



A Bystander Leadership

Approach to Safer Schools

Main Roles in Aggression Cycle

While Dan Olweus's Bully Circle (Bully, Bystanders, Victim) describes many distinctive roles within the cycle of peer aggression, each role revolves around the three main roles below:

Aggressor

Bystander

Target

When working with students, especially younger students, it is wise to focus on these three main roles as long as all the variations in between are also discussed.

Some bystanders, for instance, may be tacitly or actively supporting the aggressor or aggressors. Some bystanders may feel great empathy for the target or targets, but may say nothing at all or even laugh, seemingly in support of the aggressor. Some bystanders may be physically present, but may not actually be tuned in at all to the situation unfolding around them. Some bystanders, then, may actively support the target in a variety of ways.

Pointing out that the roles are fluid, that we may find ourselves playing different roles from day to day, is an important insight to share with students. The goal is to empower all kids to understand their actions and how those actions affect their social climate.

By giving the entire student body and staff a common language and background for discussing relational aggression, a school can more effectively deal with students' behavior and concerns.

Through recognizing and being held accountable for the roles they play in aggressive situations, students are empowered to learn and grow.

Through such self-reflection and examination of behaviors and consequences, students can learn to exhibit more positive social behaviors, and thus, develop healthier social relationships with their peers.