



Growing and nurturing relationships for life



THE BYSTANDER EFFECT: THE SCIENCE OF EMPATHY

We'd all like to consider ourselves helpful people, but are we always quick to lend a hand whenever the opportunity arises? How long do you think it would take for people to offer assistance to someone struggling right in front of them?

See

- **What is happening?**

In the context of a social experiment, most people in a group context are slow to assist someone who would benefit from help.

- **Who are the people involved?**

Everyone, and group size in particular. The larger the group, the 'bystander effect' comes to the fore.... There is a 'diffusion of responsibility', a belief that someone else will do it...

- **Who gains from this situation? Who loses?**

Nobody gains... until an individual decides to offer assistance.

- **What is the situation doing to people?**

Holding them back, paralyzing or preventing action. And leaving one individual struggling and alone..

- **Why is it happening? Why does it continue?**

The Christian philosopher and statesman, Edmund Burke, observed:

'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing' (Burke, 1770)

When we ignore the invitation or responsibility to assist another person in need, inaction prevails.

Judge

- **How do you feel about this situation?**

As a parent/adult, I can be both understanding from experience, and concerned when teenagers see offering to assist as risky.

- **Have you ever behaved or acted like anyone in the situation? If so, what happened? Why? How did you and/or those involved feel?**

As an adult, I can identify with the behaviour and experience. I have experienced being ignored or overlooked by others, and know how frustrating and difficult this can be.

- **What do you think should be happening?**

Help! Asking whether another person would like assistance, when it is apparent they are struggling with something. Can I strike a balance of support and care for my teenager, alongside understanding the bystander effect? Actions speak louder than words- as the

parent/carer, I will ideally know the way, show the way, and go the way.

- **What does our faith say about it?**

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep" (John 10:11)

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me..." (John 10:14)

"What do you think? Suppose a man owns 100 sheep and one of them wanders away. Won't he leave the 99 sheep on the hills? Won't he go and look for the one that wandered off?" (Matt 18:11)

In 2013, Pope Francis called on the world's Catholic priests to stay close to the vulnerable, the marginalized and to be "shepherds living with the smell of the sheep." "This is what I am asking you," he said with emphasis, "be shepherds with the smell of sheep."

Act

- **What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening (the reality) and what should be happening (the ideal/what our faith says)?**

Assist my teenager to be attentive and observant when in the presence of others. Listen to them and offer unconditional love-the love we enjoy in, from and with God. Explore whether there are options to be involved in social outreach, including Parish youth groups.

- **What action are we going to take?**

As an adult, engage with my teenager to help them better understand the process of brain development. Bring facts and empathy, not judgement.

- **Who can we involve in our action?**

Anyone requiring some help! Be prepared to be challenged to action, and to challenge bystanders who, in particular, may film another person struggling with a task or project. This is both irresponsible and an invasion of privacy.