

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 2nd Prize]

Three Actions That Start with Me

(Original in Japanese)

Sayo Tanaka

(Age 12, Japan)

*Takatsuki Junior High School & Takatsuki Senior High School attached to Educational
Foundation of Osaka Medical and Pharmaceutical University*

*If I didn't exist, everyone could live happily. Then, that girl wouldn't need to pick on me.
If only I didn't exist.*

There was a time when thoughts like these were constantly going around in my head. And I still remember the horrible things that happened.

When I was in elementary school, I transferred into a new school and was bullied there. I guess that girl had some hostility toward me. When teachers or others were around, she didn't do anything, but after school and on the way home she tormented me for no reason. Her words were like knives in my heart, and the wounds are still there today. Without saying anything, I just waited for the time to pass by. In my mind, there were things I wanted to say back to her, but I was afraid that she would pick on me even more, which only added to my frustration. Gradually, I became unable to eat dinner, and eventually I couldn't eat breakfast, either. My mother couldn't bear to see this, so she talked with the teacher, and the bullying stopped.

Ultimately, I just endured it without consulting anyone, but when I think about it calmly now, I wonder if it was the best thing to do. Even if I had disappeared, I don't think the bullying would have stopped. Instead, some other kid would have become the target, and maybe it would have escalated even more.

I have seen others get picked on, too, but I just pretended that I didn't see it. I was afraid that if I pointed it out, I would get picked on next. I think that by pretending not to see, I also indirectly bullied them and ran out on them.

I think those who pick on others feel very insecure, and so they take out their anger out on other people. They bully others because they are lonely and want friends. Even if only one person is doing the bullying, it creates an atmosphere where others have to join in, and so it spreads.

The people who are bullied are never at fault. They should not try to act strong by enduring or ignoring what is happening. Rather, what I hope is that they will find someone to talk with.

If we notice that someone is being bullied, we should believe in them and stick up for them. Which is better—to stick up for someone and be excluded by our peers, or not to stick up for them and continue to see them suffering? I hope each of us will think about this for ourselves. We must acknowledge that bullying should never be tolerated and if we happen to come across it, I think that we should not forget to lend a helping hand.

Also, I would like us to think about whether our casual words are hurtful to others, and whether we might have been taking the bully's side unintentionally. Are we not looking away and thinking, *It has nothing to do with me, I don't say those kinds of things?* A heart that's been wounded once, like mine, can never go back to the way it was.

Life is invaluable and irreplaceable. Everyone has the right to pass their days with peace of mind, and to live a wonderful life filled with precious experiences.

Bullying is a frightening weapon that can even drive people to suicide. I absolutely do not want to see this happen at my school. And I also do not want it to happen at other schools, or in society.

To begin, there are three things I intend to do. Firstly, when I greet someone, I will smile. Secondly, I will praise my friends' good points. Thirdly, I will show that I am thankful whenever I receive even a small kindness. Just by doing these small actions over and over, I think we can eliminate bullying. When I spread feelings of mutual trust, I believe that those feelings reach all the people connected with me. The good intentions of each person and words like "I'm here to listen" will help people who feel insecure. My wish is for this positive influence to spread from my class to the whole school, and from there to all of society. To see the importance of considering what others are feeling, and to realize that someone right in front of us might be suffering—I hope to advocate for these small changes in attitude which will become stronger together, and create a society where bullying is never tolerated.