



A Bystander Leadership

Approach to Safer Schools

Key Points Update — 2008

1. The value of the program revolves around the weekly or biweekly discussion forum and in keeping the kids talking about issues and brainstorming strategies that they can comfortably attempt. As Dr. Ken Rigby, an Australian researcher studying bystander leadership, notes, “*Values can only be taught by helping students reflect on their own experiences (Rigby, 2007).*” Our role as a Team LEAD sponsor is exactly that...to help kids reflect on what is happening socially and relationally in school and how they feel about it. From there, we can move into brainstorming how they deal with these issues and experiences and how they can deal with them positively in order to create a safer environment for all.
2. It’s vital for student leaders to come up with their own strategies that can realistically work for them in this day and age. While we can offer our perspective and *possible* strategies, the truth is that only the kids truly understand what it’s like to be a kid today.
3. As sponsors, our first priority needs to be the student leaders’ safety. We must not expect them to “stand up” in ways that put them in danger. It’s important not to expect them to do things that we, ourselves, would not feel comfortable doing among our own peers. Often, the most effective interventions (“standing up”, if you will) are those that are done subtly and under the radar, either before or after an event, in the form of supporting targets or encouraging friends in friendly ways to reexamine their actions. Direct confrontation is rarely appropriate or successful when emotions are high. Team LEADers need to be encouraged to seek help from trusted adults regularly and in ways that are confidential. They must be protected from being viewed as “security guards”, “snitches”, etc.
4. Adult support, follow-through, and encouragement in the building is vital. Without it, the student bystanders are put in an untenable situation. Without adult follow-through involving both discipline and counseling for aggressors on the reactive end of things, a proactive program cannot truly succeed.
5. Maintain a heavy focus on the solutions and positive leadership skills rather than dwelling on the negative behaviors. Help kids look for what’s going right, and find ways to reinforce and encourage those who are doing good things. We get more of that on which we focus our attention; find ways to highlight the positives.
6. Remember that even student LEADers make mistakes; the goal is growth!