



# Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander

Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Length of Time: 45 minutes

## Goals

- + To increase ally behavior in the school community.
- + To define the complexity of what it means to show ally behavior and train students in these skills.
- + To increase students' empathy and compassion for those who are targeted for name-calling and bullying.
- + To encourage students to articulate their beliefs regarding behavior toward others and to think about intentional ways to take care of other members in their school community.

## Objectives

- + Students will explore their own roles in incidences of bullying, harassment and name-calling.
- + Students will talk about bullying, harassment and name-calling.
- + Students will consider different responses to bullying behavior and how that might change depending on the situation.
- + Students will discuss alternatives to ignoring bullying, harassment and name-calling.

## Academic Standards

- + CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL.3.1, 5.1 and 6.1)

## Educators' Notes

This discussion with students will explore how all of us, at one time or another, have had to make a decision about whether or not we will intervene or take a stand when we witness name-calling, bullying or harassment of a friend or a stranger. We often make these decisions in the moment, reacting to situations as they arise.

In this lesson, students take the time to explore many different situations that could be seen at school and think about how they make decisions around allyship, such as speaking up in the moment, getting help from a caring adult, talking to the person in private or moving away. This activity can be done multiple times using different situations to increase your student's ability to be an ally.

This lesson is featured in the Welcoming Schools film [What Can We Do? Bias, Bullying, & Bystanders](#) (streaming online).

## Materials

- + "Four Corners" placards (included in lesson) hung in the four corners of the room
- + Ally or Bystander: Scenario Sheet (included in lesson)
- + Room arrangement suitable for activity and movement
- + Chart paper

### ALLY OR BYSTANDER?

INTERVENE MYSELF

TALK TO THE PERSON  
IN PRIVATE

SEEK HELP FROM AN ADULT  
OR SOMEONE OLDER

IGNORE THE SITUATION  
OR MOVE AWAY

## Before the Lesson

- + Review the list of scenarios and pick out ones that you think will generate discussion in your class or that you would like your students to consider. You could also develop your own to cover topics that may be issues in your school.
- + Start with some scenarios that may be easier for your students to consider. Include some that are only slight variations so that students have to think about how things would be different if the scenario involves friends or not, students who are older or younger, students who are more popular or not, etc. Include different topics in your set of questions. You probably will have time for three to four scenarios in one class period.
- + Many schools are doing this activity once or twice a month in their classrooms to provide students with ongoing opportunities to practice allyship and to strengthen their problem solving skills as individuals and school community members.
- + Print out or write out and post the “Four Corners” placards in the area of your classroom where you will do the lesson. Students need to be able to move around to each “corner”.

## Activity

- + Explain to the students that this activity looks at situations where you must decide, in that moment, how to react if you see someone being teased or bullied. Sometimes you may do something. Sometimes you may not. It often depends on the situation, how well you know someone, if they are older or younger, etc. There is no wrong place to be in this activity. There is the right place for you in the moment based on your identity, comfort level and overall safety.
- + For each situation, students will make a decision regarding how they will respond using the following four choices. Briefly discuss them to ensure that your students understand each one.
  - Ignore the situation or move away.
  - Intervene Myself.
  - Talk to the person in private.
  - Seek help from an adult or someone older.
- + Read the scenarios that you have chosen out loud to the class. Make sure your students understand the scenario, especially if it is a variation of one you just read. Ask them first to think for themselves which of the four corners they would go to. Then, have them move to the corner of the room that represents how they would act in response to that particular scenario.
- + Before you hear from students in the large group, give them one or two minutes to turn and talk to other students who chose the same corner that they did.
- + If there is only one student in a corner, go stand with that student so that they are not alone.
- + With each scenario, invite a couple of students from the different corners to say why they chose to stand in a certain corner. Follow up on their answers as appropriate. You could ask them to give an example of what they could say to the person being teased or bullied and what they could say to the person doing the hurtful teasing or bullying. Make sure to hear from students in all four corners during the lesson. As your students say why they have chosen a particular action/corner, acknowledge their reasoning.
- + To generate further discussion after you have presented the scenarios, ask some open-ended questions:
  - Did you respond differently to the different scenarios?
  - What are some of the reasons you chose one corner versus another?
  - With whom did you feel most comfortable intervening?
  - When were you more likely to ignore the situation? Why?
  - Would you respond in some other way not represented by the four corners?
- + Discuss what it means to be a bystander.
  - How do you think the person being teased feels if people don't do anything?
  - How do you feel when you don't do something?
- + Talk about what it means to be an ally. Brainstorm ways to be an ally. (If you use chart paper, you can keep it hanging on your classroom wall.)

- + Acknowledge that there are many ways to be an ally depending on the situation. The important message is that if students witness bullying behavior, they take some kind of action. If they are not sure whether to do something, this means it is a good time to talk with someone about it. Ask students to also think about if there are times they feel unsafe being an ally. What could they do in those situations?
- + In closing, ask students to think of how they could be a better ally to the other students in your class or school.

## Assessment and Evaluation

- + Can students define what it means to be an ally or bystander?
- + Do you observe students sticking up for each other more?
- + Can students identify ways to be an ally?

## Additional Resources from Welcoming Schools

- + [Welcoming Schools Preventing Bias-Based Bullying Booklist for Elementary](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Preventing Bias-Based Bullying Booklist for Secondary](#)
- + [Lesson Plans to Prevent Bias-Based Bullying in School](#)

# Ally or Bystander — Situation Sheet

Review the list of scenarios and pick out ones that you think will generate discussion in your class or that you would like your students to consider. The goal is to spend time discussing and unpacking each scenario, not to get through all the scenarios in one lesson. Repeat the lesson as needed, students need a lot of processing, practicing and repetition to build and master these skills with enough confidence that they will apply their ally skills outside of their classrooms.

## Scenarios for Grades K-5


1. A classmate (friend, older student, sibling) constantly makes fun of another student (your friend, younger student) because they are small for their age (tall, short, overweight).
2. A new kid (friend, sibling, classmate, someone you don't know) at school calls your friend (a stranger, your sibling, a classmate, new student) a bad name because of their religion (sexual orientation, gender expression).
3. A new student (older student, someone you don't know, a group of kids) at school calls your friend (someone you don't know, a classmate, a new student) "gay".
4. A student in your class (friend, sibling, older student) teases a boy (girl) for wearing a dress (long hair, short hair, nail polish, pink clothing, barrettes, 'boy clothes', baseball hat).
5. A girl in your class (friend, sibling, older student) teases another girl for always dressing (acting, playing) like a boy.

## Scenarios for Grades 6-8

1. A group of students your age (your friend, classmate) keeps saying, "That's gay" to mean they don't like something.
2. A new student (friend, sibling, classmate, someone you don't know) calls your friend (a stranger, your sibling, a classmate, new student) a hurtful name because of their religion (sexual orientation, gender expression).
3. When you are with a group of friends, one of them makes fun of a younger student (new student, friend, someone you kind of know, someone you don't know) because of the way they dress (sound, look, act).
4. A classmate (friend, older student, sibling) constantly makes fun of another student (your friend, younger student) because they are small for their age (tall, short, overweight).
5. A friend (another student, an older student, someone you don't know well) of yours keeps telling one of the boys (kids, girls), "Stop acting like a girl!" (acting like a boy, dressing like a boy, dressing like a girl).

## Scenarios for Grades 9-12

1. Your friend (classmate) says, "Oh, that assignment was so gay."

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2. A student you don't know well (friend, classmate, older student) says, "Ask Xiao Ming for the answer; all Asians are good at math."
  3. You overhear a younger student tell their friend, "It's Jace's fault he gets bullied because he never wears clean clothes."
  4. When you are with a group of friends, one of them makes fun of someone you kind of know (new student, friend, someone you don't know) because of the way they dress (sound, look, act).
  5. A new student (friend, sibling, classmate, someone you don't know) uses an insult/slur toward your friend (a stranger, your sibling, a classmate, new student) related to their skin color (religion, sexual orientation, gender expression, ethnicity).

Include any others that might apply to your school or community.



**Ignore the Situation  
or Move Away**

**Intervene Myself**

**Talk to the Person  
in Private**

**Seek Help From  
an Adult or  
Someone Older**