

# Introduction

*Bystanders who are helpless in the presence of another student's victimization learn passive acceptance of injustice.*

—Jeffrey, Miller, and Linn (2001, p. 145)

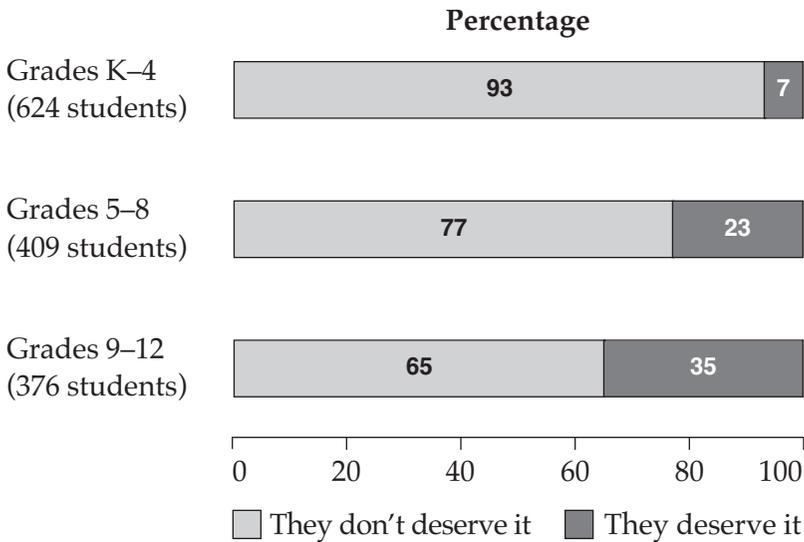
*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.

When children learn to accept exclusion and cruelty and see themselves as incapable of creating change, they learn a lifelong lesson: passive acceptance of injustice. In many ways, we live within a culture that continues to accept injustice. The United States has a history of oppression, unequal power dynamics, and aggression toward marginalized populations. While it is true that much has improved since the civil rights and women's suffrage movements, prejudice and discrimination remain common, and children often learn to accept injustice both through their experiences in school and as members of a wider community. Our country—and the world as a whole—needs active citizens who work for justice.

In 2006, school staff and I surveyed 1,409 kindergarten through 12th graders at a school system in Massachusetts. I asked them to choose one of two options to complete the following statement: "When I see someone being teased or hit, I think . . ." Their options were "They deserve it" or "They don't deserve it." As shown in the graph on the next page, I found older students more likely than younger students to state that targets of bullying deserve to be hit or teased. This finding points strongly to a learned acceptance of bullying behavior.

I have worked as an activist for social justice for causes including civil rights, peace, and prevention of domestic abuse



and rape. When I began to understand the broad implications of school bullying, I embarked on a campaign for social justice in my current subset of the larger culture—the elementary school where I continue to work. During my 20 years as a school guidance counselor, I have observed abuse of power, inequality, intolerance, and exclusion. I have also seen young people act on strong feelings of altruism and idealism. The challenge for us as adults, who naturally possess a great deal of influence over the culture of schools, is to help students maintain their natural idealism and empathy while learning effective skills to act in the face of injustice. We have the power to “think globally—act locally,” one school at a time. Students at the James H. Bean Elementary School in Sidney, Maine, where my colleagues and I developed and tested most of the interventions described in this book, chose a new school slogan in the fall of 2006: “The James H. Bean School: With kindness and fairness for all.” With respect and admiration for the work our staff and students have done, I can proudly say that this slogan accurately reflects our school’s culture.

In 1998, we implemented a bullying prevention program based largely on the research of Dr. Dan Olweus (1993, 2001). Over the years, we have fine-tuned and added to the program and

have seen dramatic and continuing reductions in student reports of bullying. For example, from the 1998–1999 school year to the 2006–2007 school year, our fifth graders reported a 95 percent reduction in physical bullying, a 92 percent reduction in teasing, and a 96 percent reduction in exclusion. Detailed survey data from the Bean school and a detailed description of the program can be found at [www.stopbullyingnow.com/beandata.pdf](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/beandata.pdf).

I wrote my first book, *Schools Where Everyone Belongs: Practical Strategies for Reducing Bullying*, over a period of four years. Published in 2005 by Research Press, this book describes the essential foundations of bullying prevention programs and documents techniques for building consistent and effective school discipline systems, connecting staff with students, and helping aggressive youth change their behavior. This second book briefly reviews these foundations before discussing interventions that build on them, especially as they relate to empowering bystanders in bullying situations.

I chose to write a second book for several reasons. For the past eight years, I have trained school staff across the United States and Canada in effective techniques to reduce bullying. Over time, my trainings have evolved as a result of new research, questions I receive from educators, and my work at the Bean school. One of the most common questions trainees ask me since *Schools Where Everyone Belongs* was published is how to lead effective classroom discussions about bullying. This book is, in part, an answer to these questions.

Also since the first book's publication, the bullying prevention program at the Bean school has evolved. Now in its ninth year, the program has grown from a staff-led intervention to a partnership between students and staff. Students at the Bean school have taken ownership of the program and now initiate their own interventions, with little adult-imposed structure. They work to improve school climate, design mentoring programs for younger students, find ways to reach out to isolated peers, and infuse school slogans with real meaning.

When reflecting on the success of our bullying prevention program, I believe it is the shared language, skills, and positive social norms that make the Bean school what it is today. As a

result of our work toward these ends, we effectively stop bullying early on by limiting the rewards of bullying behavior and empowering the empathetic majority to fulfill their positive potential as active bystanders.

After school staff implement protective systems and build staff-student connections, they can deepen bullying prevention work by empowering bystanders of bullying, teaching social problem solving skills, and helping students create a positive and inclusive peer culture. Most students in any given school do not bully others; neither are they bullied. Students who see hitting, name-calling, and exclusion often feel deeply sympathetic toward targets and possess the potential to take effective action against bullying. Like community members in Neighborhood Watch programs, bystanders' collaborative efforts can have significant positive effects on school culture.

This book presents an approach to bullying prevention and student empowerment that is both research-based and practical. Research on the dynamics of change, learning styles, and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of specific intervention techniques should inform our work. As James Garbarino often says in his workshops, "A wise person once said, 'You can change the world. But unless you know what you are doing . . . please don't!' " (personal communication, November 11, 2006). This book is also based on my 20 years' experience as a counselor in public schools at all grade levels, I am intimately acquainted with the inherent difficulties in and limitations on implementing bullying prevention interventions in a school environment. I hope this book's balance of research and practicality can provide school staff with the knowledge, skills, and sense of self-efficacy to create change in their own schools.

## **CONTENT OVERVIEW**

This book is organized around alternating discussions of theory and practice. Chapter 1 discusses the importance of focusing on bystanders and the inherent difficulties of speaking out against bullying. I use parallels to adult life to outline some of the ideological shifts essential to effective bullying prevention in schools.

In chapter 2, I describe the foundations of bullying prevention programs. Before we can conduct student conversations around bystander empowerment and social norms, school staff should implement interventions to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all students. Described in depth in my first book, these interventions include staff-student connections and mentoring, consistent schoolwide discipline procedures focused on helping aggressive youth change, and support for targets of bullying.

Chapter 3 outlines techniques for helping young people build empathy and skills for social problem solving. Empathy, or the ability to understand and feel others' emotions, is an essential and teachable skill. When students develop a wide range of solutions to social problems, they become better able to choose solutions that work for them in each situation. When students possess skills and feel safe enough to use them, they can avoid and defuse many problems with peers.

In chapter 4, I describe in detail a student workshop focused on shifting attitudes and teaching skills necessary to empower bystanders to take effective action against bullying.

Chapter 5 focuses on the topic of developing shared language, social norms, and positive school culture—all of which have the power to shape how individuals and groups think and behave. Instead of passively accepting existing language and norms and the culture they create, we can work actively to recognize and change norms and language to align them with the messages of our bullying prevention program. This process can be initiated and driven by both staff and students.

Chapter 6 outlines two climate-based interventions implemented at the Bean school: student-created legacy videos and Peace Day assemblies. These two concrete examples show how to implement the interventions discussed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 is followed by a brief afterword describing what kinds of adult citizens can emerge from bullying prevention programs in schools.

Following these chapters, I include several appendixes to illustrate ways school staff and other professionals may apply chapter topics.

The scope and sequence of the guidance program we follow at the Bean school are the focus of Appendix A. This series of lessons and discussions helps students develop skills for interpersonal relationships. We start by teaching the youngest students to accept not always getting their way and manage their state of arousal. We work with students in the middle grades to develop social problem solving skills and techniques for bystander action. We strive to empower the oldest students to design and implement initiatives to create a safe and inclusive peer culture.

Appendix B consists of a detailed lesson plan for using Eleanor Estes's 1988 book *The Hundred Dresses* (2004 / 1944) as a tool to increase motivation, knowledge, and skills in bystander situations. I have found this book to be extremely helpful in my teaching, but school staff could apply the same type of analysis and teaching techniques to other books as well.

Appendix C outlines a lesson plan focusing on relational aggression called "First, Do No Harm." This and similar lessons teach young people to avoid being pulled into conflicts between friends in ways that make those conflicts worse. Instead, we can help young people use positive solutions when they observe friendship conflicts.

"Recess School," the subject of Appendix D, is a program instituted at the Bean school to teach young students skills to play peacefully and reduce playground aggression.

Appendix E describes lessons focusing on a radio broadcast of the program *This American Life* titled "Shouting across the Divide" (Glass, 2006). This true story about a Muslim student's experiences can help students better understand issues of diversity and encourage bystander action. The program is available for download or purchase at [www.thisamericanlife.org](http://www.thisamericanlife.org).

The use of magic effects to shift student attitudes toward bullying, inclusion, and social justice is the topic of Appendix F.

Finally, in Appendix G, my daughter and co-author, Julia, adds depth to the discussion by describing the connections between the ideas in this book and the goals and methods in her work at Summit Achievement, a wilderness-based therapeutic program for teens.

The strategies presented in this book are the result of almost 40 years' work as a therapist and counselor. They are the result of many successes, but also of many failures and mistakes. They have evolved over time and continue to evolve according to what works for me and for a particular group of students in a particular school setting. I write about interventions in great detail because training audiences consistently ask for these details. In doing so, I attempt to provide for readers the experience of an observer. Rather than expecting you to copy the questions and actions I provide, I encourage you to use these examples to create your own interventions. Please adapt the lessons and techniques described in this book to fit your own style and students' needs. The interventions will be most effective when you take them on as your own, pick and choose the best for your situation, and modify them to fit your needs.

This book is organized differently than *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*. *Schools* is a summary of research and a detailed handbook for step-by-step implementation of bullying prevention programs. This book is more like a cookbook, mixing fundamental principles, practical and tested techniques, and detailed specific recipes. As with any cookbook, please feel free to adapt the techniques to your own situation and style. As with any recipe, please change the details to suit the ingredients you have at hand, the inspiration of the moment, and your own taste. I look forward to your reactions, questions, discoveries, and additions. You can reach me via e-mail at [stan@stopbullyingnow.com](mailto:stan@stopbullyingnow.com).