



MaineTeenTalk
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The Bystander Effect

The most recent news regarding bystanders took place at Richmond High School in California. A girl was gang-raped and beaten for several hours, while 10-20 people watched. Some 'bystanders' even took videos and photographs.

How can this happen? Is this a case of the 'Bystander Effect', or is this simply an example of cruelty and indifference? And, what exactly, is 'The Bystander Effect'?

The term 'Bystander Effect' refers to the social psychological phenomenon in cases where individuals do not offer help in an emergency situation when other people are present. The greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is that any one of them will help. This somewhat controversial theory was first identified and demonstrated in a laboratory by John Darley and Bibb Lantane in 1968.

There are two primary factors which are cited as reasons for the bystander effect. First, the presence of other people creates a 'diffusion of responsibility'; which says that the bystanders assume someone else will take action, so everyone feels less responsible.

The second reason is attributed to the basic principal of social influence, or the need to behave in correct and socially acceptable ways. Said another way, this means bystanders monitor the reactions of the others present to see if they feel the need to intervene. If no one reacts, individuals often take this as a sign from the collective group that a response is not needed.

There are several unusual aspects to the case at the California high school. According to CCN: "As people announced over time that this was going on, more people came to see, and some actually participated," (Police Lt. Mark Gagan) The most disturbing aspects of this event are the number of bystanders and both the violence and length of the crime.

Is this a case of apathy, where the bystanders are unmoved? Have we become so used to violence that violent behavior becomes less shocking? There are a few other possible reasons. First, there is the fear of retaliation, especially in violent communities. Also, kids who observe bullying understand the nature of the implicit 'power

structure' in teen culture. Wolfe's Neck Trek Update.....Pg 3
that the part of the adolescent brain which impacts decision-making continues to develop into their 20's.

This story is horrific, in part because these incidences seem to be on the rise. Even if that were not true, a single case is one too many. So what do we do? While there are no easy answers, raising awareness helps. Giving bystanders tools to intervene in a non-threatening or anonymous way is a start. Call 911. If it's a high school, set up a complaint system with an assurance of anonymity. Organizations (like the US Army) are beginning to conduct 'bystander training' with regard to sexual assault.

One thing is clear: Third parties can affect the outcome of a crime. Experts say that witnesses have the power to deter violence -- or stop a crime from happening. Bystanders could have prevented the gang rape from lasting more than two hours, if they had reported the crime to authorities sooner.

It's the season for compassion,...so let's join together to watch out for one another.



The Winter Holidays Are A Time To Get Together

The Winter Holidays are a time of joy and giving; a time to come together and celebrate with friends and family. Sadly, the idyllic images presented in Hall-mark cards and TV movies are not always accurate.

Expectations can be a doubled-edged sword. While they fill children’s heads with visions of sugar plums, they also have the potential to bring stress to those trying to meet them.

Almost everyone is struggling with our weakened economy. The constant barrage of TV, radio and magazine ads seems to celebrate consumerism rather than the sacred aspects this time of year represents. Because high spending does not necessarily translate to high spirits, we’d like to offer a few ideas for finding some balance during your holiday season. A place to start might be to change the focus from getting to counting blessings.

Gather loved ones together. Have a pot luck dinner, where everyone shares their special dish. This evens out the workload and could introduce some previously unknown family recipes.

Organize a ‘game night’. Charades involves pencils, paper and creativity. The same is true for Dictionary (also called Fictionary).

Make homemade gifts. The time and effort put into a gift gives it great meaning. The gifts don’t have to be elaborate: make a coupon book with offers to babysit, clean up or give a foot rub.

Start a family tradition. Hold a Family Volunteer Day at a shelter or food bank.

Have a “Secret Acts of Kindness” week (or month), where family members anonymously do chores or leave kind notes.

Create a scrapbook of favorite family memories.

Set a budget and stick to it. Consider putting names in a hat and buying a present only for the name you pull out.

Don’t buy wrapping paper. Not only will you help the environment, but it will save you a little money. Use old newspapers, bright magazines or some beautiful left over cloth.



A Family Holiday Survival Guide

Family and holidays come hand in hand for most of us. And families are all about communication. Getting together with your family around the holidays can be difficult. Frayed nerves, fatigue and economic worries can contribute to lapsing into negative patterns of behavior. MaineTeenTalk would like to offer some thoughts to help keep your holiday season as conflict free as possible.

Be an active listener and a thoughtful speaker: Choose your words carefully when confronting someone, especially a family member, about an issue that is bothering you. Be prepared to listen to their point of view. Don’t shut them out because you don’t like what they are saying.

Time Out: If you realize you are too angry to have a productive conversation with someone, wait until you are able to talk calmly and rationally.

Be aware of body language: Tone, gestures and attitude can undermine kind words. Be sure to pay attention to your non-verbal cues during a conversation, so you don’t send mixed messages.

Use an “XYZ” or “I” statement: State what happened that upset you and how it made you feel. Be specific about who, when and where, and do not bring past history into the discussion. The more specific a problem is, the easier it is to solve.

Offer solutions or suggestions: Help de-escalate an argument by offering specific solutions. If you can’t agree on an outcome, at least agree to disagree and move on.

MTT’s 1st Annual Wolfe’s Neck Trek 5k Was A HUGE SUCCESS!



Over 110 runners, ages 11 to 62, took part in our inaugural race at Wolfe’s Neck Farm in Freeport. The course was beautiful and challenging. We expect to see even more of you next year.

The overall fastest time was turned in by Jim Panaccione from Kittery, Maine, who finished the course in 20:06. Congratulations to Jim!

Thanks to all our runners and volunteers.