

# HOW CAN YOUTH WHO WITNESS BULLYING ONLINE STAND UP FOR YOUTH WHO ARE VICTIMIZED?



A large number of youth using Social Networking Sites (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) and mobile phones have witnessed cyberbullying behaviours. Yet, the majority of youth refrain from defending their peers who get victimized online. Among the major key players in the bullying events, bystanders can assume different roles in both offline and online bullying episodes. Bystanders, also known as witnesses, can 1) reinforce bullying behaviours, 2) assume passive roles, 3) decide to do nothing, or 4) Stand up to defend and/or support the victimized individuals.

We know that reinforcing the bullying behaviours, deciding to take passive role or doing nothing not only rewards the child who is bullying and glorifies their inappropriate behaviours, but could also enhance the frequency and intensity of bullying behaviours and the negative consequences for the victimized individuals. With this in mind, can online bystanders become UPSTANDERS, that is, people who defend the victimized individuals on Social Networking Sites?

Based on the research, here are various ways that individuals may exercise online upstanding or defending roles, including:

**SHOWING EMPATHY TO THE YOUTH WHO IS VICTIMIZED.** Showing empathy may include protecting, consoling, or comforting the victim through encouraging messages or phone calls. Sometimes, an upstander may arrange to meet with the victimized individuals or those who are cyber-bullying to discuss the issue offline.

**CONFRONTING THE YOUTH WHO IS BULLYING OTHERS.** An upstander may take initiatives to respectfully but assertively confront the child or teen who is bullying others in the offline or online settings and through private and public forums. The bystander could convey the message that bullying is not acceptable. Confrontation may not only help in reducing the power of the child who is bullying but can also help in breaking the bullying cycle and as a result bringing respite to the individual who has been victimized.

**DELETING, NOT LIKING, OR NOT FORWARDING BULLYING MESSAGES OR INFORMATION POSTED ONLINE.** This strategy can help reduce the spread of information in the social network of familiar and unfamiliar people. It is possible that bystanders' behaviour could create a change for the better with an inclusion of a dislike option in the social networking site application tools.

**PRIVATE AND PUBLIC FORUMS.** It is important for bystanders to think carefully about when to use private versus public online application settings or forums to communicate with others involved in bullying behaviours. An effective upstander will know when and how to exercise online defending roles using the inbuilt settings in both private and public forums. The idea is to send a message that the bullying content was not acceptable, but not to seek revenge or public shaming. Sending public messages that are aggressive or embarrassing to the person who did the bullying is likely to make the problem worse.

**ANONYMITY.** While studies have consistently linked anonymity with cyberbullying behaviours, online bystanders can also take anonymity as an opportunity for playing defending roles. By taking advantage of being anonymous on Social Networking Sites, an upstander may choose to delete or write a comment to discourage derogatory messages or information on someone that has been posted online, and/or send supportive messages to the person who was bullied



**TALKING TO FRIENDS.** Telling friends and accepting and welcoming the individual who is bullied into the online group may provide great comfort and reduce the negative effects of the bullying.

In conclusion, to be an effective upstander on Social Networking Sites requires an understanding of the cyberbullying process and its harmful effects, motivation to make a positive difference, and skills and knowledge about how to exercise defending roles.