



Lois loved to walk around the block every day or ride her adult tricycle on the sidewalk. Such a simple thing brought her so much joy. She wasn't hurting a thing or anybody. But we had a neighborhood bully named Sammy. Sammy would say mean things to Lois and others. He would use inappropriate and hurtful words. I will never forget the time he blocked the sidewalk and wouldn't allow my sister to pass. He just intimidated and bullied her until she started to cry. She came home shaking and sobbing.

This time, I couldn't keep quiet anymore. I was so mad! This had to be made right! I went over to Sammy's yard and asked if he did what Lois had told me. "Yeah," he said. "What are you gonna do about it?" "I'm going to tell your mom," I said. "Go right ahead," he yelled back. I knocked on the door, and after a long awkward wait, she answered and said, "Can I help you?"

"Sammy was bullying my sister, Lois, and wouldn't let her pass by on the sidewalk with her bike. He made her cry." She got a perplexed look on her face and said, "Oh, there must be some mistake. My little Sammy would never do something like that." She turned to her son and said, "Would you, Sammy?" Sammy's demeanor had changed from the time I confronted him. It was like Jekyll and Hyde. I almost didn't recognize the innocent boyish expression on his face as he said, "No, Mom, never." At that, his mother smiled approvingly, turned and retreated back inside her house. "Now what are you going to do?" laughed Sammy, his innocent demeanor suddenly changing back to a sinister smile.

I couldn't believe what happened. How could his mom be so blind? How could she not care what happened to Lois? How could she just blow it off and not get to the truth?

My sadness for Lois turned to anger when I heard what Sammy did, but when the adult in the situation did not take the reporting of bullying seriously and treat the situation with proper consequences, my anger turned to outrage. I remember feeling like I was losing control. I wanted revenge. I looked at Sammy and said, "If you ever hurt my sister again, I'll..."

No matter what actions I may have listed off at that point, would you blame me? Well, his actions didn't stop. No big surprise there. That's why it's important for parents, teachers, coaches, adults, and peers alike to take every report of a bullying incident seriously. The bully must have consequences to his or her actions. It cannot be tolerated or ignored.

Sammy struck again. This time he took a staple gun and shot staples at younger neighborhood kids, as well as my sister, Lois. I took matters into my own hands and got some guys together. I wanted to kill him, or at least hurt him really badly.

When telling this story, I've had some people say, "Good for you. He deserved whatever you did to him." But don't you see? By seeking to harm him, I became just like him. I became the bully. The system was still controlling me. At one time it controlled me by being silent. This time it controlled me by allowing my anger and rage to own me.

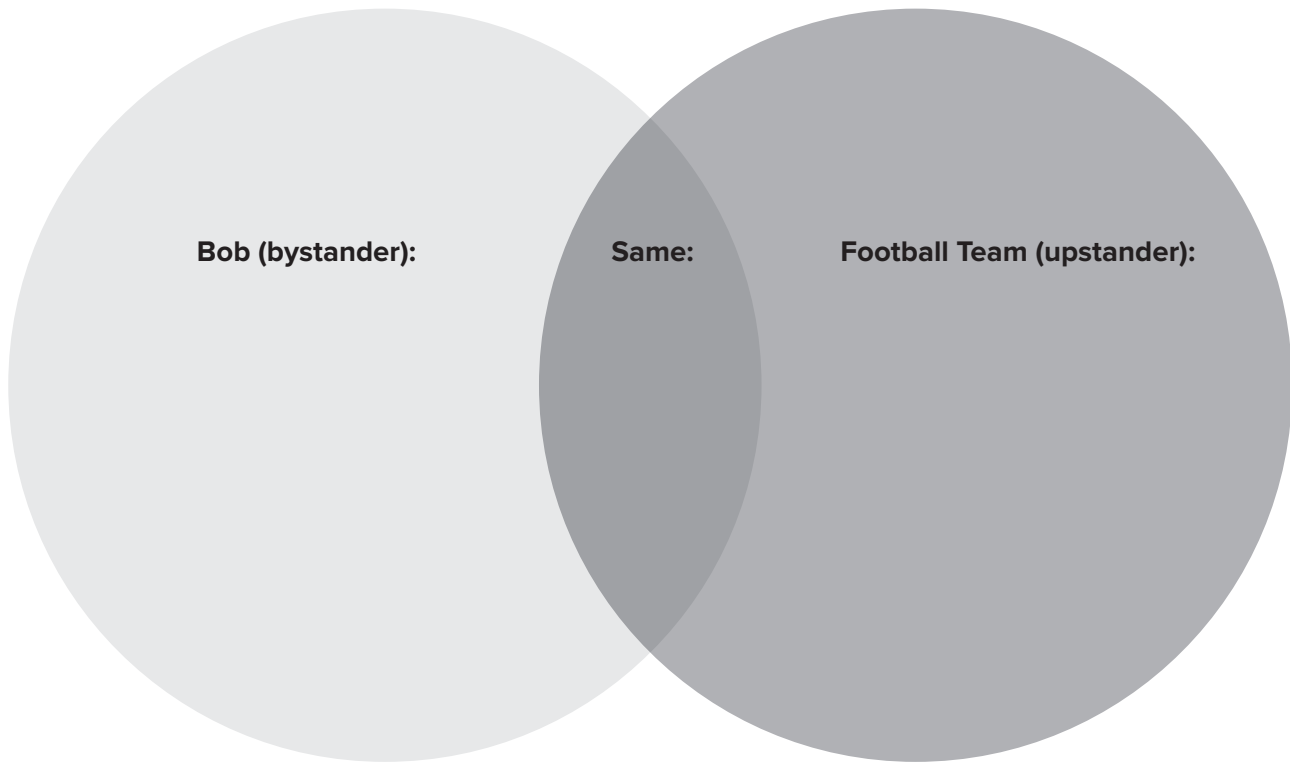
When we retaliate, we become the bully, the one who can get in trouble with the law. Thankfully, standing up to Sammy with a group of friends was enough to have him back down. We can't let it escalate to violence or the cycle will never stop. If one adult doesn't believe you, go to another or the authorities. You do have a choice and you can stand up for yourself without dehumanizing or hurting another.

Are we going to lower ourselves to their standard or rise above it? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it another way; "Darkness cannot cast out darkness. Only light can do that. Hatred cannot cast out hatred. Only love can do that." Yes, what Sammy did was wrong, but choosing to either ignore it or fight back with hatred were not our only options.

Excerpt from *Dignity Revolution: Standing Up for the Value of Every Person* (Lenz 32).

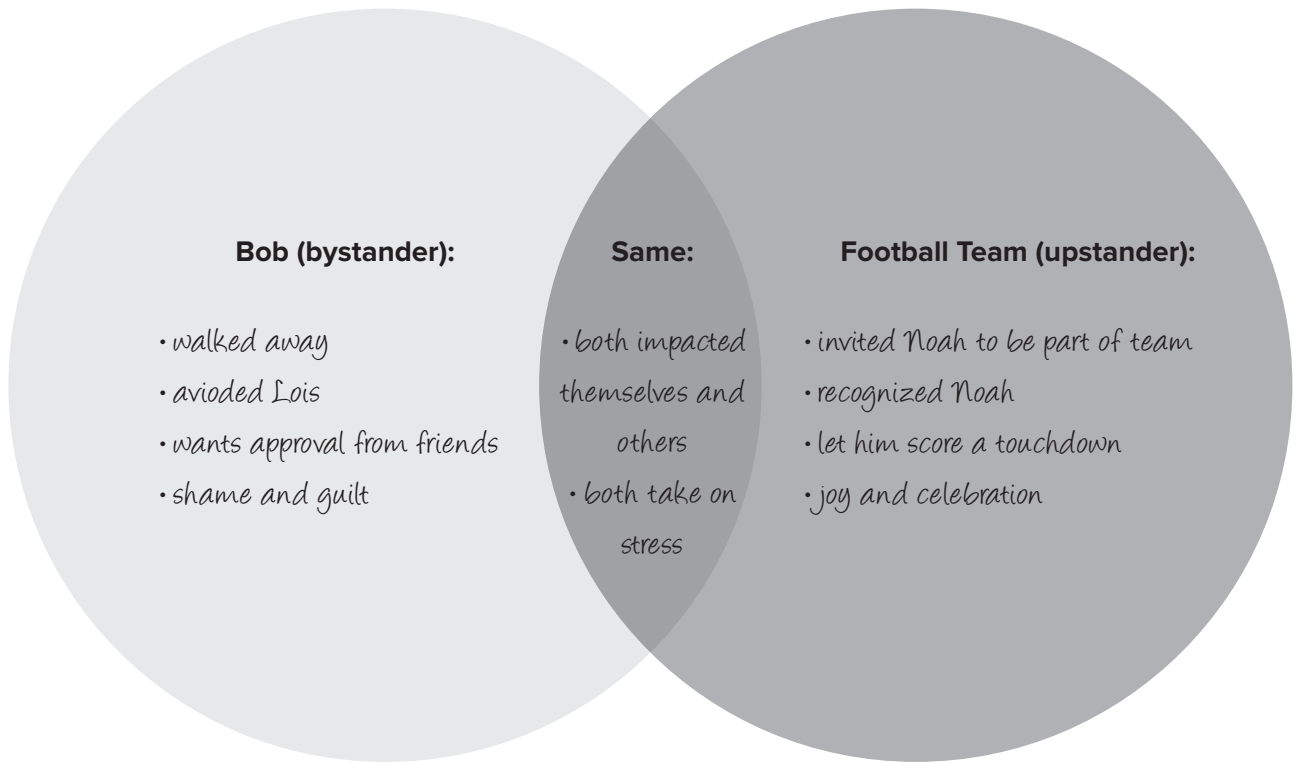


Bystander Behaviors vs. Upstander Behaviors





Bystander Behaviors vs. Upstander Behaviors





Upstander Worksheet

1. What action step can you do to make a positive change?

2. I choose to _____

When _____ Because _____

3. As a result of this activity I learned _____
