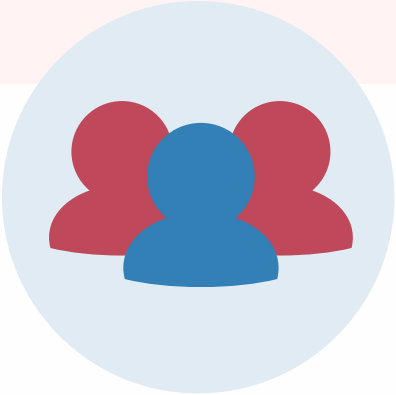
Witnessing and Defending Tipsheet for Educators

The power of peers as 'upstanders' against youth bullying



- When someone is bullied, there are almost always other children and youth around who see this happen. These people are called **'bystanders'**.
- Children and youth who **take action** when they witness their peers being bullied become **'upstanders'**. This is one way to contribute to healthier schools and communities.



- About **two-thirds** of youth have recently **witnessed bullying** [1]
- This means that students have lots of opportunities to be upstanders



- People tend to notice bullying that is **relevant to themselves**
- Students who have been bullied are more likely to notice others being bullied [1]
- Students with **diverse gender identities** are more likely to notice bullying [2]



- Once someone notices bullying, they can have a lot of influence over the situation
- When **bystanders** become **upstanders**, the bullying usually stops within **10 seconds** [2]

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How can youth stand up when they witness bullying?

- Standing up against bullying can feel really hard, because the aggressor often holds **more power** than the bystander (e.g., they are bigger or more popular)
- Being an upstander can look a number of different ways. Youth should be encouraged to choose a **defending strategy** that feels **safe** for them and others
- Youth should not be encouraged to 'fight back' or 'take revenge', as these approaches have negative impacts over time

Defending Strategies [3]

Indirect Defending

- This method involves intervening **without confronting** the aggressor or the person being bullied directly
  - E.g., **telling a teacher** or another supportive adult; **comforting someone** after they've been bullied
- This is the **most common** strategy
  - In a recent Canadian survey:
    - **75%** of youth who witnessed bullying intervened by telling an adult
    - **85%** comforted their victimized peer(s) [1]





Direct Defending

- This method involves **confronting** the person who is bullying
  - e.g., asking them to stop making rude comments or being nice to someone they are trying to exclude
- This type of defending is called **'solution-focused'**, as it involves directly enacting solutions to the bullying
- In the survey of Canadian youth, **60%** indicated that they used direct defending strategies against bullying [1]

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Citations:

1. Craig, W., Martin-Storey, A., Dirks, M., Exner-Cortens, D., Holfeld, B., & Nadeau, M. *Building capacity to prevent gender-based violence – Development and evaluation of evidence-based tools for Canadian educators.* Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. 2023-2025; unpublished.
2. Hawkins, L. D., Pepler, D. J., & Craig, W. M. (2001). Naturalistic observations of peer interventions in bullying. *Social Development*, *10*(4), 512-527. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507-00178
3. Lambe, L. J., & Craig, W. M. (2020). Peer defending as a multidimensional behavior: Development and validation of the Defending Behaviors Scale. *Journal of School Psychology, 78*, 38-53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.12.001

Additional Resources:

- **I Know Someone Being Bullied** (PREVNet)
- **Bullying Facts and Solutions** (PREVNet)
- **Identity-Based Bullying Teaching Resources: Peers as Allies** (PREVNet)
- **Identity-Based Bullying Online Training for Educators** (PREVNet)

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