

Parents' advice can support or undermine targets of school bullying-prevention programs

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Children who are bystanders to a bullying incident are more likely to intervene if their parents have given them advice to intervene and less likely to intervene if their parents tell them to "stay out of it," according to a new study published in the *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, a journal of the Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. The study suggests that culturally-consistent family components may enhance and promote the success of school-based anti-bullying efforts.

"Bullying is a serious problem for [children](#), schools, and families. Our research suggests that [parents](#) have the power to address this problem through the advice they give their children at home. Nearly all children are involved in bullying situations as bystanders even if they are not a bully or a victim, so it is important that parents talk with their children about ways they can intervene if they witness someone being bullied," said Stevie Grassetti, PhD, Post-Doctoral Researcher at the University of Delaware, and lead author of the study. "Bystander children play a powerful role in stopping bullying."

An estimated 10 percent of children are victims of bullying, and many anti-bullying programs are aimed at encouraging bystanders to intervene. Researchers found a link between parents' advice to children and children's specific behaviors when they witness bullying take place at [school](#). For instance, parents' advice to their children to help and comfort victims, significantly predicted children intervening. Furthermore, when children's parents told them to ignore bullying incidents, they were not only less likely to intervene on behalf of victims, but were actually more likely to join in the bullying.

The study took place in fourth and fifth grade classes of nine elementary schools with diverse

populations in an urban/suburban school district in a mid-Atlantic state. Data were collected at school and at home as part of a larger study on the effectiveness of a school-based bullying prevention program. In the classroom setting, 1,440 children reported on their classmates' specific behaviors during bullying incidents. At home, 106 pairs of caregivers and children were presented with five hypothetical bullying examples, and then parents were asked to explain to their children how they should respond if they witnessed the situation take place.

Previous research has examined family factors associated with children becoming bullies or victims of bullying, but little has been known about parental influence on children who are bystanders to bullying. Researchers said these results broaden the understanding of how best to engage children who may be able to intervene in ways that parents and teachers are not able to and make a real impact on the bullying problem.

"Parents and school personnel should work together to make sure that children are receiving consistent messages on how to stop and prevent bullying. We now know that parental [advice](#) given at home could be very relevant to children's behavior with peers at school during bullying incidents," said Grassetti.

More information: Stevie N. Grassetti et al, Caregivers' Advice and Children's Bystander Behaviors During Bullying Incidents, *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* (2017). DOI: [10.1080/15374416.2017.1295381](https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2017.1295381)

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