

Safe School Ambassadors

Harnessing student power to stop bullying and violence

A program of



Empowering Youth
Transforming Communities

**Every day in America, thousands of courageous young people
are standing up to cruelty, bullying and violence**

The **Safe School Ambassadors®** (SSA) program was developed in 1999 to help prevent and stop peer mistreatment and violence among 4th- to 12th-grade students. Since then, over 650 public and private schools have adopted this powerful program in 26 states and in Canada.

Following the tragic event at Columbine High School, schools disproportionately focused on school safety from the “outside-in,” installing airport-like security: locks, fences, metal detectors and security cameras. They largely ignored the role that students can play in reducing violence and mistreatment. The SSA program provides a complementary “inside-out” approach, which harnesses the power that students have to change things from within and puts them at the center of the solution.

Students see, hear and know things adults don’t. They are typically the first responders on the scene of mistreatment and violence, and can intervene in ways adults can’t. While adults may make and enforce the rules at school, students create and maintain the social norms that allow peer mistreatment to happen.

Research shows that 70-85% of students have been passive bystanders to peer mistreatment. Most often, they do not intervene because they fear retaliation or don’t know what to do or say. Their silence amounts to tacit consent, which reinforces an environment where it’s “cool to be cruel.”

SSA trainings mobilize the bystanders, but not just any bystanders. Socially-influential, opinion leaders (the students who shape the school’s norms) from the diverse groups and cliques on campus are carefully identified and chosen by both the school faculty and their peers. They are trained to use powerful nonviolent communication and intervention skills to prevent, de-escalate and stop mistreatment among their peers. It is with their peers that they can be safe, cool, and effective. The SSA program is sustained through regularly-scheduled, small group meetings with trained adult facilitators, in which Ambassadors strengthen their skills, share their experiences, and document their interventions.

As a result of having implemented the SSA program, schools report a reduction in violence, mistreatment and tension among students. Schools also report improvements in social-emotional climate, where respect is the norm, students feel welcome, safe, and included, and they can focus on learning.

Safe School Ambassadors® is a program of Community Matters, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that specializes in: youth violence prevention, youth development, and sustainable school and community partnerships. Headquartered in Sebastopol, California, Community Matters has been in operation since 1995.