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Essay Contest

“The ‘I’ in ‘Intervene’”

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.

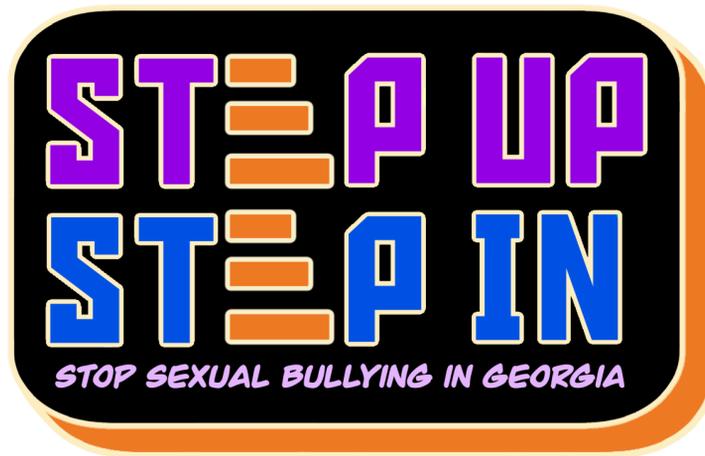
Step Up Step In brings greater awareness to youth, schools, and communities around the issue of sexual bullying – so it can be stopped.

Bystander intervention can be an important strategy to stop sexual bullying. 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, youth 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/organizations should refine the contest to best suit their objectives and the needs of youth they serve.



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Contest Theme

The essay contest encourages youth to write around the theme of, “How I Can Put the ‘I’ in ‘Intervention.’” This theme empowers youth to understand the individual role each one plays in stopping sexual bullying. Through this exercise, each person 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:

·Use the Bystander Intervention Resources [WS1] that are provided in the Step Up Step In Toolkit to develop a high-level discussion about sexual bullying and the importance of intervention

·During the discussion, introduce participants to the many ways they can intervene, which include:

Directly stopping a situation that is occurring (but only when the youth feels it is safe to do so!)

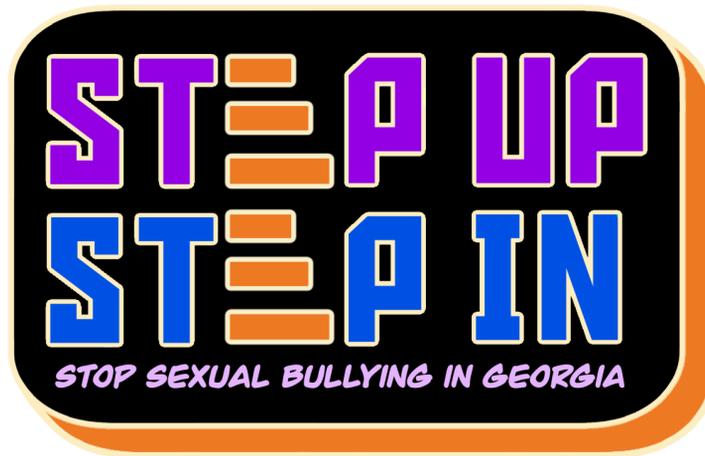
Telling a trusted adult what they have seen or suspect is happening

Turning over cell phone video, photos, or audio of an incident to a trusted adult

Pointing teachers or leaders to social media posts that ridicule other students

·Throughout the discussion, remind participants 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”



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Contest Theme (continued)

Use the essay contest to expand the conversation beyond the meeting time and into more critical thought around the issue. Ask participants 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, youth 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 discussion. Age-appropriate information about bystanders can also be provided for youth to review as part of the contest, or youth can be charged to look online for more information about being a bystander.

·Allow at least two weeks for participants to complete their essays.

·Participants turn their essays in to the person who assigned it. That person will then turn in the essays to their 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 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 youth, the essay contest can serve as an informal research tool for schools to identify:

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

Findings will not be scientifically valid, but they can provide a glimpse into the current mind of the youth population so that new, timely awareness and prevention strategies can be explored.