



**FROM BYSTANDERS TO ALLIES—
HELPING STUDENTS STAND UP
FOR EACH OTHER**

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When we look back on our years in middle school and high school, most of us remember individuals who helped us solve problems, get things done and overcome challenges. They're the ones who stuck up for us when we needed it. They celebrated the highs and cried with us during the lows. They were the people who "had our backs." They were our "allies," which comes from a Latin word meaning "to bind to."

Sometimes our allies were parents, teachers and other adults. But often, those allies were our friends. In fact, research consistently shows that young people are most likely to turn to their friends, not adults, when they need help—even if their friends are not equipped to respond in helpful ways.

As educators and adults, how might we encourage the kinds of positive supports that fuel learning, growth and well-being? What roles can we play in ensuring that our students' friends are positive allies for each other in learning and in life?

This month's theme broadens ideas often focused on bullying prevention to explore how students' can shift from being "bystanders" for each other in learning and in life to becoming "allies" for each other, binding your classroom together to help everyone be successful.

Students develop relationships in schools with both adults (teachers, staff, administrators) and peers. Those peer relationships can be a positive resource for growth and learning that teachers can help to nurture. [Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework](#) provides a tool for exploring positive teacher-student relationships. This month's content focuses on how teachers can support students in providing practical support to each other.

SOURCES:

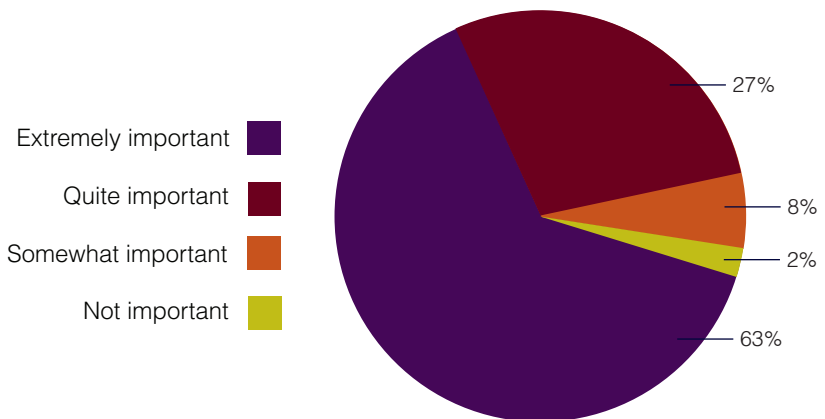
Schmeelk Cone, K., Pisani, A. R., Petrova, M., & Wyman, P. A. (2012). Three scales assessing high school students' attitudes and perceived norms about seeking adult help for distress and suicide concerns. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, 42(2), 157-172.

Sierksma, J., Thijs, J., & Verkuyten, M. (2014). With a little help from my friends: Bystander context and children's attitude toward peer helping. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 154(2), 142-154.

It's easy to ask students to help each other out. But research shows that whether students help each other is shaped by the relational culture in the school. Research highlights a range of factors — many of which teachers influence — that make it more likely that students will support each other in learning and other areas of life.

The Importance of Friends

Almost two-thirds of high school seniors say that having strong friendships is a “very important” part of their life, according to a survey of seniors in about 130 public and private high schools. Only one in ten says that relationships are only somewhat important or not important.



SOURCE:

Bachman, J. G., Johnston, L. D., & O'Malley, P. M. (2014). *Monitoring the future: Questionnaire responses from the nation's high school seniors — 2012*. Ann Arbor, MI: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan. Accessed from www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs.html#refvol5x

Friendships Lead to Developmental Advantages

As children develop cognitively and socially, friends become an important resource. Children in friendships help each other navigate stress during transitional periods in their development. According to researcher Willard Hartup at the University of Minnesota, “The evidence shows that friends provide one another with cognitive and social scaffolding that differs from what nonfriends provide, and having friends supports good outcomes across normative transitions.”

The quality of the friendship matters as well. Children who enjoy support from friends are more likely to exhibit cooperation and willingness to help others. Conflict-ridden or coercive friendships have the opposite effect and tend to lead to developmental disadvantages, such as dependency or victimization.

SOURCE:

Hartup, W. (1996). The company they keep: Friendships and their developmental significance. *Child Development*, 67(1), 1-13.

When Students Do — and Don't — Motivate Each Other in School

Students who feel emotionally secure and connected to their peers are more likely to be motivated to learn, contribute in class and engage in classroom activities. The opposite is also true: Students who do not perceive their relationships with peers as supportive tend not to be as motivated in school.

SOURCE:

Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13, 21-43.

When Do Friends Help Friends?

Sometimes students are consistent in supporting each other, whether with schoolwork, family issues, or personal and emotional challenges. But sometimes they are not, with issues of bullying, teasing and ignoring each other being too common. What makes a difference in whether young people turn to friends for support or give support to each other?

Researchers have found students are more likely to support each other when they believe they...

- Belong (versus feeling isolated);
- Can do something;
- Have a responsibility to do something; and
- Are safe and comfortable with each other.

On the other hand, students don't share their difficulties with classmates when schools and teachers focus on extrinsic motivation, performance goals and norm-referenced grading. All of these practices put students in competition with each other.

SOURCE:

Newman, R. S. (2000). Social influences on the development of children's adaptive help seeking: The role of parents, teachers, and peers. *Developmental Review*, 20(3), 350-404.

Collaborative Learning Promotes Academic Growth

A key to supporting each other is learning to work together. Students' ability to problem-solve, comprehend class material, and communicate positively with others is enhanced by collaborative learning, which involves partners with differing ability levels who are able to work together to complete a task. (Collaborative learning focuses on assessing individual learning, not group performance, as is the case with cooperative learning.) But collaboration isn't automatic. To be effective, students need to learn how to give feedback, explain their ideas, and encourage others to participate in discussions.

SOURCE:

Wentzel, K. R., & Watkins, D. E. (2002). Peer relationships and collaborative learning as contexts for academic enablers. *School Psychology Review*, 31(3), 366-377.

Bystander Intervention Can Decrease Instances of Bullying

Too often, we hear of bystanders who do nothing when they see bullying or other harmful behaviors. What does it take for young people to shift from standing by to doing something when they see something? Researchers have identified a number of factors that shift students from being bystanders to allies:

- They see the actions as causing significant harm to the victim.
- They feel empathy toward the victim.
- They evaluate the social dynamics, including whether or not the victim is a friend and whether the victim is respected by peers.
- They believe that what is happening is wrong.
- They have been encouraged by adults to take action in these situations.
- They believe that intervening will actually be helpful.

SOURCE:

Thornberg, R., Tenenbaum, L., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., Jungert, T., & Vanegas, G. (2012). Bystander motivation in bullying incidents: To intervene or not to intervene? *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 13(3), 247–252.

When Students See Something, Will They Say Something?

When students learn that peers' plan to engage in dangerous activities, they are more likely to tell a friend or family member than seek help from an adult at school. However, students are more likely to intervene if the school's climate promotes positive teacher-student relationships, fairness and respect.

SOURCE:

Syvrtsen, A. K., Flanagan, C. A., & Stout, M. D. (2009). Code of silence: Students' perceptions of school climate and willingness to intervene in a peer's dangerous plan. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101(1), 219–232. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0013246>

TIP SHEET FOR EDUCATORS

Helping Students Become Allies For Each Other

Students can be vital resources and allies for each other in your school and classroom. Here are some ways teachers can make it more likely that students will help each other grow and learn.

1. Show & Tell

- Teach students to maintain respect in words and actions in your classroom.
- Show empathy and a positive response when interacting with students that do not meet expectations.
- Show students specific ways they can help each other feel included and supported.

2. Expect

- Set, and consistently enforce, expectations about how classmates treat each other, so that each and every student feels welcomed, safe and included.
- Encourage students to speak up respectfully if they notice someone is not treated fairly.
- Be clear to students that you disapprove of putdowns and bullying and will intervene when necessary.

3. Connect

- Regularly check in with each student, if only briefly. A brief interaction can give you a cue if more support may be needed.
- Help students think through options and resources when they encounter obstacles.

4. Teach

- Focus on intrinsic learning and goals, rather than comparing students or reinforcing competition among students to do better than each other.

5. Practice

- If students finish classwork early, pair them with another student who may need a boost.
- Use role-play and learning-by-doing activities to explore feelings associated with supporting and being supported by others.

6. Recognize

- Be specific and fair in honoring students for the ways they support each other and contribute to a positive classroom environment.
- Be intentional in recognizing a range of students for their contributions, not just a few.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

Classroom routines can be a powerful tool in building community among students. Routines can demonstrate expectations for student behavior, such as being respectful and helpful to others. By integrating community building into the routines of the classroom, students learn that getting to know their peers and interacting with them in healthy ways is an expectation.

This classroom routine can be done weekly. By sharing events from their lives with each other, students build trust and practice positive ways to encourage each other. The activity is ideal for a homeroom, an advisory period, or a school club or team.

INTRODUCE THE ROUTINE

Step 1

Remind students of your classroom expectations. Highlight any expectations that touch on respect, helpfulness or working well with others.

Step 2

Explain to students that your classroom is a community of learners, with everyone working together as a team to learn and grow. Because the classroom is working together, it is helpful to know each other. The more we know about each other, the easier it is to support, encourage and help when needed. We will be sharing weekly reflections as a way to learn about each others' lives.

Step 3

Demonstrate appropriate ways to listen and respond when someone is sharing. Encourage students to provide affirmations after someone has shared.

PRACTICE THE ROUTINE

Step 4

Give students each a blank piece of paper. Ask them to write two positive events that happened in their life in the past week. These events can occur anywhere and they don't have to be big deals. Remind students that even small things can be positive, such as someone holding the door open for you or enjoying walking a dog.

Step 5

Ask students to also write down a challenging event. This could be a difficult class, a rough sports season, or a fight with a friend. As part of the challenging event, students should also write what they have learned from it or what they could do differently in the future.

Step 6

Split students into small groups of 3-4, and ask them to share their three events. Remind students of the expectations:

- Affirm each other
- Respect the information that is shared

Step 7

If there is time, ask a few students to share their events with the whole class.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: SHOWING SUPPORT

Students need to feel safe in order to learn. A safe environment is not only nurtured by their teachers, but by their peers. This activity provides a safe environment for students to model what peer support looks like. After a role play, teachers open a dialogue with students on ways they can provide support in school.

Step 1

Explain that everyone has choices in how they interact with others. People have a lot of power over how they make someone feel by what they say and do. One mean-spirited comment or threat can cause great distress. While we have this power, we also have the power to make someone feel safe and welcomed.

A lot of us are used to providing support to people we love, such as family and friends. However, it helps everyone in the classroom feel safe when they know they can count on you to provide support to them, even if you do not know them very well. You can also feel more comfortable if your classmates are watching out for you.

Step 2

Brainstorm a list of ways students have seen others showing support in their daily life. Examples could come from school, home, or in their community. If students get stuck, provide some examples, such as:

- My friends stick up for me.
- I get help from my teachers in school.
- I can tell my parents what is happening in my life and they will listen.

Step 3

Tell students that they will be practicing ways to show this type of support in their classroom. The purpose of doing so is to empower everyone to provide safety and support, rather than stress or anxiety.

Step 4

Separate students into groups of 3-4. Provide each group with a different scenario:

- A student overhears another student making a joke about someone's ethnicity.
- A student sees that a classmate is just not acting like himself/herself.
- A student reveals to another student that they are a target on social media.
- A student notices that some classmates are not understanding what the teacher is saying.

Step 5

Discuss with the class how each group decided to handle the situation, and if they saw any potential challenges. Brainstorm additional approaches to each situation as a class.

Optional formative assessment: At the end of the activity, ask students to write a response to this prompt: "How can I show support to my classmates?" Require students to provide at least three examples in their answer. Use this assessment to see if students need further instruction or direction on showing support.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: TWO STARS AND A WISH

While teacher-to-student feedback is a natural process in the classroom, students sometimes struggle to provide good feedback to peers. Peer feedback can be an effective method of challenging growth throughout the learning process, building a community beyond a teacher-centered model.

This method of peer feedback can be used in any content area classroom during practice work, revision of rough drafts, projects, or group work.

Step 1

Explain to students that they will be providing feedback on the work of their peers. Make sure that students are aware of the significance of this strategy and the importance of providing positive, yet constructive, feedback for their peers to improve on their work.

Step 3

Allow students time to listen to or review a peer's work.

Step 4

Ask students to identify two positive aspects (stars) of the work. They may star the peer's work or write down the two positive aspects.

Step 5

Then, students write a "wish" about what the peer might do next time in order to improve the work.

Step 6

Feedback is shared with the peer in a written response or verbally.

Modifications:

- Adjust this activity to be a roundtable peer review session. Ask students to share their work with three or more students in the room. Challenge students who receive a previously peer-reviewed work to star different items, if possible, or provide different wishes. By the end, students will have received a greater amount of feedback.
- The process of “Two Stars and a Wish” can be created as a worksheet for students to fill out until they are comfortable providing constructive feedback on their own during peer review.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: MEMORY MOTIVATION

Students can challenge each other to learn and grow. The skills of providing good feedback and responding to setbacks can be learned and practiced, and they can use these tools in their relationships with peers to productively challenge each other.

This activity teaches students how to provide good feedback and work together to progress toward a goal.

Step 1

Before the activity, gather two sets (one original, one duplicate) of several different objects for each group that fit on a tabletop and can be arranged in a random order. Objects that have unique shapes work well.

Step 2

Explain to students that one of the most important relationships they have are those with friends and classmates. Classmates have a lot of influence; they can build you up and encourage you.

Step 3

Ask youth to think, pair, and share in discussing this topic: Describe a time you helped a classmate or friend learn something new or become better at something.

Step 4

Call on volunteers to share what they discussed. What are the common ways that they helped each other grow? Write examples on a whiteboard or smartboard.

Step 5

Next to the examples, write the following phrases: “Focus on what will help, be clear that you believe in them, show that you care, give good feedback, be specific when describing what needs to be done, pay attention to reactions.”

Tell students that these phrases are steps that we take when challenging others in a positive way. Give an example of each, such as:

- Being encouraging when others make a mistake.
- Explaining how to do something or how to improve in a clear way.
- Trying new ways of explaining things if you notice a frustrated reaction.

Step 6

Explain to youth that you will be practicing these skills in an activity. Separate students into groups of three, and provide groups with two sets of objects. Each group should have two work areas to complete this task.

Step 7

Share with students that this activity is not a race. The goal of the activity is to create two identical arrangements of objects, and to be supportive to each other in reaching this goal. Refer to the phrases listed on the board as ways students can challenge each other to reach the goal.

Step 8

The first participant will be in charge of arranging the objects in a random order on a tabletop. The second participant’s role will be a “runner,” going back and forth to the arrangement to look at the setup and instruct the third participant how to duplicate it. The runner cannot take pictures and cannot touch the objects, using only verbal instructions to the third participant on how to arrange the objects.

Step 9

Allow the designated people in each group one minute to arrange their objects while their group members wait. Then, allow the runners to go back and forth to look at the arrangement and instruct the person who is re-creating it.

Step 10

Provide 5-10 minutes for all groups to finish. Have them look at each others' arrangements of objects and vote on which group had the closest duplication.

Step 11

Debrief with students and ask,

- How did the challenge work in your group? Was it difficult or easy?
- What did group members do that was helpful to complete the challenge?
- What is an example of a group member giving good feedback or showing that they believed you could do it?
- What is one new way you could challenge your friends and classmates to grow?