

Student Program 2

TITLE Bullying: What can I do if I see it happening?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Bullying goes on in every school in Australia so it makes sense for you to be prepared to deal with bullying situations. Bullies feel in control when they threaten or frighten others, and they feel admired by other students. When bystanders do nothing, that feeds the bully's sense that they are better than everyone else. Bullying gets worse when it is ignored. We know that bystanders are present around 87% of the time and that when the bystanders are silent, bullying behaviour continues and can get worse.

Most young people feel uncomfortable about stepping in and it takes courage to intervene. It is always up to you whether you feel safe to intervene or not.

Student: Why should bystanders step in?

Dr Carr-Gregg: The amazing thing is that when bystanders respond effectively, good things happen. Firstly verbal bullying usually stops within 10 seconds after a bystander speaks up. Second, the argument is more likely to be sorted out when bystanders intervene than when a teacher intervenes and lastly, students who are 'defended' by others feel much better, and report less bullying one year later.

The problem is that even though many young people want to do something, very few actually know what to do to stop it from happening.

Student: So, what sorts of things can I do if I see bullying happening?

Dr Carr-Gregg: So I want to tell you five really great strategies that have stood the test of time. The five techniques are distracting, balancing, reasoning with the bullies, supporting the person being bullied, or just getting help from a trusted adult.

Student: How do I distract someone who is bullying?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Distracting the bullies is probably the easiest action and can be used to stop put downs, unwanted physical contact, and can stop people being excluded. It involves you changing what is being talked about, maybe using humour or a simple request or comment. For example, if you think tension is building and physical bullying is about to happen, you could call out to the group "Come on, this is boring; let's go to the handball courts."

Student: Can you explain how to use balancing?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Balancing involves you using a positive comment when someone who is bullying says something negative to put someone down. It does

not involve telling someone that they are wrong or directly challenging them. It means that if someone says "That guy Josh sucks up to the teacher all the time, I'm sick of it." before anyone jumps in to agree, a helpful bystander could say: "Yeah well I don't know about that but he played football with me last week and he was the best guy on the team". This works really well when the target of the bullying is not around to hear it.

Student: And how can reasoning be helpful?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Reasoning involves you helping the student who bullies to think and not just react. Bringing attention to what they are doing can help them realise the ugliness of what they are doing. It can help them think about other options available. It can also help them realise that their actions might not be worth the consequences.

An example could be when Charlotte tells Leah that she is going to get at Sam by spreading a rumour about her. Leah could use reasoning and say, "I have had rumours spread about me and it really upset me, how would you feel if someone spread a rumour about you?"

Student: Supporting sounds like an easy thing to do. Does it actually make a difference?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Without intervening, you can support other students by saying something supportive or giving them a positive gesture. This can have a big effect on the whole life of the person being targeted by bullying behaviour. You can use this in combination with the distraction technique, by following up with saying, 'Hey, she says mean stuff like that all the time, this isn't about you - I think she's having a bad day.'

Showing this type of support can help the person being bullied bounce back. This can make them feel better and less hurt and isolated when others see them being supported by you. It makes them less likely to be targeted by others in the future.

Student: What if these things don't work?

Dr Carr-Gregg: Sometimes these strategies do not work, and the bully might start to pick on you. If this happens, try to get out of the situation by stepping away, using closed body language like this (*cross arms*), and say, 'Hey I was just trying to keep things cool' or 'I'm only saying this as you might end up getting in heaps of trouble.' Remember, do not intervene in physical bullying. You must get out of the way, and get adult help. Never try to break up a fight as you could be the one that ends up getting hurt.

You should never put yourself in danger.

Student: You said the fifth thing to do is to get help. What if I don't want to do?

Dr Carr-Gregg: The final technique is to get help. Go to an adult or person in authority and make them aware of the bullying. Even if you go away quietly and get help without saying anything to the bully you are still doing something to stop the harassment. Bullies quickly lose their power when people stop accepting their behaviour.

Lastly, but very importantly, getting help is not dobbing. Dobbing is when someone goes to a teacher just to get them into trouble, usually about something small. Getting help is when you go to an adult to stop trouble or to get someone out of trouble, usually about something serious.

Student: What if I want to talk to someone about how I feel too?

Dr Carr-Gregg: We know that even seeing bullying happening can be upsetting. If you need to speak to someone there are always other people who can help. You can ring a helpline or book some online counselling. Web counselling lets you connect one-on-one, real time, with a Kids Helpline counsellor, over the web. Web counselling is open 7 days a week. Because a lot of people use web counselling, there can be a bit of a wait, before a counsellor is available. But if you need to talk to someone now, call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.