

The Ring of Valor: From spectator to witness

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Fact Sheet #6

Being a spectator

The third point in the bullying triangle, along with the bully and the target, are the spectators. Children who bully thrive on fear and power. They want targets to cower as victims and *spectators* to approve their actions or to be intimidated into passivity. Bullies want to achieve status through control by fear. Bullies are more likely to target children who do not have friends. Like tigers culling an injured prey from the herd, bullies seek to isolate vulnerable targets from social support. So targets often feel isolated and weak, alone and abandoned by their fearful peers who remain as spectators.

The goal of *The Ring of Valor: No Bullying* is to make spectators witnesses who stand by their victimized peers. Onlookers must realize that they have a choice. They can take the wrong action out of fear or the right action out of courage. They are either part of the problem as spectators or part of the solution as witnesses. They cannot escape responsibility and accountability for the consequences of their inaction or approval.



In this *Bullying* series:

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The courage to intervene

What is the “right” action for onlookers to bullying? The eight steps to bullying found in *Raising Courageous Kids* provide a roadmap to the development of the skills of *willpower, caring, vigilance, composure, empathy, integrity, honor, and valor*. For a brief overview of the eight skills, examine http://www.raisingcourageouskids.com/Bullying_chart.pdf.

Each of these strengths enables children to stop being a *spectator* to become effective *witnesses* to bullying. Witnesses feel the suffering of victims and care about their wellbeing. They have a commitment to fairness, and to the rights of their peers to be treated with respect.

Witnesses are also vigilant. They can discriminate between teasing and cruelty. They understand the urgency and risks of intervention. If they intervene too soon, they can deprive targets of opportunities to display their own strength through resistance. They know when targets who are unable to defend themselves are about to become victims and need support from witnesses. They also know how to evaluate their own abilities to manage risks if they intervene. In some cases, by moving silently to stand by their side, engaged witnesses can encourage targets to stand up for themselves. Witnesses demonstrate their union through proximity. In other cases, getting immediate help from adults may be a better choice. If no adult is nearby and the chance of success is worth the risk, a witness may have to intervene physically to stop violent aggression.

Witnesses can understand that they have many options for intervention. Every circumstance varies with the type of bullying, the characteristics of bullies, the isolation from nearby adults, the characteristics of targets, and the abilities of the witnesses. The decision to intervene is a difficult and complex decision that often requires lightning fast thinking.

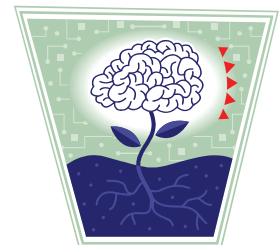
The decision to become involved can have unattractive consequences. Bullies might humiliate and physically threaten witnesses. Witnesses who intervene might get into trouble with teachers. The decision not to become involved has consequences too. Victims lose self-respect and become more isolated. They can become depressed and harm themselves. Their rage toward being victimized can become explosive toward the bullies and the spectators who never intervened in their misery. Failing to act can diminish the self-respect of spectators.

The content of this fact sheet is subject to revision at any time. For the most recent version, check the website.



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If you have any questions or comments, you can contact the author at casmith@ksu.edu.



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