

How to be an Anti-Bully

When a Wisconsin middle school basketball player saw people making fun of a cheerleader with Down Syndrome, he went into the stands during a timeout to defend her. His action proved contagious - a few other players joined in, then others in the school, then the whole town and then the story went viral online. Why did this message resonate so? The kindness of a single person can turn the tide when it comes to bullying.

Many of us tend to think of bullying as something that happens among kids, but nothing could be further from the truth. Bullies grow up and find new ways to spread misery - among their coworkers, their neighbors and their families. They may be overt, using intimidation and fear, or they may be more subtle, using cruel humor and gossip.

Bullying often involves more than just the bully and the victim. Bystanders are often part of the dynamic because many bullies thrive on attention. Bullies try to isolate the victim and gain the support of onlookers. Bystanders often add fuel to the fire, either by laughing, by joining in or just being silent.

In simple terms, bullying is behavior designed to harm or dominate others. It is hurtful words or actions designed to intimidate or isolate another. There's a spectrum of bullying that can range from "mild," such as hurtful humor or passing on gossip, to very severe, up to and including violence. Left unchecked, it can often escalate.

Most people don't like bullies, but don't know what to do. People are often afraid to challenge the bully in any way, fearing to become a victim themselves - or simply not wanting to get involved.



Step one in becoming an Anti-Bully is to ensure that we are not enabling the bully in any way by our approval or silence. But there is much more that each of us can do than simply not joining in. Bullying works by isolating the victim. You don't have to confront the bully, but you can reach out to and support the victim with kindness and compassion. You can be the one to start the kindness chain.

Here are some other ways you can be an Anti-Bully:

- Spread kindness. Start your day with a resolution to make the world a better place, not a worse one.
- Stop and think before you say or do something that could hurt someone else.
- Practice tolerance.
- Give people the benefit of the doubt.
- Don't pass gossip, rumors or damaging, unverified stories on.
- Don't let racist, sexist or other mean-spirited "jokes" pass unchallenged.
- Be "that one" to reach out and support the victim.

Remember, if you or a family member faces a difficult or stressful situation on or off the job, you can call your EAP 24-7 for help, support and tools!