# Kids shuffle lunch seats as part of "No One Eats Alone" campaign

(Group Pink)



"I am uncomfortable. I am not used to this," said Kyle Johnson, 14, who cringes as he realizes his blue card does not match the purple color of his usual lunch table friends at Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri. The school participated in No One Eats Alone Day by encouraging students to talk to kids outside of their immediate social circle by switching up lunch seating. Photo: Laurie Skrivan/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS

Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read.

For many kids, middle school is not easy. There can be hurt feelings, in-groups and bullying. There are the challenges of puberty and low-self esteem. Some kids may have a little too much self-esteem.

All the drama comes crashing together in the cafeteria. Lunchtime leaves some kids feeling friendless and like they don't fit in.

**No One Eats Alone Day**

A national campaign is trying to stop this. Called “No One Eats Alone Day,” the project makes sure that on one day kids all have someone to eat with.

Schools are picking up on it. More than 300,000 students across the country have signed up to participate in No One Eats Alone Day. In just a year, the program has grown from 35 schools in 2014 to more than 700.

The program was created by Beyond Differences, a national nonprofit group. Its mission is to change the culture in middle schools so all kids feel valued and accepted.

Social isolation and bullying have become huge problems in schools. The program gives students simple and fun ways to include others during lunchtime. It makes sure no one eats alone, said Laura Talmus, the founder of Beyond Differences.

**Nobody To Eat With**

Middle school was a rough couple of years for Talmus’ daughter, Lili Smith. She was born with a medical condition and her facial or skull bones did not grow normally.

Nearly every day, Lili would finish her lunch at school, Talmus said. Then she would call her mother from the restroom, crying.

Lili would say, "Mom, I have nobody to eat with, and the girls don’t want me to sit with them,” Talmus said. “Lili was never teased or bullied, but was almost suffering as much because she felt invisible.”

Lili died at the age of 15. Afterward, a group of teens from the community joined together to bring change to their local schools.

It is not an easy task.

At Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri, there was a lot of resistance to No One Eats Alone Day. A lot of students worried that they would not get to sit next to their friends.

Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read.

**Start A Conversation**

At the school, there is an anti-bullying group called the Mistreatment Leadership Team. They planned the No One Eats Alone Day. The students in the group placed conversation starters on the tables in their cafeteria. There were questions like, “Who is your favorite celeb?” and “Who is your role model?”

The students of the Mistreatment Leadership Team waited nervously with pieces of paper to hand out to classmates. The papers were color-coded and let all the students know where to sit.

When the lunch bell rang, some kids complained when they saw their table.

Others tried to make the best of what they said was an uncomfortable situation.

“I would much rather sit alone than with people I don’t know, to be honest,” said Cori Caby. She is a seventh-grader.

**Some Kids Reach Out**

Some switched cards before others noticed so they could sit with their friends. Some got on their cellphones to get out of talking to kids they did not know.

No one thought the kids would become best friends after just one lunch. It was more about being aware of other people’s feelings, said Reece Black. He is an eighth-grader and one of the organizers. It was also about encouraging students to reach out and start a conversation with someone they normally do not talk to.

Sixth-graders Jenna Walden and Avarry Wilkerson ended up at a table by themselves. They noticed that Alexander Scherer, a new student at school, was alone. They moved over to sit with him, and as he ate his lunch, they all talked about Six Flags, the theme park.

“By the way, I’m Avarry,” she said to Alexander, just as lunch was coming to an end.

Reece and the other student leaders saw other kids reaching out.

“So that was pretty cool,” Reece said.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Select the sentence from the article that shows the growing acceptance of the program in schools.
2. More than 300,000 students across the country have signed up to participate in No One Eats Alone Day.
3. The program was created by Beyond Differences, a national nonprofit group.
4. The students in the group placed conversation starters on the tables in their cafeteria.
5. The students of the Mistreatment Leadership Team waited nervously with pieces of paper to hand out to
6. Select the paragraph from the section "Some Kids Reach Out" that shows a positive outcome to the "No One Eats Alone Day" program.
7. Select the sentence that contains a word or phrase that means "refusal to accept."
8. There are the challenges of puberty and low-self esteem.
9. Its mission is to change the culture in middle schools so all kids feel valued and accepted.
10. At Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri, there was a lot of resistance to No One Eats Alone Day.
11. When the lunch bell rang, some kids complained when they saw their table.
12. Read the sentence from the section "Nobody To Eat With."

"Lili was never teased or bullied, but was almost suffering as much because she felt invisible."

What does it mean when the author says that "she felt invisible"?

1. Lili had a medical condition.
2. Lili used to hide from bullies.
3. Lili was avoided by other kids.
4. Lili was different from other ki