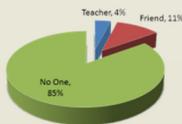


BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

The current prevention-based thinking weighs heavily on Bystander Intervention yet in peer-to-peer bullying incidents in education today, Adult intervention (Teacher) occurred in only 4% of the cases, Peer intervention (Friend/classmate) occurred 11%, which left the victim alone to fend for him/herself 85% of them time.



THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD:

If a bystander is scared of the bully, how can we expect them to intervene or help someone else when in truth, they are probably just grateful that it is not them being targeted?!

Why don't bystanding students intervene?

- ▶ Fear of the bully themselves or retaliation at a later time;
- ▶ Fear of getting caught in the middle and being hurt, bullied, or punished through Zero Tolerance policy enforcement;
- ▶ Believe that adults will not be of help and in fact may make the situation worse;
- ▶ Believe that telling an adult about bullying is a form of "tattling" or "ratting" (Snitches get stiches);
- ▶ Benefit in some way from the victimization of a student (e.g., gain a possession or social status or feel empowered);

Zero Tolerance

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Zero Tolerance is the most widely implemented school discipline policy in the United States. While specific Zero Tolerance policies and practices vary from school to school, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Safe and Responsive Schools, at least 79 percent of schools nationwide had adopted Zero Tolerance policies by 1997. To say that that number has grown in the last 15 years is an understatement.

WHAT IS ZERO TOLERANCE?

Zero Tolerance policy in schools as they relate to bullying are commonly interpreted and enforced by a practice of punishing **"any infraction of the rule, regardless of extenuating circumstances, mistakes and maybe most importantly the right to protect yourself when in imminent danger."** In many cases, punishment for a violation under the policy is severe, such as suspension or expulsion from school. These policies have been implemented at the school, district, and state levels with the intended goal of ensuring the safety of students and staff. In theory and hope, Zero Tolerance would deter students from violent or illegal behavior because the punishment for such a violation is harsh and certain.

*Zero Tolerance as interpreted in many schools
(and through the eyes of adults) means*

***"You don't get to hurt anyone, because we don't allow it."
However, through the eyes of a child, Zero-Tolerance means
"I am going to get in trouble especially if I defend myself!"***

WHAT IS BULLYING?

According to stopbullying.gov, a federal government website managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Bullying is defined as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a **real or perceived power imbalance**. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose."

Every 7 minutes a child is bullied. A Bullying scenario typically involves multiple players: The bully (or bullies), the targeted child (or children) and bystanders (friends or adults, even teachers).

IMBALANCE OF POWER

Real or perceived, there is little question that one of the *main ingredients* in any bullying scenario is an imbalance of power. It is one of the key components in the very definition of bullying so then **does Zero Tolerance (equal punishment to all parties involved no matter what) make ANY sense? Especially from the prospective of the child who is being bullied?**

Here's how bullying looks...

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD:

The **Bully** selects their "**Victim**" looking for someone who may appear weak, small, different, or insecure. The bully provokes engagement (taunting or teasing) from the targeted child, making demands of their victim and analyzing the victim's response. If the targeted child reacts with an un-empowered fear based response, (showing signs of intimidation, yielding control, complying, crying), this is the signal to the bully that (s)he has found his/her target. The bully many times will then survey the landscape looking for "passive acceptance" of others, silence or even encouragement from bystanders. Ideally, a bully's target child is a child who fails to gain **Bystander** support and one they perceive as one who "can't stop them."

On the other hand, the targeted child has done nothing wrong, certainly hasn't asked to be chosen as a target, or has been selected because of a real or perceived weakness. When looking for help at home the targeted child is often directed to fight back or tell the teacher (see article on *What Parents Should Know about Bullying*). When looking for assistance at school most of the time (85%) the targeted child is alone, has very little chance of being assisted by a fellow classmate (11%) and even less of a chance of getting help from a teacher (4%).

So I ask you...

Is it ok with you if your school has a policy that punishes the bullied child with equal punishment that is given to the bully?

And in addition,

Doesn't the child being bullied and victimized have the *RIGHT* to defend themselves against this predatory behavior and possible physical harm?

In radKIDS we believe that these Zero Tolerance policies are unjust and contributory to the bullying pandemic we are experiencing today. In fact, in many cases these policies can and do violate a child's right to defend themselves which is supported by law in all 50 states. We advocate strongly for change and we are not alone. Recently in an educational webinar, the United States Secretary of Education Mr. Arne Duncan declared that "Zero Tolerance policies in regards to Bullying behaviors have failed and do not work."

ZERO VICTIMIZATION

Instead of a Zero Tolerance school culture of, "You will be punished if you defend yourself physically", radKIDS advocates for a change to a common culture and climate of "**Zero Victimization**" a unified policy and practice that is grounded in this statement "**NO ONE GETS HURT HERE.**"

THE CHANGE

For Zero Victimization to succeed a couple of changes must be considered; first a child needs to be given permission to "STOP" anyone from hurting them and then taught how to do it (radKIDS). As we stated earlier in this article 85% of the time a child is being bullied they are the only ones that know about it (No intervention). The only real thing that will stop anyone who wants to bully is to make them, "STOP". Once the imbalance of power is equaled through personal empowerment (self-value and self worth) including an understanding that, "No One has the right to hurt you" and "that you will not be punished if you resist" the power will truly shift to the child who is being bullied. When you couple this with activity based training on realistic physical resistance skills to stop anyone from hurting you, we can realistically have an expectation of behavior and a Zero Victimization environment.

If after that, one child chooses to bully another, the only thing that should be considered is, “Did this student intend to engage in behavior that is defined as bullying?” If the answer is yes, then punishment is applied due to the choice made by the bully to try to hurt or intimidate another child.

THE radKIDS WAY

As many of you know in radKIDS our focus is on the child, by empowering the child to recognize, avoid, resist and if necessary stop and escape violence or harm, we can and are changing the cycle of bullying violence in schools and communities across the nation. **The radKIDS Curriculum and physical skills development class does not teach or empower a child to fight**, but we do empower and teach a child to “STOP” potential violence or harm in their daily lives and with this education we shift the power imbalance back and give a child the opportunity to escape violence or harm, because no one has the right to hurt a radKIDS or any child.

We ask you all to take a look at Bullying -- through the eyes of a child -- and if the concepts in this article create thought and make sense to you, we encourage you to share conversations with your friends and even your schools leadership and PTA's / PTO's. Maybe even beginning that conversation with a few questions like:

Do we have a bullying problem?
What do our children say?
Is our school policy a “Zero Tolerance” policy in regards to bullying?
Can we help make a change?

If you find that your district has a Zero Tolerance policy, might it be better to empower our children within a Zero Victimization educational environment (where we declare that, “No One Gets Hurt Here”) rather than try to control our children within the expectations of a Zero Tolerance mandate (that states “We Will Not Allow Bullying”) and in the eyes of children means, “If I do anything to defend or protect myself, ***I will get in trouble and be punished (re-victimized)?***”

Is it time to make a change for our children and our future? Sadly many children today are not only losing hope they are giving up, when you see that children as young as 9 years old are so hurt that they consider suicide a real option to stop their pain and suffering the answer is clear. What kind of school do you want your child to attend? One that clearly states and supports a culture and climate where, “No Gets Hurt Here” or one where children are afraid to protect themselves for fear of getting in trouble, (We Don't Allow that here). The choice is ours and so is the responsibility.

We stand by to help in anyway we can and we thank you for taking the time to think about a change.



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