

Being an Active Bystander

Tips to being an Active Bystander

First, assess risk and set any safety measures possible.

Disrupt the situation. Ask the harasser for directions, engage the person in conversation to disrupt the situation.

Do not act alone. The more people that come together to disrupt a situation, the less this type of behavior is tolerated in the community.

Speak up, Confront the harasser. Share that what they are saying is not ok or appropriate. Speak against victim blaming by stating it is never the survivor's fault or challenge victim blaming.

Focus on the needs of the target. Let them know you saw what happened and ask if they need anything. Remind them they did nothing wrong.

Express your support to the individual.



“Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that leads to negative impacts regardless of intent.”

Creating Social Change as an Active Bystander

Bystanders represent a web of people surrounding a progression of inappropriate behaviors, harassment, or violence, including those who make a choice to speak up or intervene in some way and those who do not. Bystanders can have a powerful impact on sexual violence prevention.

Research also considers characteristics of the bystander that may influence his or her decision to intervene, including relevant skills and experience, relationship to the victim and/or the perpetrator, feelings and attitudes, and perception of the relative personal costs of either intervening or doing nothing.

Becoming an active bystander means making focused observations, asking compassionate questions, and having knowledge of what to do at various points on the continuum of violence or harassment.

A common goal among bystander programs is developing ways to increase people's awareness of knowing when to intervene, and how to do it safely and effectively. (Joan Tabachnick, NSVCR. 2008).

After a historic event creating the concept of “Bystander Effect” Darley and Latane (1968) published a piece on bystander apathy. This work explained the five steps a bystander needs to move through to take effective action. Bystanders must first notice and recognize a pattern of behavior or events as something that falls on the continuum of behaviors leading to violence. Next, they must decide if the situation requires action, they must then decide if they have a responsibility to act and what form of assistance to use. Lastly, the bystander must understand how to implement this. Often this process feels overwhelming, and the bystander does nothing.

Five Steps Toward Taking Action

1. Notice the event along a continuum of actions
2. Consider whether the situation demands your action
3. Decide if you have a responsibility to act
4. Choose what form of assistance to use
5. Understand how to implement the choice safely

Darley and Latane, 1968



Social Change

To create long-term social change, we must begin with individual actions and support the actions of others. To sustain changes, many suggest that we must engage all our communities and our society to shift these social norms and create the policies that increase the incentives and decrease the costs of taking action.

Studies indicate that bystanders who feel it is their responsibility to do something and are confident about HOW to intervene, from either past experience or from skills training, are more likely to intervene [than those without skills or knowledge on how].

(Christy and Voigt, 1994; Crick and Dodge, 1994).

“An engaged or active bystander is someone who intervenes before, during or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that promote sexual violence.”



Bystander Effect

the greater the number of people present; the less likely people are to help a person in distress. When an emergency occurs, observers are more likely to act if there are few or no other witnesses.

Shifting Social Norms

When someone chooses to do nothing, it is often rooted in a social norm. We recognize the importance of breaking the cycle of “bystander apathy” and shifting social norms so there is social pressure to do or say something instead of nothing.

“Social norms are a set of standards or expectations in a community that subtly guides a group’s behavior.”

Making Change...

Encourage help seeking behavior. This can look like a simple offering, or sharing stories of hope, help and change for the target. Make sure those at risk know there is support and help available.

Adopt Policies to Encourage Engagement. Offer training on sexual violence, prevention for youth, healthy relationships education and advocacy. When leaders take initiative and share the realization that we are all bystanders, bystander engagement becomes the norm.

Celebrate the actions of bystanders. When you hear of bystander intervention, take a moment to celebrate how this impacted the person at risk. Provide positive recognition for their intervention.



Information sources

Crick, N. R., & Dodge, K. A. (1994). A review and reformulation of social information processing mechanisms in children’s social adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 115, 74–101.

Tabachnick, Joan. 2008. *Engaging Bystanders in Sexual Violence Prevention*. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. 1-56.

Bystander Intervention Tips and Strategies. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. February 19, 2018

Engaging Bystanders. National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2013, 2015

Who Can Help?

24-hour Centralized Safety Line
HOPE and Area call 604 - 869 – 5191
Text 604 – 869 - 1872

24 Hour Crisis Line 1-866-661-3311

24 Hour Rape Crisis Line 1-877-392-7583

Victim Link BC 1-800-563-0808

Fraser Canyon Hospital 604-869-5656

Stopping The Violence Counselling 604-869-6299

Adult Mental Health- Hope 604-860-7733