

# Bullying Role Play

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The bullying role play builds from the observation that most people have bullied someone, been bullied or been a bystander while someone else was bullied. Research demonstrates that most students want to intervene when someone else is being bullied but they hold back. Reasons include not knowing what to do, not feeling safe to intervene, and not wanting to be bullied as a result of defending someone else. This role play helps students identify some of the roles in the bullying drama.

## Directions

1. Find five students to volunteer (alternatively 5 staff/leaders could act out the parts). One will be a bully, one a supportive bystander to the bully, one will be the student being bullied, one will be a silent bystander and the last will be the student who is bullied. I recommend that you not type-cast the roles. In other words, if you know a student has been bullied or is a bully, do not place them in these roles.

2. Tell the players that they will briefly play their role in a bullying drama where a student is being called names and being harassed. The types of names and reasons for bullying are many. You can select any number of issues, but appearance or mannerisms is a common reason. I recommend that at least sometime during your series on bullying, you role play a situation where the student being bullied is because he is perceived to be gay or sexual orientation name-calling is at issue.<sup>1</sup>

3. Make signs with one label each: Bully, Bullying Bystander, Student Being Bullied, Silent Bystander and Defender. Each sign should have one label.

4. Set up the situation in this manner: **In bullying situations, there are usually more people involved than just the person who is being bullied and the person who is doing the bullying. Our volunteers (or leaders) are going to help us see some of the roles in a bullying drama. A possible lead from the bully could be:**

**Bully:** “Oh look, it is Justin, or is it Susan? That is the gayest outfit I have ever seen. (Bully and student supporting the bully laugh) Hey, those books must be heavy for you, let me take them off your hands... (pretends to knock books out of the bullied student’s possession).”

**Student supporting the bully:** (laughs along with bully, points to student’s clothes)

**Student being bullied:** **Leave me alone!** (looks embarrassed and turns away. Looks to defender for help)

**Silent Bystander:** (Looks serious and concerned but says nothing)

**Defender:** **Hey, that’s not cool. Stop that!**

5. Some students will adlib this more but make this very brief, sticking to the very short scenario. Ask the characters to stand in a line in front of the class and ask the class to assign the signs to the proper character. No doubt they will have no trouble assigning the labels to the correct actor.

6. Ask students in the class the following questions:

- **What do you someone in each of these roles is thinking and feeling?**
- **What role do you think most of the students at your school(s) play?**
- **What role do you think you *should* play? Why?**

7. Engage the class in a discussion about what Silent Bystanders can do under these circumstances. Hopefully the class comes to consensus about the Defender being the best role. However, they may not and may need to have the “Christians and Bullying Prevention” lesson as a basis for understanding the appropriate intervention.

At this point, some leaders will want to return to the Christians and Bullying Prevention lesson. However, others may want to make this exercise the basis for an entire lesson depending on time constraints and how the discussion is going.

If you continue and depending on the openness and safety of your group/class, you could ask if students can relate to these roles or have ever played them. Students may describe many social pressures which seem to make the Silent Bystander role attractive. Adolescents often tell adults that they are not subject to peer pressure. However, this kind of exercise highlights the power of the situation and just how much humans are subject to social pressures. No doubt the Good Samaritan felt social pressure to ignore the wounded man on the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37). However, he went beyond that pressure to reach out and help. Bystanders can become Defenders by:

- Intervening directly by communicating that the bullying should stop
- Providing support for the student being bullied
- Not joining in the bullying in any way
- Alerting an adult

If you are using this activity as the basis for an entire lesson then it might be helpful to turn to Luke 10:25-37 to read the Good Samaritan story. It is not too far of a stretch to identify the roles in the parable with the roles just discussed in the bullying drama. Students in school who are bullied are often left alone and wounded, with religious students passing by as Silent Bystanders. Jesus clearly favored the Samaritan who played the role of Defender. As indicated by the story, playing the Defender will sometimes cost us something. However, we are called to follow the teaching and example of Christ.

Note: This role play is designed to be used with the lesson plan “Christians and Bullying Prevention” which is on the [Golden Rule Pledge website](#). However, as noted, it can be used as a shorter stand alone lesson.

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<sup>i</sup> I encourage this scenario because it is the one most religiously conservative students have trouble with. Also, name calling surrounding sexual orientation related slurs is very common, even when the target is not assumed to be a sexual minority. If a youth leader believes this scenario would be too intense or defeat the purpose of the lesson, then bullying related to clothing choice alone can be substituted. However, I strongly suggest that the anti-gay harassment be revisited in order to help students understand that such bullying is unacceptable. When students ask what the Bible teaches about homosexuality (as this often does come up), I suggest putting that discussion off until another lesson. Such discussions are not relevant to how one treats others. Disagreements over doctrine or culture war related arguments can derail the lesson from the objectives of following the Golden Rule in relationship to all people.