

Anti-bullying assemblies for secondary schools

A friend in need

Participants: Readers 4 Mimers 2 (plus optional number of extras)

Props: chair, bag, magazine, 2 mobile phones

Tapes and recorder for pre-recordings (*see script*)

Music

Readers 1&2 enter to each side.

Reader 1 Today we're going to hear a true story about a girl called Atia.

Mimer 1 as ATIA enters to centre and sits in chair with back to audience. She has a bag with her, from which she takes out a magazine and reads. Her mobile phone is easily accessible.

Reader 2 Atia lives with her Mum in south London. Dad lives with his new partner quite a distance away, so she doesn't see him that often.

Reader 1 But she's ok with that now. She's always been close to her Mum and she's never been short of friends.

Reader 2 Her best friend has always been Maddy..

During the next lines, ATIA gets up quickly to answer imaginary call on her mobile. At the same time, Mimer 2 as MADDY enters. She is holding her mobile to her ear. Neither looks at the other, so the impression is given of two friends talking to each other in different locations. There should be lots of smiles and laughs.

Reader 1 Atia's best friend is Maddy. They've been friends since Primary school. They've always shared everything – hopes and fears

Reader 2 Laughs and tears.

Reader 1 That is until a few months ago, when things went horribly wrong.

MADDY suddenly switches phone off and exits. ATIA does the same and exits in the opposite direction.

Lively music sets the scene for a party. ATIA and MADDY enter together, along with other mimers as PARTYGOERS. Some hold drinks, some chat and some dance. The action continues during the dialogue which follows, but the music fades.

Reader 2 It was at a party that everything was to change. Both ATIA and MADDY had the usual instructions from their homes about what time they should return. But MADDY had fallen for one of the boys at the party.

If it is an all girls' cast, MADDY can frequently be looking offstage and convey that the subject of her attention is out of sight. Otherwise, a mimer should play the part of the boy on stage, chatting to her and bringing her drinks. ATIA looks rather shy and left out.

Reader 1 Before the evening was over, she had agreed to go off with him,

She exits in the direction where she has been looking (or with him if they are both on stage.) ATIA watches for a moment before looking at her watch and leaving.

Reader 2 Leaving ATIA to go home on her own.

Reader 1 Ok, so not exactly the end of the world you might say. But two days later, ATIA received a letter.

An effective way of giving dramatic emphasis to the words of the letter, would be to have them pre-recorded and played through the speakers as ATIA reads them silently.

Enter ATIA with letter. Enter Reader 3 (if recording is not used).

Reader 3 ATIA. I can't even bring myself to say *dear* Atia. I only use that word for people I like. I really hate you now Atia. I never thought I'd find myself saying this. How *could* you shop me like you did. All I wanted

you to do was to tell one measly little lie when my Mum phoned and say I'd spent the night at your place. And you couldn't even do that! Some friend! Result? I'm not allowed to see Tom again and I've been grounded. I can't believe you'd do this to me. I can only assume it was because you were jealous – that he fancied me, not you. Anyway, I'll never trust you again. Your ex friend Maddy. *ATIA rushes off in distress. Exit Reader 3. A few bars of music are played. Enter MADDY with a letter. She takes it from the envelope and reads it. Its contents could also be pre-recorded, or read by Reader 4 who enters.*

Reader 4 Dear Maddy Please, please forgive me. Honestly, I really didn't mean to shop you. I didn't realise until it was too late. It wasn't as if you'd asked me to. You just left the party without saying goodbye. I didn't know where you were. It's just a silly misunderstanding. Please can't we be friends again. Atia

MADDY screws up the letter and storms off. Exit Reader 4.

Reader 1 But sadly for Atia, Maddy didn't want to know.

Reader 2 Not only did she feel and show hatred for Atia, she got others to gang up against her.

Music plays softly. ATIA enters on her own, stands sadly at the side. A group, including MADDY snigger at her and whisper about her, knocking her purposely as they pass. She goes off slowly in the opposite direction. Music fades.

Reader 1 At least she'd get some comfort from her Mum.

Reader 2 Well, you'd think so, wouldn't you?

Reader 1 But as luck would have it, Atia's Mum had recently qualified as a teacher.

Reader 2 At her new school, she was having a terrible time.

Reader 1 Like many new teachers, she was not very confident.

Reader 2 Unfortunately, school children pick this up.

Reader 2 Some see it as an opportunity to gang up and make life more difficult.

Reader 1 This is bullying too. Atia's mum was so stressed by the bullying she was receiving, she didn't notice what Atia was going through.

Reader 2 And Atia had no idea what her mother was suffering.

Reader 1 Fortunately, things *did* improve for Atia. It took a long time.

Reader 2 They improved because someone had the courage to speak out.

Reader 1 Someone was prepared not to worry about their own popularity.

Reader 2 As Atia's mother gained in confidence, life improved for her too. And she now had Atia to turn to. They were able to support each other.

Reader 1 But they both suffered months of pain and worry before the sun began to shine again in their lives.

Music plays softly in the background.

Readers 3&4 enter.

Reader 3 When the person who stood up for Atia was asked why she helped, she said, "I just tried to step inside her shoes and try and feel what it was like. And I know it's not quite the same, but I remembered some words we'd learned in history about a man who lived during the war with Hitler, who was one of the worst bullies ever. This man was a priest and he said:

Reader 4 "First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out
Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out
Then they came for the Trade Unionists and I did not speak out
And then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak out for me."

Reader 3

Let's reflect on what we have heard today. It's easy to gang up on people – safety in numbers they say. But it's not exactly brave. And it certainly isn't fair. Some people, we may think, deserve to be ganged up on. They seem to ask for it. It's hard perhaps for us to feel respect for them. Bullying is painful at any age. But no one deserves to be put through the misery of bullying. We need to try and step inside another's shoes. To have compassion. And the courage to stand back from joining in. And to stand up for those who need our support. Who knows, one day we might need that support ourselves.

Music continues for a few moments as readers exit.