

Beyond the Bully and the Bullied: Bullying Also Impacts the Mental Health of the "Bystanders"

AVON, Conn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- Although not everyone may be a victim of bullying or a bully themselves, people oftentimes overlook the third person involved in a bullying situation: the witness or bystander. Research suggests that approximately two out of every three children have witnessed bullying, and with the advent of cyberbullying, that number continues to grow rapidly. The bystander has an opportunity to intervene to help resolve a conflict, or at least prevent it from escalating. A study published by the *Canadian Journal of Psychology* found that once a bystander stepped in to help the target of bullying, the behavior stopped within 10 seconds. However, simply witnessing a bullying event also can have mental health consequences for the bystander that can last beyond the incident itself.

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month, and Magellan Health Services is calling attention to mental health and bullying for its second annual [Take Mental Health To Heart](#) campaign. Magellan has partnered with The Jed Foundation, the nation's leading organization working to promote emotional health and prevent suicide among college students and young adults, to raise awareness about the mental health effects of bullying and encourage people to take responsibility for building a bully-free community. Throughout the month, Magellan and The Jed Foundation will share information about bullying from the perspective of the victim, the bully, parents and bystanders.

Intervening in a Bullying Situation

An important new strategy for bullying prevention focuses on the powerful role of the bystander. Those witnessing a bullying event must first evaluate the safety of the situation: if there are weapons involved or other threats of physical harm, the bystander should notify a professional to intervene. Otherwise, bystanders can help by:

- Telling the bully that what he or she is doing is wrong
- Inviting the victim to leave the situation with them
- Not laughing or otherwise encouraging the bully
- Talking to the victim in private and sharing their support
- Speaking to the bully about why their behavior isn't appropriate
- Including the victim in their activities and/or helping them avoid other potential bullying situations
- Avoiding spreading rumors about what happened

"When it comes to bullying, there is power in numbers," said Victor Schwartz, M.D., medical director for The Jed Foundation. "The bully is often harassing the victim to demonstrate power and entertain the bystanders. If those bystanders laugh or encourage the bully, the situation is likely to continue. However, if the bystanders are sympathetic to the victim, then the bully loses influence and his or her reason for bullying. Therefore, it's important for bystanders to recognize the power they have to stop the bullying situation and make it known that this type of behavior is not acceptable."

The Mental Health Impact on Bullying Bystanders

Research has documented a number of mental health effects for both bullies and bullying victims, however, witnesses to bullying may also suffer similar mental health consequences. Just like witnessing an act of violence, seeing someone being bullied can be a traumatic experience, or can remind a person of other personally traumatic experiences. Additionally, many bystanders feel a sense of guilt or regret for not intervening on behalf of a bullying victim.

A 2009 study in the United Kingdom surveyed 2,000 students and found that nearly two-thirds of the students had witnessed bullying, 20 percent admitted they had been a bully themselves, and 34 percent indicated they had been a victim of bullying. Witnesses were more likely to exhibit the same mental health issues as bullies and victims, such as depression and interpersonal sensitivity, and were more likely than victims to engage in substance abuse.

"Bullying impacts all of us, whether we're actively participating or simply witnessing a bullying event," said Gary Henschen, M.D., chief medical officer for behavioral health at Magellan. "We have to be mindful that people who witness bullying might be hurting, too, or may have difficulty dealing with the emotions of what they have experienced. It's more important than ever that we establish rules of respect and tolerance within our communities and online. When bullying happens, we all lose."

"Planting the Seed" to Stop Bullying

On www.TakeMentalHealthToHeart.com, visitors can learn more about how bullying impacts the victim, bystanders and the bully; find helpful information for parents; take a screener for depression; and discover a variety of other links and

resources. Visitors are also encouraged to leave a comment by "planting a virtual seed" on the website that they can share with friends and family to raise awareness about the impact of bullying. As individuals share their pledge to end bullying with others, their virtual seed will grow into a "tree" representing the expansive network of people they have reached with their message. For every virtual seed planted during the month of May, Magellan will donate \$5 to The Jed Foundation, up to \$25,000.

To learn more about bullying and the *Take Mental Health To Heart Campaign*, visit www.TakeMentalHealthToHeart.com.

About The Jed Foundation: The Jed Foundation (TJF) is the nation's leading organization working to promote emotional health and prevent suicide among college students. TJF materials and tools are available to all colleges and universities throughout the United States. Founded in 2000 by parents who lost a son to suicide while he was attending college, the organization has developed several programs, which include: ULifeline, an online resource that gives students access to campus-specific resources and allows them to take an anonymous emotional health screening; the Peabody Award-winning Half of Us campaign with mtvU, which uses online, on-air and on campus programming to decrease stigma around mental illness and encourage help-seeking; Love is Louder, a movement online and in communities to build connectedness and increase resiliency; and a portfolio of nationally-recognized tools, resources and training programs that help campuses effectively promote mental health and protect at-risk students. Learn more by visiting www.jedfoundation.org, www.ulifeline.org, www.halfofus.com, or www.loveislouder.com.

About Magellan Health Services: Headquartered in Avon, Conn., Magellan Health Services Inc. is a leading specialty health care management organization with expertise in managing behavioral health, radiology and specialty pharmaceuticals, as well as public sector pharmacy benefits programs. Magellan delivers innovative solutions to improve quality outcomes and optimize the cost of care for those we serve. As of March 31, 2012, Magellan's customers include health plans, employers and government agencies, serving approximately 33.8 million members in our behavioral health business, 16.1 million members in our radiology benefits management segment, and 6.2 million members in our medical pharmacy management product. In addition, the specialty pharmaceutical segment served 41 health plans and several pharmaceutical manufacturers and state Medicaid programs. The company's Medicaid Administration segment served 24 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit www.MagellanHealth.com.

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