
BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

RECOMMENDED LESSON

Bystander Effect

This lesson outlines one simple way to integrate the Bystander Revolution Bystander Effect video playlist and discussion questions into a middle school classroom setting.

Grade Level:
Middle School

Estimated Time:
45 minutes

**Common Core
ELA Standards
Grades 6–8:**
R.7, SL.1.B,
SL.1.C, SL.1.D,
SL.2, SL.3, SL.5,
W.2.A, W.2.B,
W.2.C, W.2.D,
W.2.E, W.2.F,
W.3, W.4

OVERVIEW

Students will discuss the meaning of the “bystander effect” and how it applies to bullying situations. Students will watch videos from celebrities, experts, and students introducing the social phenomenon, share their own experiences, and debate the merits of different intervention strategies. The lesson concludes with an opportunity for the educator to discuss resources available to students at the school, and present an optional homework assignment.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Define the “bystander effect.”
- Summarize solutions heard from celebrities, experts, and students.
- Compare and contrast different intervention strategies.
- Apply the strategies to counteract the bystander effect in real life bullying situations.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Computer & internet access
- LCD projector (optional)
- [Bystander Effect video playlist](#)
- Pens/pencils & paper

PREPARATION

- First, watch the Bystander Effect video playlist.
- Familiarize yourself with the definition of the bystander effect .
- Copy the **Graphic Organizer** (pg.7), one for each student.

PROCEDURE

Introduction

(5 minutes)

Introduce the topic by asking students the following questions:

- What is a bystander?
- How many of you have heard of the “bystander effect”?
- Do you think a bystander would be more likely to help in a bullying situation in a big group or if they were the only one present?
- Can you think of any reasons why people might be less likely to help in a group?

KEY QUESTION

What is the “bystander effect” and how can one person counteract it?

DEFINITION

The Bystander Effect is: a social phenomenon that refers to situations in which individuals do not offer help to a victim when other people are present. The greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help.

Then explain to students that the bystander effect is: *a social phenomenon that refers to situations in which individuals do not offer help to a victim when other people are present. The greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help.*

Video Viewing

(15 minutes)

Introduce the video playlist by explaining to students that they are about to watch 7 short, unscripted videos from celebrities, experts, and students talking about solutions related to the “bystander effect,” along with their own personal experiences. Instruct students to keep in mind any experiences they have had as a bystander and to consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would work in those situations. Provide students with the **Graphic Organizer** to keep track of their reactions. Then show the following 10-minute [playlist](#).

FEATURED SOLUTION

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

A good example is contagious. If you model positive behavior in your own life, you can pass it on to the people around you.



Discussion

(15 minutes)

Below are some sample questions you might use to lead a conversation, as time permits. Each sample question has several possible follow-up questions that may be useful in the discussion.

1. What is the bystander effect?

- Is it a phenomenon where bystanders are less likely to help when there are more people present? Why do you think that happens?
- Could it be that the more people who are present in an emergency situation, the less likely it is that any one person will help?
- Do you think that bullying behavior can be contagious? Why?

2. What are some reasons bystanders might think they shouldn't help someone in need?

- Might they assume someone else will do it?
- If it's a bullying situation, could they be afraid of being targeted themselves?
- Sam Trammell discusses the feeling of knowing something was wrong, but not doing anything about it. Have you ever felt that way?

3. What is "diffusion of responsibility"? How does it relate to Neiko's analogy about Superman and Batman?

- Does it mean that in a time of crisis, people often don't help because they assume that someone else will do it?
- What would happen if Superman and Batman both waited for the other to do something before deciding whether or not to save people?
- Have you ever noticed yourself waiting for someone else to respond to a situation that makes you uncomfortable?

4. Dr. Zimbardo talks about breaking the bystander effect with the "power of one." What does he mean by that?

- Could it be that when one person begins to help, others are more likely to join in?
- Why do you think other people start to help when one person takes initiative?
- Can one person make helping someone in need become the "new norm"? How?

5. Elizabeth Banks talks about the importance of courage. How can you work up the courage to help others?

- Can thinking about the person being hurt, and how they feel, help you understand the need to step in?
- Can it motivate you to imagine the regret you may feel if you don't help?
- Do you think overcoming fear will feel good?
- Is it important to trust your gut? If you feel like something is wrong, should you act or ignore that feeling?
- Do you have to do something big, or, can small actions help too?

6. If a situation seems too dangerous to step in, what are examples of other ways you can help?

- Can you tell a teacher or another trusted adult?
- Could you and a group of friends agree in advance to help together, like Sargunvir did with his friends?
- Can you approach the person being bullied after the fact to offer sympathy and support?
- When should you call 911?

SUGGESTED STRATEGY

If you see someone being bullied, and it feels safe to do so, tell them that a teacher needs to see them in their classroom right away. It might be just the excuse they need to get out of the situation.

7. Now that you know about the bystander effect, how would you define a bystander revolution?

- Is it some kind of large-scale shift in how bystanders approach situations where help is needed?
- Is it a chain reaction where more and more bystanders choose to take action?
- Is it a new standard where people take initiative based on what's needed and not what everyone else is doing?
- Do you think it has anything to do with changing our culture?
- Can it happen in a school?

8. How can one person start a bystander revolution?

- Could it help to develop a habit of taking action? How?
- Could performing small acts of kindness, courage, or inclusion make a difference?
- If you consistently took action, do you think your peers would be more likely to do the same?
- Can one person make kindness cool? How?
- How would you personally start a bystander revolution?

SUGGESTED STRATEGY

It's hard to see how powerful a simple act can be until it's been done. If you have an opportunity to do something good for someone, be courageous and give it a try. The ripple effects your act creates might surprise you.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

(5 minutes)

Ask students to write a paragraph describing one experience where they didn't act because they assumed it wasn't their responsibility. It could be something related to bullying, or something as small as doing the dishes or giving directions to someone who looked lost. Ask students to explain why people might pass off responsibility and to include ways that bystanders can avoid inaction when it matters most. If time permits, ask students to share what they've written with the class.

CLOSING

(5 minutes)

Let students know that if they are being bullied or know someone else who is, there are free, anonymous resources listed on bystanderrevolution.org/help. If there are resources available within your school, like a guidance counselor or social worker, you can make students aware of those options as well. You should also emphasize that if students are in danger or are witnessing an emergency, they should tell a teacher or guidance counselor, or call 911.

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

1. Watch a video and reflect in writing

Have students visit bystanderrevolution.org and watch another video of their choosing. Ask students to write a letter to the person in the video, telling them why they agree or disagree with the advice presented. Ask them to tell the person how they might apply what was said to their own life.

2. The Weekly Stand

The Weekly Stand is a list of 52 simple, fun, transformative actions bystanders can take to reduce bullying and improve school culture. Each action contains helpful background information, suggested strategies and phrases to use, and a video for inspiration.

Have students go to bystanderrevolution.org/weekly, choose one of the actions to complete, and then turn in proof that they did it through some creative means: a photo, a screenshot, a short video, an essay, or even a comic strip.

ABOUT BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

Bystander Revolution is an online resource offering practical, crowdsourced advice about simple things individuals can do to take the power out of bullying.

As you watch these videos keep in mind any experiences you have had as a bystander. Consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would have worked in those situations. Use the notes column to keep track of comments, questions, or thoughts you may have.

	VIDEO	NAME	NOTES
1		It Only Takes One	
2		Dr. Philip Zimbardo	
3		Sam Trammell	
4		Rachel	
5		Sargunvir	
6		Elizabeth Banks	
7		Neiko	