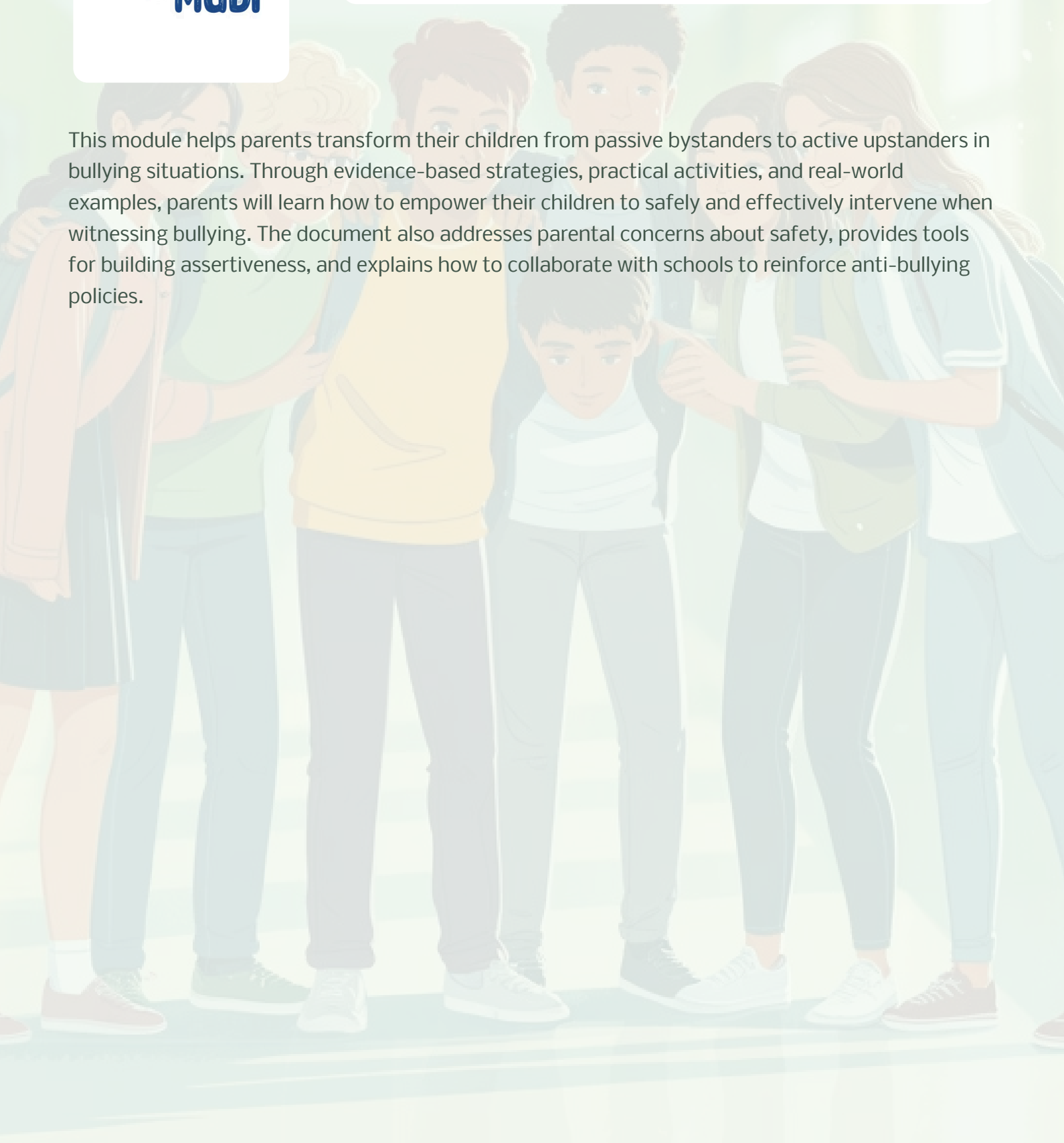


Module 11. When your child is a bystander



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

This module helps parents transform their children from passive bystanders to active upstanders in bullying situations. Through evidence-based strategies, practical activities, and real-world examples, parents will learn how to empower their children to safely and effectively intervene when witnessing bullying. The document also addresses parental concerns about safety, provides tools for building assertiveness, and explains how to collaborate with schools to reinforce anti-bullying policies.



Understanding the Importance of Upstanders

The bystander effect, identified by Latané and Darley in 1969, describes how the likelihood of intervention decreases as the number of witnesses increases. An "upstander" actively intervenes in harmful situations, while a "bystander" passively observes. This distinction is crucial for parents to understand when guiding their children's social development.

Parents often worry that encouraging upstander behavior might expose their child to retaliation or social exclusion. While these concerns are valid, they can be addressed through proper preparation. Consider this important perspective: if we don't encourage our children to be upstanders, they might become the next victims. Teaching them to speak up for others is an investment in their safety and social development.

Silence in bullying situations can be interpreted as complicity. Many schools now enforce consequences for bystanders who fail to report bullying or appear to condone it through inaction. Even small actions—like standing silently near a bully—can be perceived as approval of the behavior.

Parents as Vital Links

Parents serve as the crucial connection between children and schools, helping shape students' perspectives on bullying. Every parent has a responsibility to understand school anti-bullying policies and protective measures.

Encouraging Communication

Parents can reassure children that speaking up is acceptable and help them feel comfortable discussing bullying situations with teachers. They can also encourage victims to unite and take action together.

Building Understanding

Watching educational videos like "Bullying: How to Safely Help Someone" with your child can facilitate meaningful discussions about the difference between being a bystander and an upstander.

Assessing Your Child's Current Role

Understanding whether your child tends to be an upstander or a bystander is the first step toward encouraging positive intervention. The "Am I an upstander or a bystander?" activity helps parents and children explore this question together through guided reflection.

Questions for Parents

- In which category do you think your child fits: upstander or bystander?
- Do you believe your child has friends who would help them if they were bullied?
- Would your child get involved as an upstander if another child were being bullied?
- If your child became a victim of bullying, do you think they trust you enough to tell you about it?

Questions for Children

- Do you see yourself as an upstander or a bystander?
- Would you help a friend if you saw them being bullied?
- Would you help a stranger who was being bullied?
- If you were bullied, who would be the first person you would tell?

After both you and your child have answered these questions, take time to analyze and discuss any differences in your perspectives. This conversation can reveal important insights about your child's values, fears, and decision-making process in social situations. It also provides an opportunity to address any misconceptions and reinforce the importance of upstander behavior.

Remember that children's responses may evolve over time as they develop greater empathy, confidence, and social awareness. Regular check-ins using similar questions can help track your child's growth and identify areas where they might need additional support or guidance.

Teaching Safety in Intervention

When encouraging your child to be an upstander, their personal safety must remain the top priority. Teaching children to evaluate the safety of a bullying situation before intervening is crucial. If direct intervention feels unsafe, guide them toward indirect strategies that can still make a positive difference.

Assess the Situation

Teach your child to pause and evaluate whether the bully appears physically aggressive or if adults are nearby. Help them recognize warning signs that indicate a situation might be too dangerous for direct intervention.

Consider Safer Options

If direct intervention seems risky, encourage alternatives like reporting the behavior to a trusted adult, using distraction techniques to defuse tension, or supporting the victim after the incident.

Show Support Afterward

Even if immediate intervention isn't possible, children can show kindness to victims by inviting them to join their group, offering emotional support, or simply acknowledging what happened was wrong.

Remind your child that their safety is just as important as anyone else's in a bullying situation. By teaching them to make thoughtful assessments rather than impulsive decisions, you're helping them develop judgment skills that will serve them throughout life.

Practice safety assessment with your child using hypothetical scenarios. Ask questions like: "What would you do if you saw someone being bullied in the hallway?" or "How would you know if it's safe to step in?" These conversations help build critical thinking skills while reinforcing the importance of personal safety.

The Power of Group Intervention

Intervening as part of a group can feel safer and be more effective than acting alone. Help your child identify peers they trust and feel comfortable with—friends, classmates, or teammates who share similar values. Encourage them to have conversations with these peers about standing up for kindness and fairness, creating a shared commitment to intervene when bullying occurs.

Taking the Lead

If your child takes the initiative in organizing group interventions, others are likely to follow. Teach them simple phrases like, "Let's go sit with them," or "We should tell the teacher together."

Building Confidence

Practice responses to different bullying scenarios at home to build confidence in your child's ability to act safely and effectively in real situations.



Showing Solidarity

Simply standing together with the victim—without confronting the bully—can deter further bullying. For example, if someone is targeted during lunch, the group can sit with the victim to show support.

Creating Distractions

Teach your child and their friends to redirect attention away from bullying. One group member could start a conversation with the bully while others help the victim leave the scene.

The strength in numbers approach not only provides safety but also demonstrates to bullies that their behavior is not socially acceptable. When multiple children stand together against bullying, it creates a powerful message that can change the social dynamics of a classroom or school.

Role-Playing: From Bystander to Upstander

Role-playing is a powerful tool to help children understand the impact of their choices in bullying situations. The "To be, or not to be, an upstander" activity provides a structured way to explore different responses through experiential learning.

Activity Instructions

Begin with a simple bullying scenario, such as: "A child at your school is being bullied because of his height." Then proceed with two rounds of role-play:

Round 1: The Bystander Role

In this round, the parent acts as a bystander who does not intervene in the bullying situation. After the role-play, discuss with your child:

- How did the victim likely feel when no one helped?
- What might be the long-term effects of this inaction?
- What emotions did the bystander experience by not getting involved?

Emphasize the negative effects of failing to intervene and highlight the emotional state of the victim when left without support.

Round 2: The Upstander Role

In the same scenario, the parent now demonstrates being an upstander who takes action. After this role-play, discuss:

- What specific actions did the upstander take?
- How might these actions change the outcome for the victim?
- What different methods can be used to stop bullying?

Present various intervention methods, such as directly telling the aggressor to stop, distracting from the situation, supporting the victim, or seeking help from an adult.

This activity helps children visualize the real impact of their choices and practice effective intervention strategies in a safe environment. By experiencing both roles, they gain a deeper understanding of how their actions—or inactions—affect bullying situations.

Consider creating additional scenarios relevant to your child's age and social environment. The more they practice, the more confident and prepared they'll feel when facing real-life bullying situations.

Collaborating with Schools on Anti-Bullying Efforts

Many schools incorporate bystander intervention programs as part of their anti-bullying education. As a parent, it's important to understand these programs and reinforce their messages at home. Proactive communication with your child's school creates a consistent approach to bullying prevention.



Communicate with Teachers

Reach out to your child's teachers and administrators to understand their anti-bullying curriculum. Ask specific questions about how they address bystander intervention and what language they use when discussing upstander behavior.



Review School Policies

Familiarize yourself with the school's anti-bullying policies, including any zero-tolerance policies that apply to bystanders who fail to report bullying. Ensure your child understands these policies and the potential consequences of remaining passive.



Reinforce at Home

Discuss school lessons about bullying at home, using consistent terminology and approaches. This reinforcement helps children internalize the importance of upstander behavior across all environments.



Provide Feedback

Share observations or concerns about the school's anti-bullying efforts with administrators. Your perspective as a parent is valuable for improving these programs.

When parents and schools work together, children receive consistent messages about the importance of upstander behavior. This collaboration creates a community-wide approach to bullying prevention that is more effective than either party working in isolation.

Consider volunteering for school anti-bullying initiatives or parent committees focused on school climate. Your involvement demonstrates to your child the importance you place on creating safe, supportive environments for all students.

Encouraging Reporting to Trusted Adults

Children often hesitate to involve adults in bullying situations, fearing they'll be labeled as "tattletales." This reluctance can allow bullying to continue unchecked. As a parent, you can help reframe reporting as an act of responsibility and courage rather than "tattling."

Identifying Trusted Adults

Help your child identify trusted adults at school—teachers, counselors, coaches, or administrators—whom they feel comfortable approaching. Discuss what makes someone trustworthy and how these adults are positioned to help stop bullying effectively.

Encourage your child to build relationships with these adults before problems arise. When children have established connections with school staff, they're more likely to seek help when needed.



Following Up After Reporting

Teach your child the importance of following up with adults to ensure the issue is being addressed. This follow-up demonstrates persistence and shows that your child is serious about resolving the situation. It also helps them understand that sometimes complex problems require ongoing attention.

Reporting bullying isn't about getting someone in trouble—it's about keeping everyone safe and creating a better environment for all students.

Practice with your child how to approach an adult about bullying. Role-play different scenarios and help them develop clear, concise ways to explain what they witnessed. For example: "I saw someone repeatedly pushing a younger student in the hallway between classes" is more helpful than "Someone was being mean."

Reassure your child that adults want to know about bullying situations and that reporting is an important way to create positive change in their school community.

Inspiring Through Role Models

Teenagers are often more inspired by media figures than by what parents or teachers say. Discussing celebrities who have overcome bullying and become advocates for kindness can be particularly effective in motivating teens to become upstanders.



Lady Gaga

Lady Gaga experienced severe bullying during her school years, being mocked for her appearance, love of theater, and unique personality. Rather than letting these experiences define her, she channeled them into her music and activism, founding the Born This Way Foundation to empower young people to build a kinder world.



Emma Watson

Best known for her role as Hermione Granger in Harry Potter, Emma Watson faced bullying and criticism as a child actress and later for her feminist advocacy. She became a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador and launched the HeForShe campaign, advocating for gender equality and encouraging everyone to stand against discrimination.

These examples show teens that even highly successful people have faced bullying, and that these experiences can become catalysts for positive change. By connecting your teen's experiences to those of people they admire, you help them see the potential for growth and impact in their own lives.

Encourage your teen to research other celebrities or historical figures who have overcome bullying or discrimination. This exploration can help them develop a broader perspective on resilience and the importance of standing up for others. Many celebrities have established foundations or campaigns specifically addressing bullying, which can provide additional resources and inspiration.

Building Assertiveness Skills

Assertiveness is a crucial skill that enables children to stand up for themselves and others in bullying situations. An assertive teen is more likely to intervene when witnessing bullying and can serve as a model of social responsibility and courage for peers.

Research shows that students are more likely to adopt an upstander stance when a close friend is involved, when they demonstrate high empathy toward others, and when they belong to a group that espouses anti-bullying values. Assertiveness training can foster improvements in self-belief, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, enabling children to alter negative attitudes and responses.

The "Stand Your Ground with Confidence" Activity

This structured activity helps teens develop assertiveness skills through guided practice and reflection:

Preparation

Create index cards with various bullying scenarios, such as "Someone teases you about your outfit in front of the class" or "A classmate is being shoved in the hallway." Explain the difference between assertive, aggressive, and passive responses.

Role-playing Practice

Take turns role-playing each scenario. The parent plays the bully, victim, or bystander while the teen practices responding assertively using calm words, confident body language, and maintaining eye contact. Switch roles to provide different perspectives.

Warm-up Discussion

Talk with your teen about why assertiveness matters in bullying situations. Ask reflective questions like "How can being assertive help make the situation better?" and "What's the difference between standing up for yourself and being aggressive?"

Reflection and Adjustment

After each scenario, discuss what worked well, how it felt to speak up, and what might be changed next time. Emphasize staying calm, clear, and respectful while expressing thoughts or setting boundaries.

To reinforce assertiveness skills, help your teen create a personal "confidence mantra"—a short, empowering phrase they can use when feeling nervous about standing up for themselves or others. Examples include "I have the right to speak up," "I can be confident and respectful," or "I stand for what's right."

Key Factors in Upstander Intervention

Understanding the factors that influence a child's likelihood of intervening in bullying situations can help parents provide targeted support and encouragement. Research has identified several key predictors of upstander behavior that parents should be aware of.



Relationship Proximity

Students are significantly more likely to intervene when a close friend is involved in a bullying situation. This highlights the importance of friendship networks in promoting upstander behavior.



Empathy Development

Children who demonstrate high levels of empathy toward others are more likely to take action when witnessing bullying. Empathy allows them to understand the victim's distress and motivates intervention.



Group Values

Being part of a peer group that espouses anti-bullying values significantly increases the likelihood of upstander behavior. The social norms within a child's friend group powerfully influence their actions.

Assertiveness training has proven to be an effective strategy in combating bullying. It fosters improvements in victims' self-belief, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and assertiveness, enabling them to alter negative attitudes and responses. Assertive individuals are better able to build supportive relationships, protect themselves from bullying, and express both positive and negative thoughts without experiencing guilt or infringing upon others' rights.

Perhaps most importantly, developing assertiveness enhances children's awareness of their right to defend themselves and others against bullying. This awareness is fundamental to creating a culture where bullying is consistently challenged rather than tolerated.