



MAKING DECISIONS – ALLY OR BYSTANDER: SHORT ACTIVITY

LEVEL: Educators or Parents/Guardians

LENGTH OF TIME: 10-15 minutes

The *Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander* classroom lesson explores with students what they may do when they witness name-calling, bullying or harassment of a friend or someone they don't know. They'll soon see that different situations call for different responses.

During a professional development training or an evening gathering of parents/guardians, this lesson can be adapted as a short activity to get participants thinking concretely about actions that bystanders can take and all the thoughts that quickly go through one's mind as they decide what to do in the moment. It can also get people to see how difficult it is to speak up when they witness bullying and can lay the groundwork for realizing that practicing responses would be a good idea.

MATERIALS

The [lesson plan, *Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander*](#), “4 Corners” placards posted in four corners of the room (see below), room arrangement suitable for activity and movement. In a professional development session – a copy of the lesson for students for each participant.

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

- Review the list of scenarios and pick out ones that you think will generate discussion or that you would like people to consider – gender, race, ability... Include some that are only slight variations so that people have to think about how things would be different if the scenario involves friends or not, students who are older or younger, students who are more popular or not. Include different topics in your set of questions. Depending on the amount of time you have, choose 2-3 scenarios geared towards students and 2-3 geared towards adults.
- Print or write out and post the “4 corner” placards in the area of the room where you will do the activity. People need to be able to move around to each “corner”.

INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

- Explain that this activity looks at situations where you must decide, in the moment, how to react if you see someone being teased or bullied. Sometimes you may do something. Sometimes you may not. It often depends on the situation, how will you know someone, if they are older or younger, etc.
- **Point out the four possibilities and the four placards in the room:**
 - Ignore the situation or walk away.
 - Attempt to negotiate or stop the situation. Intervene myself.
 - Talk to the person privately later.
 - Seek help from an adult or someone older.

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- As you begin, ask participants to either think about how they would respond if they were a student in the 4th or 5th grade – either one they know or how they would have responded when they were that age.
 - Read out loud a scenario that you have chosen to use. Make sure people are clear about the scenario, especially if it is a variation of one you just read. Ask them first to think which of the four corners they would go to. Then, have them move. You could point out that asking students to think, before they move, keeps students from just following the crowd.
 - With each scenario, invite a couple of people from the different corners to say why they chose to stand in a certain corner. If they moved to the tell an adult corner, ask them if they would know how to handle the situation now, if a student asked for their help.
 - When the lesson is done in a classroom, having them turn and talk before the sharing is a way to ensure more students are engaged in talking and therefore thinking about their actions.
 - Often a participant will bring up a scenario they have encountered in their school, as an adult. This is a good time to transition to these kinds of scenarios. Having participants think about what they themselves would do in a scenario, helps give them perspective on what we are asking students to do.
 - If no one has brought it up, after you have completed a few scenarios with participants thinking as students, switch to having them be themselves.
 - Ask, “What are situations that you run in to at school, as an adult, where you have to make a decision on what to do?” You could ask people to think about ones about gender or race or families depending on what you are focusing on in the training. It is good to get ideas for scenarios from the participants or you could use ideas from the list below.
 - Do a few rounds with scenarios that may occur for an adult in the school.
 - In these scenarios, the corner that says “seek assistance from an adult” could mean talking with the principal, another colleague, or another parent to figure out what steps they could take.

SAMPLE SCENARIOS FOR EDUCATORS OR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

ADULT → ADULT

1. You are talking with a group of colleagues and one comments about a boy with two moms, “Daniel just keeps acting out. He really needs a father figure at home.”
2. A colleague or parent comments, “It’s no wonder he gets bullied, he wears pink nail polish to school.”
3. A colleague says, “No wonder she’s not doing well in school. Just look at her family.”
4. A parent comments, “Roberto is always playing with the girls, his parents should sign him up for football. He should do more things with boys.”

ADULT → STUDENT

1. You overhear a group of students talking and one says, "Oh, that assignment was so gay."
2. A child says, "Ask Xiao Ming for the answer, all Asians are good at math."
3. You overhear your child say something bad about another child because of their skin color.
4. You overhear another child say something bad about a child because of their skin color.
5. You overhear your child say something bad about another child because of their religion.
6. You overhear a child say something bad about another child because of their religion.

STUDENT → STUDENT (FROM THE LESSON PLAN)

1. A classmate or friend constantly makes fun of another student because they are small for their age.
2. An older student makes fun of a younger student because they are small for their age
3. When you are with a group of friends, one of them makes fun of a younger student because of the way they dress.
4. A new kid at school calls your friend a bad name because of their skin color.
5. A friend of yours calls a new kid at school a bad name because of their skin color.
6. A kid you don't know calls another kid you don't know a bad name because of their skin color.
7. Someone in your class says something mean to another student in your school because of their religion.
8. A new kid at school calls your friend "gay"
9. A group of students your age keeps saying, "That's gay" to mean they don't like something.
10. A group of students your age keeps saying, "That's gay" to mean they don't like something and you know that your friend's dads are gay.
11. A friend of yours keeps saying to other boys, "Hey stop acting like a girl."
12. A boy in your school that you don't know very well keeps saying to other boys, "Hey stop acting like a girl."
13. A friend in your class teases a younger boy for having a teddy bear or a doll.
14. A student in your class teases a boy for wearing a pink T-shirt and nail polish.
15. A girl in your class teases another girl for always dressing like a boy.

Include any others that might apply to your school or community.

RELEVANT RESEARCH ON ALLY AND BYSTANDER BEHAVIOR

- According to 5th graders included in a study of over 13,000 students in grades 5-12:¹

Peer actions that make things better are:

- spending time or talking with them at school,
- helping them get away from the situation,
- making a distraction,
- and helping them tell an adult at the school.

Peer actions that make things worse are:

- blaming them for what happened,
- making fun of them for being teased or for asking for help,
- and ignoring the situation.

Adult actions that make things better are:

- listening, giving advice and encouragement,
- checking in over time to see if things got better,
- increasing adult supervision,
- and disciplining the student who was mean.

Adult actions that make things worse are:

- telling them to stop tattling,
- telling them to solve it themselves,
- telling the student that they should have acted differently,
- and ignoring the situation.

- A consistent message about intervention and support from adults and administrators helps shift bystander attitudes towards a willingness to intervene in a bullying situation based on analysis of evidence from 11 school-based programs.²
- Perceiving that others in a school are also likely to intervene correlates with greater comfort intervening in bullying situations for educators, staff and students in a school.^{3,4}

¹ Charisse Nixon and Stan Davis (2010). The Youth Voice Research Project. 2010 International Bullying Prevention Association. Seattle, WA.

² Joshua R. Polanin, Dorothy L. Espelage, and Therese D. Pigott (2012). A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Bullying Prevention Programs' Effects on Bystander Intervention Behavior, *School Psychology Review* 41:1.

³ Catherine P. Bradshaw, Tracy Evian Waasdorp, Lindsey M. O'Brennan, Michaela Gulemetova (2011). Findings from the National Education Association's Nationwide Study of Bullying: Teachers' and Education Support Professionals' Perspectives. National Education Association.

⁴ Frances Aboud and Anna Joong (2008). Intergroup name-calling and conditions for creating assertive bystanders. In S. Levy & M. Killen (Eds.), *Intergroup attitudes and relations in childhood through adulthood* (pp. 249-260). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

**IGNORE THE SITUATION
OR WALK AWAY**

INTERVENE MYSELF

**TALK TO THE PERSON
IN PRIVATE**

**SEEK HELP FROM AN
ADULT OR SOMEONE
OLDER**