they should *not* confront the bully. Rather, they should quickly go and get help from an adult. Discuss with students signs that might indicate such a physical threat (very angry voices, someone crying, the aggressor being in someone’s personal space, threats being made.) As mentioned above, students should report any incidences they believe to be bullying to an adult. Note that students *will* confuse conflicts and bullying as they continue to learn. You will hear many reports of bullying that are not, in fact, bullying. Praise the child who comes to you for caring and for trying to help.

NOTE: You may want to go over Telling vs. Tattling: *Telling is trying to help someone, tattling is trying to get someone in trouble.*

Brainstorm as a group some things you can do when you see someone being hurt or bullied or you are being hurt or bullied.

Record children’s ideas on the chart under your “upstander” definition using **two columns:** 1) ideas that mean confronting the person who is bullying and 2) ideas that do not involve confrontation. Some possible suggestions include:

- Refuse to join in (doesn’t involve confrontation).
- Report bullying you know about or see to an adult (doesn’t involve confrontation).
- Invite the person being hurt to join your group (might involve confrontation).

- Speak out using an “I” message. Say, “I don’t like it when you treat him like that.” “I want you to stop calling him that name.” “I’m going to tell a counselor right now.” (Does involve confrontation.)
- Be a friend to the person who has been bullied by showing him you care about him: put an arm around him, give him a put-up, etc. (doesn’t involve confrontation).
- Distract the bully with a joke or something else so she stops the behavior (does involve confrontation).

Now tell students they will do an activity where they will practice responding to bullying or unkindness with assertive (strong, but not mean) messages.

The Upstander Machine (10 minutes)

Introduce the next activity:

“It takes practice and courage to act strong without being mean when you or another child are being treated unkindly or bullied.” Tell the students you would like them to pretend they are an Upstander machine.

To form the machine, have children break into two lines facing one another about three feet apart. They should imagine that they have on/off switches on their arms. When you touch an arm, the Upstander machine switches on. Once a child is “switched on,” that child should give out a strong (but not mean) Upstander message.

Walk along the aisle between the students. Recite a scenario from the ones listed below. Then choose a child randomly and switch him or her on with a touch on the arm for a strong Upstander response. Practice with several students before moving on to another scenario. Some possible situations:

- Someone calls you a mean name. (Possible response: “I feel hurt and angry when you call me that name. Please don’t do that.”)
- Someone tells you to do something you don’t want to do. (“No, thanks. I’m not interested.”)
- Someone is calling someone else a bad name. (“That’s not cool. Be cool.”)
- Someone is making fun of someone because she is blind.
- Someone wants you to spread a rumor about someone else.
- Someone tells you can’t play in the game.
- Someone demands another student’s afternoon snack or lunch money.
- Someone tells everyone not to let someone else play with you.
- Someone posts something mean about a classmate online

Ask for a few volunteers to share:

- What are some of the feelings you had during this activity?
- What might happen if everyone were an upstander instead of just a bystander?
- What are some questions you still have about this activity? (respond to questions or chart them to respond to at a later date.)

Self-portrait Pledges (10 minutes) (Integrated Arts)

Provide large construction paper, art materials, and white construction paper for speech bubbles. Have students create a large self-portrait, including their whole body to show themselves being an upstander. Students make speech bubbles that show something they

can imagine themselves doing to help someone who is being bullied. Have students start with *"I can...."* *"I can give someone a compliment."*; *"I can ask a friend to help with me."* *"I can say, 'Don't listen to them.'* Display self-portraits where others can see them.

Closing: Upstander Celebration (5 Minutes)

Do a group high-five, special hand shake or fist bump to celebrate their work!

Grade Level Modifications

K-1

Ask: *“Raise your hand if you ever witnessed someone else being bullied or treated unkindly by other people.”*

Ask the questions below in a whole group format.

(IMPORTANT: Remind students not to use anyone’s name in order respect privacy.)

- *“Think of one of those times you saw someone being treated this way. What did it feel like to witness someone being treated that way?”*
- *“How did you respond when you saw that happen?”*
- *“Would you do the same thing again?”*

Follow the instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity, OR do the Upstander Machine as a separate session.

Emphasize to younger students the importance of reporting bullying incidence to adults. Younger students will have more difficulty distinguishing bullying from social cruelty, but noticing when someone is being treated unkindly is of value no matter the definition.

For the Self-portrait Pledges, have students dictate their pledges as needed. Accept “Go tell an adult” as an appropriate response for this age level.

6-12 and Adult

Follow the instructions as outlined, but use the following scenarios for the Upstander Machine:

- Someone much larger and stronger threatens to fight a friend of yours in public.
- Someone has spread a very bad rumor about someone online that has gone viral.
- Someone repeatedly calls a kid a very hurtful “nickname” at lunch that makes everyone laugh.
- Someone makes fun of a kid’s clothing.
- Someone insults another person’s parents for being of a different race or religion.
- Someone posts a picture of someone else online without their knowledge to make fun of them.

Curricular Connections

K-1 Literacy [*Bootsie Barker Bites*](#) by Barbara Bottner features a narrator who is bullied by Bootsie as soon as the two girls are out of their mothers’ sight. Read story aloud. Stop and allow students to practice what they might say to Bootsie or what they might do in the narrator’s shoes. Ask what the students think about the ending. What do they think of how the narrator and the narrator’s mother handled it? What would they have done differently? Will the ending change Bootsie’s behavior in the future?

K-1 Literacy [One](#) by Kathryn Otoshi features numbers and colors as characters (blue is being bullied by red), but ultimately teaches about respect and having the courage to stand up for what's right.

K-5 Literacy and Art: Provide students with materials for making a mobile: several index cards, yarn or ribbon, a wire hanger. On each card students write one idea for being an upstander and illustrate it on the back. Have students punch holes in the top of the index cards, thread them with yarn and tie them to the hanger. Hang projects for display.

K-5 Literacy and Technology: Have students write and illustrate a class "How-to" or comic book for being an Upstander.

K-5 Geography: On chart paper taped together, have children draw one huge map of your school and its school grounds (perhaps teaming with other classrooms who would take certain zones of the school). As an extension of the Caring Being ([hyperlink to lesson](#)), have students create the "Caring School." Brainstorm a list of where they would most like to feel safe (the playground, the bus, the cafeteria, the library, home, etc.). Have them write in the words and ideas that they would like to see characterized in each place.

2-5 Literacy: Read [Loser](#) by Jerry Spinelli. Ask students to think about where different characters in the story would be on the Heart of the Matter chart. *"What choices do you see characters making when Zinkoff is being treated unkindly? What other choices could they make?"* Have students write a letter to Zinkoff or one of the other characters in the story, giving them advice on how to handle the situation.

6-12 Social Studies and Literacy: Because bullying at school reflects power dynamics at work in society at large, explore with young people how characteristics such as a person's size, race, age, culture, or perceived sexual orientation influence whether one is bullied at your school. Concepts such as bias, discrimination, prejudice, privilege, and internalized oppression can be explored through the lens of bullying at your school:

1. Who are the targets of harassment in your school?
2. What gives some students advantages over others?
3. How might being told you are inferior because of some unchangeable characteristic affect someone's self-image over time?
4. What is a hate crime?
5. What can a student do to challenge bias?

Explore the historical roots of these power dynamics. Explore how these power dynamics are reflected in literature.

6-12 English/Literacy: Create PSAs that encourage moving from bystander to upstander and read them over your school's PA system every morning.