Bystander intervention to stop violence in schools

escrito por Sara Carbonell | 19 de enero de 2023



Not all interventions are effective in stopping and reducing violence in schools. We receive many proposals based on «good ideas» that are being implemented without any success.

As a teacher, I have attended training sessions where they suggested offering a «healing kit» to the victim when violence occurs, with items like a «magic band-aid» to repair the damage as if by magic. Even worse are the practices in some schools (some of them driven by regulations) where «informal meetings» are held with the aggressor and the victim so that, through affective questions, both parties can express their reasons and feelings.

All of us who are against all forms of violence know that **there are never reasons to exert violence and that justifying it by seeking a motive has never succeeded in making steps to end it**. Moreover, bringing the aggressor and the victim together to dialogue only exposes the victim again.

But what does the scientific evidence on social impact say? **It is widely proven internationally that the most effective way to stop violence is through what is known as bystander**

intervention, meaning the activation of witnesses in favor of the victims. This intervention focuses on protecting the victims, through direct or indirect intervention, breaking the silence, and reporting what has happened or what is going to happen. This strategy is also showing results in reducing violence against vulnerable groups like the LGBTIQ+ community.

In many schools, the **zero-violence brave club**, framed within the dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution, is achieving this community activation.

All members of the educational community learn that, **when they are direct or indirect witnesses of violence, they cannot remain neutral and look the other way because this behavior suggests they are siding with the aggressor**. They learn to act without exposing themselves to being attacked. Many of them become what they call a «shield»; when they see someone being mistreated, they approach together and stand by the victim, saying phrases that clearly reject the violent behavior like «we will not allow this» or «we disagree.» They know that acting together is effective because it prevents attacks or reprisals for defending the victims, thus preventing isolating violence. A simple way to remember how to position themselves while protecting themselves is to recall the «5Ds»:

1. **delegate** (report the violence),
2. **distract** (pretend to befriend the victim to cause a distraction),
3. **direct** (stay with the victim and stop the aggressor with words),
4. **delay** (accompany the victim afterward providing support), and
5. **document** (observe and note information to report later).

Personally, I witness the effectiveness of basing educational programs on evidence to improve coexistence in schools every day. In my school, children are not afraid to break the silence because when they do, they are socially valued and always find support. Coexistence problems come to light in the early stages and are addressed collectively, rejecting the behavior of those who speak ill, mock, belittle, insult on social media, pressure, or threaten. This prevents escalation and sends a clear message: **anyone who wants to exert violence will not have anyone to cover for them and will not remain unpunished because we are a brave community that does not look the other way**.

[Image: Unsplash]