

UB's anti-bullying expert says bystanders can make a difference

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The Miami Dolphins scandal raises questions about the role that bystanders who may witness bullying can play, says Amanda B. Nickerson, PhD, director of the Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention at the University at Buffalo.

"We are increasingly looking at the power of the bystander, or the people who witness [bullying](#) and harassment, and their role," says Nickerson, who emphasized she is not commenting directly on the ongoing controversy in which Dolphin Richie Incognito allegedly repeatedly hazed teammate Jonathan Martin, but rather the instances and ongoing problem of bullying abuse in general.

"We know that bystanders have a powerful influence on reinforcing the [behavior](#) (making it more likely to occur) or reducing the behavior or its [negative impact](#) by telling the perpetrator to stop, banding together as a group to say it is not going to be tolerated, reporting it or reaching out to provide support to the target."

Nickerson, who has been director of the UB center since 2011 and has been a frequent expert on national and regional news broadcasts, says bullying, which she defines as a repeated pattern of intentionally aggressive behavior intended to cause physical and/or [psychological harm](#) toward a target where there is an imbalance of power, is common in schools. But the same behavior also frequently occurs in many other settings.

"We know that bullying can occur as young as preschool and can continue into adulthood," says Nickerson. "Unfortunately, in the workplace, the outcome is often employees leaving the hostile environment."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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