

“The ‘I’ in ‘Intervene’” Essay Contest

Overview

Youth often don’t realize they are sexually bullying someone – or being sexually bullied – because the behavior is dismissed as joking, flirting, teasing, or even just a normal part of growing up, according to research conducted by the Georgia Network to End Sexual Assault and funded by the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Step Up. Step In. brings greater awareness to youth, schools, and communities around the issue of sexual bullying – so it can be stopped.

Bystander intervention can be an important strategy to stop sexual bullying in schools. Active bystanders understand that sexual bullying is harmful to their friends and peers and – rather than casually observing an incident – they become engaged in stopping it.

Step Up. Step In.’s essay contest encourages youth to research and think more critically about bystander intervention. Through this activity, students can:

- Learn more about becoming an active bystander;
- Determine when they would most likely intervene;
- Decide what “intervention” means – whether it’s stepping in directly; reporting an incident to a trusted adult; or taking another action; and
- Become an active participant in efforts to stop sexual bullying.

Step Up. Step In. provides general direction for how the contest can be implemented. Schools should refine the contest to best suit their objectives and their student needs.

Contest Theme

The essay contest encourages students to write around the theme of, “How I Can Put the ‘I’ in ‘Intervention.’ ”

This theme empowers students to understand the individual role each one plays in stopping sexual bullying. Through this exercise, each student can achieve a greater understanding that “I” have the power to help my friends and classmates when I feel like someone is not treating them well.

Here's how the contest could work at your school:

- Use the Bystander Intervention Resources that are provided in the *Step Up. Step In.* Toolkit to develop a high-level classroom discussion about sexual bullying and the importance of intervention
- During the discussion, introduce students to the many ways they can intervene, which include:
 - Directly stopping a situation that is occurring (but only when the student feels it is safe to do so!)
 - Telling a trusted adult what the student has seen or suspects is happening
 - Turning over cell phone video or audio of an incident to a trusted adult
 - Pointing teachers or school leaders to social media posts that ridicule other students
- Throughout the discussion, remind students about the importance of “I” in “intervention” – reminding them:
 - “I have the knowledge and the power to stop sexual bullying from occurring”
 - “I know in what instances it’s OK for me to directly intervene and when I should take another route”
 - “Here’s how I can intervene in certain situations”
- Use the essay contest to expand the conversation beyond the classroom and into more critical thought around the issue. Ask students to answer the following question in 1,000 words (two pages) or less:

How can I put the ‘I’ in ‘Intervention’?

- Through the essay contest, students explain in what types of instances they are most likely to intervene – and how they are most likely to intervene. They may write it based upon what they learned during the classroom discussion. Age-appropriate information about bystanders can also be provided for students to review as part of the contest, or students can be charged to look online for more information about being a bystander.
- Allow at least two weeks for students to complete their essays.
- Participating students turn their essays in to the teacher who assigned it. Teachers then turn in the essays to their school’s *Step Up. Step In.* Ambassador.
- A panel of volunteers, including the *Step Up. Step In.* Ambassador, reviews the entries. First-, second-, and third-place winners can be chosen by grade level based upon:
 - Originality
 - Depth of research and thought
 - Level of understanding in the role a bystander can play
 - Clarity of example in how a student would intervene
- Each wins an age-appropriate prize and school-wide recognition for their accomplishment.

Further Use

Beyond engaging students, the essay contest can serve as an informal research tool for schools to identify:

- What do students know about sexual bullying?
- What do they know about bystander intervention?
- When would students intervene? When would they not?
- To what frequency are students witnessing and experiencing sexual bullying – and what types?

Findings will not be scientifically representative of an entire school. They can, however, provide a glimpse into the current mind of the student population so that new, timely awareness and prevention strategies can be explored.