Bystander Intervention

**Common Components**

- **Awareness.** A key first step is to heighten awareness so individuals and groups are better able to identify instances of sexual violence.

- **Sense of Responsibility.** A sense of responsibility gives the bystander motivation to step in and take action. Bystanders are much more likely to help friends than strangers, and are more likely to help strangers if they see them as part of a group they identify with (like supporting the same sports team).

- **Perceptions of norms.** Perceptions of peer norms about helping (whether you think your friends are likely to help), and perceptions of authorities’ attitudes are related to bystander attitudes. People often mistakenly think others are less supportive of doing something to address sexual violence than they actually are.

- **Weighing pros and cons.** People weigh the costs and benefits of getting involved in a risky situation. These include threats to their own safety, negative consequences for their relationships with others, and the potential to change the outcome of a risky situation or to help a victim.

- **Confidence.** People who feel more confident in their ability to help are more likely to take action. A consistent research finding is that prevention programs, particularly in-person educational and skill workshops, increase individuals’ sense that they can take effective action.

- **Building Skills.** People need to know what to do and how to do it. Population survey data shows that many people are at a loss for specific ways to help. Survivors tell us that friends and family do not always do things that are useful or supportive, and these negative or unhelpful responses make coping with and recovering from abuse much harder.

- **Context.** Bystanders also need safety nets for themselves - resources they can call upon and community policies that support intervention.
What is Bystander Intervention?

Bystanders are the largest group of people involved in violence - they greatly outnumber both the perpetrators and the victims. Bystanders have a range of involvement in assaults. Some know that a specific assault is happening or will happen, some see an assault or potential assault in progress, and others know that assaults do happen. Regardless of how close to the assault they are, bystanders have the power to stop assaults from occurring and get help for people who have been victimized.

Example:

Take the example of the typical perpetrator of college sexual assaults. Most are men who are outwardly charming, have a lot of friends, and don’t consider their actions to be wrong. People who know this person (bystanders), and are potentially friends with this person, often do not want women they care about (sisters, friends, etc.) to date or hang around this man. When his behavior is directed at other women whom they are not close to, they often do not think it is a situation in which they need to get involved. Bystanders often know that this person’s behavior is inappropriate and potentially illegal, but may not know what they can do to make a difference.

We have all been bystanders in our lives, and we will all be in situations where we are bystanders in the future. The choice, then, becomes whether we are going to be active bystanders who speak up and say something, or whether we will be passive bystanders who stand by and say nothing.

We are not advocating that people risk their own safety in order to be an active bystander. Remember, there is a range of actions that are appropriate, depending on the situation. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, calling 911 is the best action a bystander can take.

As opposed to being the bystander who stands by and does nothing, we want to create a culture of bystanders who are actively engaged in the prevention of violence.

What else can bystanders do to make a difference?

• Believe someone who discloses a sexual assault, abusive relationship, or experience with stalking or cyberstalking.
• Watch out for your friends- if you see someone who looks like they are in trouble, ask if they are okay.
• If you see a friend doing something shady, say something.
• Speak up - if someone says something offensive, derogatory, or abusive, let them know their behavior is wrong and you don’t want to be around it. Don’t laugh at racist, sexist, homophobic jokes. *(Challenge your peers to be respectful.*)
• Get involved - volunteer for the UNK Women's Center, or join another campus or community group working on these issues.
“There is an acceptance of an unhealthy culture in which people believe ‘that’s just the way things are’ and we must get past that.”

Techniques to Try

Think small
- Small interventions can be the most effective. Use humor and creativity. Act early. Act often.

Name the problem
- Acknowledging that things aren’t right can go a long way.

Offer help
- Signal your concern and willingness to act. It’s okay if you are turned down at first or altogether. Simply offering to help changes the dynamics.

Disrupt the situation

De-escalate
- Be calm, respectful. Shift the focus away from the problem.

Make space
- Separate the person at risk from the source of danger. Set some alternative plan in motion, or create a diversion.

Slow things down
- Give people time to extricate themselves, if that’s what they want.

Think big
- Most interventions are small. But some problems are so deeply entrenched that they require sustained action. Find allies and make plans.

BE SAFE
- If you think you are in danger, step back and get help.

Why does this work so well?
Sexual violence often operates through “scripts”—patterns that are surprisingly coercive for those cast in the central roles. As a bystander, you’re an extra, standing by as the plot unfolds. Simply by stepping into the action, you break the script. You’re like that kid in 3rd grade who walked onstage at the wrong cue and messed everything up. This time, that’s exactly what you’re after! Be the kid in 3rd grade, be An Active Bystander!
Steps to Action

PAY ATTENTION
• Be alert to things that make you feel uncomfortable
  ▪ Signs of sexual pressure, unwanted attention, or disrespect?
  ▪ Someone who’s way too intoxicated?
  ▪ Worried looks? Anyone who seems scared or confused?
• Keep an eye on anything that is worrying. Do not ignore the “little” stuff.

DECIDE
• Should someone intervene?
  ▪ Is the situation heading in a bad direction?
  ▪ Does someone need help? If you can, check in with whomever you are aiming to help—but if you can’t, trust your instincts.

MAKE A PLAN
• Fit your intervention to the situation.
  ▪ Who’s in the best position to act? Call on friends, allies, hosts, authority figures—or do something yourself.
  ▪ When’s the best moment? Now? Later? Do you need time to plan or to organize others?
  ▪ Be creative and strategic.

MAKE IT HAPPEN
• Stay calm. Follow your plan. Be ready to get help if you need it.
  ▪ Look for allies. Be alert for others trying to help, too.
  ▪ Start by using the lightest touch you can.
  ▪ Act even if you feel awkward or nervous.

Overcome Bystander Barriers
Feelings that might keep a bystander from taking action:

  - "I don't know what to do or say."
  - "I don't feel safe approaching the man."
  - "I don't want to embarrass anyone or criticize another person's parenting."
  - "Maybe I'm overreacting."
  - "It's not my job... I just don't want to get involved."
  - "I'm not qualified to intervene."
How to Intervene Safely

- Tell another person. Being with others is a good idea when a situation looks dangerous.
- Ask a friend in a potentially dangerous situation if he/she wants to leave and then make sure that he/she gets home safely.
- Ask a victim if he/she is okay. Provide options and a listening ear.
- Yell for help
- Call the UNK Women’s Center or UNK Counseling Care for support, options, and information.
- Call police or someone in authority

Helping a Survivor

- Listen carefully, without judgment.
- Do not blame. Believe the victim and make it clear the fault lies only with the abuser.
- Offer a safe place to stay.
- Let the survivor make decisions about next steps. All control has been stripped from the victim during the assault. Allow the victim to make decisions about what steps to take next.
- Assist in getting the treatment/services they need if they agree.
- Remain calm. You might feel shock or rage, but expressing these emotions to the victim may cause the victim more trauma.
- Encourage medical attention and counseling.
- Refer them to the resources and reporting information available on the UNK Women’s Center website
- Seek help yourself.

Who you can reach out to if you would like to know more about bystander intervention and what you can do to prevent sexual assault?

- UNK Women’s Center at 308-865-8279
- UNK Counseling Care at 308-865-8248

References

http://www.mencanstoprape.org
https://www.notalone.gov
http://www.stopabuse.vt.edu
http://cce.yalecollege.yale.edu
http://www.framingham.edu
http://www.calvin.edu

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