

Taking a Stand

By Samantha McCann

Isabella Griffin stood up to bullies at her school. Now she's encouraging kids across Colorado to do the same.

Isabella Griffin knows how hard it can be to stand up to bullies. When she was in third grade at Alamosa Elementary School in Colorado, three girls bullied her constantly. They were always making fun of her clothes, calling her a "snobby rich girl."

Isabella changed the way she dressed, hoping it would stop the bullying. But the insults only got worse. "They said, 'Oh, now you're just trying to fit in,'" Isabella remembers.

After five months of **harassment**, Isabella had had enough. When she told her parents, they encouraged her to stand up for herself. That gave Isabella the courage to tell the bullies that what they were doing wasn't funny and wasn't cool. The girls eventually stopped.

The next year, Isabella saw another group of kids picking on a student with a disability. She remembered how bad it felt to be bullied. So she stood up for the boy, telling the bullies that what they were doing wasn't OK. "It took a while, but the bullying stopped," she says.

That experience made Isabella realize how important it is to stand up for others. She decided to come up with a plan to try to end bullying at her school.

Innocent Bystanders?

When people think about bullying, they usually focus on the bully and the victim. But bystanders often play an important role too. Those are people who see bullying happen but don't help the victim. Researchers have found that 85 percent of bullying incidents are witnessed by bystanders. Though they may not realize it, bystanders give most bullies what they want: attention.

"Most bullies need an audience," explains bullying expert Charles Notar. "If bystanders do nothing, the bully's actions are strengthened."

Bystanders also may not realize how much power they have. According to the National Bullying Prevention Center, when a student steps in to help a victim, the bullying stops more than half the time. Even small things, like not laughing or not joining in with a bully, send the message that you don't like what's happening.

Of course, taking a stand isn't always easy-especially if you're worried about becoming the bully's next target. If the situation is dangerous, experts say, you should immediately tell a trusted adult instead of stepping in.

Strength in Numbers

Isabella wanted to take the power away from the bullies, but she knew she couldn't do it alone. That's why she started a program called "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully." To join, students sign a pledge to become "upstanders"--meaning they'll stand up for kids being bullied. Students who sign the pledge get a bracelet to show others that they won't tolerate bullying. Isabella's school was the first to **implement** "Be a Buddy, Not a Bully." The program has been so successful that six other schools in Colorado now use it.

Even the girls who had bullied Isabella in third grade signed the pledge. "I was surprised and happy that my message got to them," says Isabella.

Aiming High

Isabella, now a sixth-grader in middle school, has even bigger plans. Last year, she won \$50,000 from an organization called Peace First to help support her mission. She wants to use the money to spread the program to every school in Colorado. She hopes to help kids gain the confidence they need to stop bullying.

"All it takes to stand up to a bully is 20 seconds of courage and you can change a person's life forever," Isabella says.

Words to Know

harassment (ha-RASS-muhnt) *noun*. the act of repeatedly being rude or cruel to someone

implement (IM-pluh-ment) *verb*. to put something into effect

Stand By or Speak Up?

Below are some thoughts bystanders might have when they see someone being bullied. Check out how upstanders might respond to the same situations. Keep their responses in mind the next time you see bullying.

BYSTANDER

Someone else will step in and stop it.

UPSTANDER

What if everyone else is thinking like me, so no one steps in to help?

BYSTANDERS

I'd say something, but I'm not really friends with the victim.

UPSTANDERS

What if I was being bullied and my friends weren't around to help? I'd want someone to stand up for me.

BYSTANDERS

If I say something, the bully will target me next!

UPSTANDER

The bully might turn on me, but I'll feel better about myself for standing up to him.

Source Based on information from school counselor and bullying expert Signe Whitson. LSW