



Instructor Guide Unit 4: Lesson 1 Bystander Effects

Objectives:

- The child will be able to define bystander.
- The learner will recognize, name, and understand the four main bystander effects:
 - fear of going down in the social pecking order,
 - not noticing a need,
 - not knowing what to do, and
 - diffusion of responsibility.

Fundamental Skill(s) or Competencies: Fundamental Skills or Competencies: Situational Awareness, Social awareness, Responsible decision-making

Time Needed: It is flexible. You can choose to do everything in this guide, or you might select just a few parts to do with the kids each day.

Materials, depending on which activities you choose:

- 4-1-5 Assessment for Bystander Effects handout (1 per student)
- Video clip from the movie *Wonder* (1:45) and please remember to choose “skip ads” on the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L111H4Krm7o>
- A cup of water and a roll of paper towels for Diffusion of Responsibility group experiment
- Hula hoops for physical activity
- For visual art activity:
 - Colorful construction paper, cut into strips
 - Scissors and tape
 - Pencils, crayons, markers, paper

A copy of the following picture books to read aloud:

- [The Juice Box Bully: Empowering Kids to Stand Up For Others by Bob Sornson and Maria Dismondy](#)
- [Ella the Elegant Elephant by Carmela D'amico and Steve D'amico](#)
- [Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes](#)
- A copy of 4-1-4 *Sharing Circle Script for Bystander Effects*

Part One: Watch Video on Bystander Effects

Start by watching the ***Bystander Effects Video for Kids***. If kids have trouble focusing, invite them to do 25 jumping jacks or another burst of intense physical activity for one minute before you start the video. After watching the video, you can move into Part Two below.

Part Two: Discussions on Bystander Effects

Lesson Essential Questions: What are the main reasons that bystanders do not step up and help?

Introduction:

The instructor should ask if anyone knows what a bystander is.

For example, you might say, “Have you ever been in a situation where you were in a group of kids, and one kid was teasing another kid, and everyone else just watched to see what would happen next?”

Let kids provide some answers. Then tell them: “We have all had times in our lives when we were bystanders. Maybe you have watched someone drop a piece of trash on the ground and you didn’t say anything. Maybe you heard a family member say something unkind about someone, and you kept silent. Have you ever wondered why we don’t take action? There are actually four reasons that keep people from speaking up, and we will learn them today. These are called the Bystander Effects.”

Vocabulary:

Bystander – A bystander is someone who is present at an event or witnesses an incident but does not participate or take action.

Diffusion of Responsibility - Diffusion of responsibility is a psychological phenomenon in which people are less likely to take action to help someone in distress when there’s a large group of people around. Because there are other observers present, no one person feels pressured to respond.¹

Teaching Kids About the Four Bystander Effects

Key Concept One: The first reason why people don’t speak up is they are afraid of making someone upset and losing social status. They don’t want anyone to get mad at them or laugh at them, and they don’t want to risk losing friends or popularity.

- For example, imagine that you and a close friend are eating lunch with a group of kids who rarely invite you to join them, and you are both excited to be included. A popular kid from the group starts making fun of your close friend’s lunch, saying that the food is smelly and gross. Imagine that you say nothing, because you want to be included in the popular group.
- If this has happened to you, you might end up feeling a little uncomfortable or guilty, because you know that someone needs assistance, but you just don’t feel safe enough to risk your social status.

Key Concept Two: The second reason why people might not speak up is that they simply don't notice the problem.

- Maybe you are very focused on what you are doing, like playing on a phone or reading a book or walking your dog, and you don't notice what is happening around you, so you don't recognize that someone is being mistreated.
- Or perhaps you have grown up with privilege and you are used to being treated with respect, and you don't recognize that someone is saying something that is hurtful to another person.
- For example, if your close friend has parents that grew up in another culture, their family may enjoy food with different spices and ingredients. Perhaps their grandma packs their lunch with special food items that have a strong spice. What is "smelly" to the rest of the kids at lunch could be a beloved dish to your close friend.
- In this case, the best thing to do is be aware of your surroundings and be open to seeing how people around you are treated.

Key Concept Three: The third reason why people might not speak up is that they simply don't know *how* to help. You see the problem, and you are willing to speak up or take action, but you don't know what to do to make it better.

- For example, if you see someone fall and get a bad cut on their head, and you don't know first aid, or you don't know how to make the bleeding stop, you might just stand and watch instead of helping. In this case, you could choose to go find an adult or call 911, if you have a phone.

Key Concept Four: The fourth reason why people might not speak up is because they are in a group, and everyone thinks someone else will be the one to help. No one feels a sense of responsibility.

- For example, if you are in a gym with a bunch of kids, and someone starts a fight, everyone might look around at each other, waiting to see who is going to help, and nobody does anything. This is called diffusion of responsibility, and it can happen in crowded places.

Part Three: Activity Options

*For a one-page brief summary of quick activity options, please see *4-1-3 Quick Guide to Breakout Activity Options for Bystander Effects*

Activity Option One: Watch video clip of Wonder and hold discussion on Bystander Effect.

Tell students: “I am going to show you a short clip from the movie *Wonder*. We will discuss how it shows a bystander effect, which prevents a boy from sticking up for his friend.”

Featured Bystander Effect: Fear of losing social status.

Clip is from the movie *Wonder*, and please remember to choose “skip ads” on the video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L11IH4Krm7o>

Before watching, tell the children what they will be seeing. Read aloud the following:

- This clip is from the movie “Wonder,” based on the novel of the same name by R.J. Palacio. As the clip begins, Auggie the main character, who was born with a facial deformity, is enjoying Halloween at his new school. It’s the first year Auggie has attended a real school.
- Auggie loves Halloween because it’s the one day each year when he can wear a mask and he gets treated like everyone else, because no one can see his unusual face.
- In this scene, Auggie overhears some fellow students making fun of his disfigured face. His best friend and ally, Jack, (the boy dressed as a mummy who is sitting on the desk with his back turned to the screen) is chatting with the group. The dark-haired boy making hurtful comments about Auggie is named Julian, and he is the leader.
- Auggie is devastated when Jack does not stand up for him and so he slips away before anyone knows he was there.

After watching the clip, ask children to discuss the following questions:

1. Why didn’t Jack stand up to Julian and tell him to stop making fun of Auggie’s appearance?
2. In fact, why did Jack join in and *make a cruel comment about Auggie*?

Tell children that this clip shows Jack’s desire NOT to lose social status, which is a bystander effect.

Read aloud the following bullet points, which explain the bystander effect:

- In this scene, Jack joined in making fun of Auggie rather than standing up for his friend. Julian was the leader of the group of boys. He was on top of his social group and was exercising that status. Jack wanted to be a part of the group and feared that being friends with someone different like Auggie would bring him down in the social pecking order.”
- It’s possible that Jack wanted to impress Julian. It’s also possible that Jack wanted to keep the focus on Auggie to protect himself from becoming a target. Sometimes kids join in when a bully is mocking an identified target as a form of self-preservation to minimize the chance that they themselves become targeted.”
- Finally, in this scene, Jack was feeling like he was a member of the group and slipped into the habit of joining in groupthink. He echoes the comments of the group instead of sticking to his own true values. Groupthink is a common behavior for humans. Have you ever joined in a group even though you knew what they were doing was wrong?

Activity Option 2: Diffusion of Responsibility Group Experiment. This activity works when you have a larger group of students. Ideally, at least 8-10 kids, and more if possible.

- In this activity, the instructor will tell the children to form a circle and sit down. Hand out pieces of paper and give each child a pencil.
- The instructor will have a cup full of water and a roll of paper towels. The instructor will place the paper towels down inside the circle and walk a few steps away toward the other side of the circle.
- The instructor will place the cup down and then knock it over, pretending it’s an accident.
- **Wait to see if any children grab a paper towel to help.** If none of the children take action, the instructor should say, “Oh no! This is a mess. It needs to be wiped up.”
- **Wait some more to see if any children grab a paper towel to help.** If none of the children help, the instructor should say, “Can someone help me wipe this up? The paper towels are right there,” and point to the paper towels.
- **Afterwards, tell the students that this was an experiment.** Explain to the children, “If you didn’t help me when I first spilled the water, it’s because everyone was assuming someone else would be the one to help and that they didn’t need to. This is an example of the bystander effect called Diffusion of Responsibility. The more people there are witnessing a situation, the less likely any one person is to offer help.
- **Invite children to draw their experience of the spilled water situation on the piece of paper that you handed out when they first formed a circle.** What did they notice? What happened from their perspective? They can use thought bubbles to show the thoughts of people in their drawing.

Activity Option 3: Hold a full group Sharing Circle to discuss the Bystander Effects.

- Please use the complete guided script for facilitators labeled *4-1-4 Sharing Circle Script on Bystander Effects*. Allow 20-35 minutes for this activity, depending on how many rounds you complete and how large the circle is.

Activity Option 4: Read aloud and discuss a picture book about Bystander Effects. We recommend the following books that embody the themes of this lesson plan. After reading each book aloud, ask the children how it relates to the idea of bystander effects (not standing up for others). Children may draw pictures of the story as they listen.

- *The Juice Box Bully: Empowering Kids to Stand Up For Others* by Bob Sornson and Maria Dismondy
- *Ella the Elegant Elephant* by Carmela D'amico and Steve D'amico
- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes

Activity Option 5: Physical activity: The children will explore bystander effects and cooperative play.

1. **Freeze Tag:** How fast will you help? Pick a volunteer to be “It.” The child who is It races around the room tagging other children. Once tagged, a child is frozen until another child crawls between their legs to free them. The goal is to notice when someone is frozen and race to help them! Switch who is “It” every five minutes to give plenty of opportunities to volunteer chasers.
2. **Hula Pass:** This game encourages children to work together and use creative thinking. The whole group holds hands and tries to pass a hula-hoop by stepping through it and “passing” it to the person next to them. The goal is to get the hula-hoop completely around the circle without breaking hands. Everyone needs to support each other. Once you succeed, try to beat your time.
3. **Caterpillar Races** - Divide the class into four teams (two teams will sit out and cheer on the other teams as they take turns). The two active “racing” teams must sit down in a line with their knees bent and keep a hold of the ankles of the person behind them. Mark a finish line and once the whistle is blown, teams must scoot along, without letting go of the ankles of the person behind them, scooting forward and inching along like a caterpillar until they reach the finish line. Have the winners of each heat race against each other for the championship.

Activity Option 6: Drama/Theater activity: The children will create a two-part skit about this week’s theme, which is *Bystander Effects*. Below are the prompts for each part.

- Part one: Your community is holding a tryout to join a sports team. It can be any sport you choose (i.e. basketball, cheerleading, soccer). One of the kids who is trying out trips and falls while everyone is watching. The child cannot get back up. Nobody helps, and some people make fun of the child who fell. The coaches are angry and cancel tryouts.
- Part two: This is the same scenario as above. However, when the child trips and falls, some bystanders decide to help. How do they help? What do the coaches do? What happens?

Activity Option 7: Visual Art activity: Kids will do art projects that promote being allies instead of bystanders.

- **Chain of helpers:** Cut strips of colorful construction paper. Have children decorate the strips with their own names and the names of people they care about. As each child finishes decorating a strip, have them loop it through the chain and seal it with tape. Display the long “chain of helpers” to show how children that they are connected to many helpers.
- **Collage of kindness:** Have each child draw a picture of an act of kindness that they can do to be helpful at home or in their community (feeding a pet, cleaning a spill, eating lunch with a lonely child). Assemble all the drawings together on a wall to make a collage of kindness. Encourage children to do the acts of kindness in real life over the next few days and share stories about their experiences.

Part Four: Assessment

If you want to do a formal assessment at the end, hand out one printed copy to each child of *4-1-5 Assessment for Bystander Effects*. Ask the children to do the written exercise. For primary students, you can talk through this assessment as a discussion.

ANSWERS: *The correct answers to the multiple-choice questions are 1). a and 2). b.*

Recommended Readings:

Diffusion of Responsibility: <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/news/releases/children-less-likely-to-come-to-the-rescue-when-others-are-available.html>

Accommodations/Modifications for diverse learners in your classroom:

Allow students to offer their answers to all or part of the assessment orally instead of in writing.

Video Resources:

Wonder YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L11H4Krm7o>

Notes:

a. Kendra Cherry, “Diffusion of Responsibility: Why being part of a group may reduce our sense of responsibility,” Updated March 11, 2018, <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-diffusion-of-responsibility-2795095>.

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.C

Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.D

Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2

Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate ... each source.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on *reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; ... gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.