

The People Watching

Suitable for:	Upper primary and secondary
Time:	20–30 minutes
Format:	Scenario work / discussion / role exploration
Evergreen:	Yes

The idea

People who witness bullying are not all in the same position.

Some may laugh. Some may join in. Some may stay silent. Some may want to help but feel afraid. Others may act later, privately or through an adult.

This activity asks:

What difference can the people watching make?

1. Start with a fictional situation

For example:

A pupil is being repeatedly mocked during lunch. Several people are nearby. One laughs, one looks uncomfortable, one walks away, one records part of it on a phone, and another pupil watches without saying anything.

Ask:

What is each person doing?

Avoid immediately calling anyone a “bystander” or “defender”. Start with behaviour.

2. What might be happening inside?

Choose each person in turn and ask:

What might they be thinking?

Possibilities might include:

- “I don’t want them to turn on me.”
- “It’s only a joke.”
- “Someone else will deal with it.”
- “I don’t know what to do.”
- “I want to help, but not in front of everyone.”
- “If I say something, I might lose my friends.”

The aim is to explore hesitation without excusing harmful choices.

3. What could they do?

Ask groups to generate several possible responses.

These might include:

- refusing to laugh
- not sharing or forwarding something
- checking on the person afterwards
- standing beside someone
- speaking privately to a friend
- asking another witness for support
- telling a trusted adult
- reporting online content
- recording information safely if needed
- helping someone reach support

4. What feels safe?

Now ask:

Which actions might feel safer for different people?

Make clear that helping does not always mean direct confrontation.

A useful response may happen later, privately or with support from others.

5. What makes a defender possible?

Ask:

What would make it easier for someone watching to help?

Possibilities might include:

- knowing an adult will listen
- having another friend beside them
- clear reporting routes
- knowing they will not be blamed
- understanding what safe intervention can look like
- seeing other people refuse to join in

6. One small shift

Ask each group to change the action of just one witness.

Then ask:

How might that affect everyone else?

A single person refusing to laugh, for example, may change the mood of the whole group.

Final reflection

Complete:

“Someone watching can help by...”

and:

“It is easier to help when...”

Key message

The people watching are part of what happens next. They should not be expected to put themselves in danger, but their choices can matter.