



What kind of upstander am I?

Most people want to help when they see harmful behaviours, but they are not always sure how. This resource will help you understand what it means to be an upstander, so you have the knowledge when you need it.

An upstander is someone who chooses to safely and positively support someone experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviours.

See 'What can I do? Guide to upstander action', for step-by-step guidance on what to do while something is happening.

Note

The term 'upstander' in this resource is in line with the findings of the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Report. An upstander is someone who chooses to act positively and safely to support a person being bullied or harmed. They are someone who upholds values of kindness and empathy.



'I learned that loyalty isn't defending your friends no matter what. Loyalty means not letting their mistakes go unnoticed and being honest with them when no one else will.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Ways you can be an upstander

You don't need a certain personality to be an upstander. There are many ways you can help someone in need, and no way is better than another. Every situation is different, so the right action changes each time. The most important thing is to stay safe and positive.

There are several different approaches you can use to be an upstander, as shown below¹. You can choose to use these if you see bullying or other harmful behaviours. Only use the ones you are comfortable with and only when it is safe to do so.

Direct

A direct approach should only be used when it feels safe to do so. You can try a different approach if that feels like a better choice for the situation. A direct response is safely speaking up when you see harmful behaviour.

You could ask the person being targeted if they are okay. Or you could do something to make them feel safe and included. You could ask for help from a trusted adult. This approach can take courage. It won't feel right in every situation, and remember that your safety always comes first.

Distract

Distraction can shift the focus away from the harmful behaviour. This can make a situation feel calmer and help stop it from getting worse. You can create a distraction by changing the subject. You could also invite the person being targeted to join another activity.

Delegate

Get help from a trusted adult or older person. This could be a teacher, coach, parent or carer or school staff member. Telling a trusted adult is not the same as dobbing. Dobbing means telling on someone so they get in trouble. Delegating means telling someone so they can help keep a person safe. If the first person doesn't help, tell another adult. Keep trying.

Delay

Check in with the person who was targeted. Do this after the situation, when it feels safe. Let them know that you noticed what happened, that you care and that they are not alone. This can really help them feel supported.

¹ These approaches have been adapted from The Stand-Up Project and the University of Cambridge's 'Be an active bystander'.

What do upstander actions look like?

There isn't just one way to be an upstander. Some ways may feel easier than others, depending on the situation. Every safe and positive upstander action can make a difference.

Read the scenarios below to learn about how you can be a safe and positive upstander. Different upstander actions can be used for each scenario. Think about which ones you would feel comfortable using.

'When I was in primary school, I was unfortunately bullied for a considerable amount of time. The acts that made me feel better and reassured weren't some glorified, unrealistic version of a "heroic" friend stepping in to save the day, that only happens in the movies, but rather a friend who subtly noticed and invited me to sit with them. Small acts of kindness that say, "I'm here, I understand," can be far more powerful than others realise when someone is struggling.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Scenario 1: Exclusion

Your friends eat lunch together every day. Lately, you've noticed that when Rose arrives, the group doesn't make an effort to include her. One day, some of your friends are talking about going to the movies on the weekend. Rose asks what movie they will see. The conversation quickly changes.

Later, at lunch, Rose asks if she can join the group. Someone shrugs and says, 'There's not really enough room,' even though there is plenty of space. Rose walks away and sits by herself.

What could an upstander do in this situation?

- ◉ **Direct:** You could say, 'I can move over to make some space for Rose.'
- ◉ **Distract:** Start a conversation with Rose. You could also invite her to join another activity with you. This helps take the focus off Rose being left out.
- ◉ **Delegate:** Tell a trusted teacher that Rose is often being left out. Let them know you are worried about how it is affecting her.
- ◉ **Delay:** Check in with Rose later. You could say, 'I noticed what happened at lunch today. Are you okay?' Supporting someone who is being excluded can make them feel less isolated.

Scenario 2: The group chat

Your class has a group chat. People usually share funny memes, talk about homework and make each other laugh.

At recess, Joseph slips on the stairs at school. He hurts his leg and is upset. He finds it embarrassing, but everyone seems to move on.

After school, Alex posts a meme about someone falling. The caption says, 'POV: Joseph.' A few people react with laughing emojis. Then more students join in with jokes about Joseph falling and crying. Joseph replies, 'Hey, it's really not that funny. I actually got hurt.'

More people laugh at his comment and keep posting jokes. After that, Joseph goes offline and doesn't reply again.

Scenario 3: Class discussion

During a class discussion, Leo answers a question. Another student copies how he talks and makes fun of his accent. A few classmates laugh. Leo stops talking and looks down at his desk. For the rest of the lesson, he doesn't put his hand up again.

What could an upstander do in this situation?

- ◉ **Direct:** You could write a comment like, 'Sorry to hear you really got hurt – that's not funny.'
- ◉ **Distract:** Change the conversation. Ask a real question about homework or tomorrow's plans. This helps move the chat away from Joseph.
- ◉ **Delegate:** Tell a trusted adult what is happening online. This is important if Joseph is picked on again or seems upset.
- ◉ **Delay:** Send Joseph a private message or talk to him the next day. You could say, 'I saw what was happening in the chat. Are you okay?' Letting someone know they're not alone can make a real difference.

You can report harmful behaviour online to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.



What could an upstander do in this situation?

- ◉ **Direct:** You could say, 'Knowing more than one language is really amazing.'
- ◉ **Distract:** Ask Leo a follow-up question about his answer. This could also help bring the class back to the topic.
- ◉ **Delegate:** Tell the teacher what happened so they can address the behaviour and support Leo.
- ◉ **Delay:** Check in with Leo after class. You could say, 'I noticed what happened in class. Are you okay?' Checking in with someone when they are being treated badly can help them feel supported.

Reflection questions

- ◉ What would you do in each scenario?
- ◉ Which upstander approach would you feel most comfortable using in each scenario? Why?
- ◉ Has anything like this happened to you or someone you know?
- ◉ Would you do things differently in the future, now that you know ways to be a safe and positive upstander?

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety or overwhelm, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Counselling and guidance for children and young people experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour, available 24/7.

headspace/ehespace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

Connected resources

- ◉ What can I do? Guide to upstander action
- ◉ What's stopping me?

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76 or 13yarn.org.au. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people): 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

eSafety Commissioner: esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via their website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local polices and school context.