NSVRC TIP SHEET

Bystander Intervention Tips and Strategies

The #MeToo movement has brought forth thousands of powerful stories illustrating the serious and widespread impact of sexual harassment and abuse. The wave of stories and research has made clear that sexual violence is not limited to just a few abusers, industries, or populations of victims. Now that the scope of the problem is clearer than ever, it is time for a national conversation on how everyone – not just survivors – can use their voices to change the culture and take action to prevent sexual violence.

WHY BYSTANDER INTERVENTION MATTERS

Preventing sexual harassment is everybody's responsibility. An engaged bystander is someone who lives up to that responsibility by intervening before, during, or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that threaten, harass, or otherwise encourage sexual violence.

The behaviors that make up sexual violence exist on a spectrum. While some behaviors – such as sexist jokes, inappropriate sexual comments, innuendos, catcalling, or vulgar gestures – aren't illegal, this does not make them any less threatening or harmful to the person experiencing them. These situations also take place across a range of locations and settings – often in public spaces, workplaces, schools, communities, and online. All of us must embrace our voices to demonstrate that these behaviors will not be tolerated.

HOW TO BE A GOOD BYSTANDER

It may not be safe or effective to directly confront the harasser in every case, but there are a range of ways bystanders can be involved before, during, or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that promote sexual violence. Below are some intervention tips and strategies:

Disrupt the situation.

Every situation is different, and there is no one way to respond. When you witness a person being harassed, threatened, or followed by someone, you can try to distract the harasser or insert yourself into their interaction to help the targeted person get out of the situation. For example, if you see someone on the street being verbally harassed, you can interrupt the harasser and ask them for directions. You can also intervene by pretending to know the person being harassed and starting a conversation with them as an opportunity to come between them and the harasser.

Don't act alone.

Get support from people around you by calling on others to help. The more people who come together to interrupt a situation, the more you reinforce the idea that the behavior is not acceptable in your community. This can be as simple as saying, "Let's say something to them so they stop." If you do not feel safe, you may consider contacting the police.

Confront the harasser.

Whether or not you know the harasser, you can intervene by telling them in a respectful, direct, and honest way that their words or actions are not okay. For example, when you hear someone make comments that blame victims for being assaulted, or make light of sexual violence, you can tell them:

- You need to stop.
- That's so inappropriate.
- What you just said made me feel uncomfortable. Here's why…
- Do you realize how problematic that is?
- We need to talk about what you just said.
- Why would you say that?

Set the expectation to speak up and step in.

Talking openly and responding directly to inappropriate behaviors will have a snowball effect and encourage others to respond. It shows you recognize the comment or behavior is unacceptable and shows others it will not be tolerated. For example, if you are in a group setting and you hear someone make inappropriate comments, you can say:

- Are you hearing what I am hearing?
- I can't be the only one who thinks this is not OK.
- I don't see how XYZ is relevant or appropriate to this discussion.
- I know you're a better person than that.

Understand how your privilege positions you to speak up.

Your age, race, gender, etc. may make it safer for you to speak up and be vocal about harassment – especially when you are not the target or representative of the target group.

Focus on the needs and experience of the target and ensure they receive the support the need.

- Let them know that what has happened to them isn't their fault.
- Affirm that they didn't do anything wrong.
- Express your support for the individual.
    - I saw what they just did. Are you OK?
    - I heard what that person said to you. I am so sorry.

Take action online.

Everyone can help address an online culture that tolerates rape and sexual violence. Online comments that blame victims contribute to a broader climate in which sexual violence is tolerated and not taken seriously.

- Believe and support survivors. For example, thank survivors for sharing their stories in the comments of news articles and blog posts.

- Respond to victim-blaming, rape jokes, or other problematic comments on social media:
  - Post a response like, “Sexual assault is never the survivor’s fault.”
  - Refocus accountability on the individual(s) who committed sexual abuse.
- Link to an educational resource about sexual violence prevention, like those that can be found at nsvrc.org/publications.

Be proactive.

Practice with friends and family what you would say and how you would say it if you’re ever put in the situation where you need to confront a harasser. Think of how you would like others to take action on your behalf, or reflect on a situation where you wish you had acted differently.

ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation. The organization was chartered in 2000 by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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