

Taking Action to Intervene



Bystander Intervention: Interrupting a harmful, hateful, predatory, or inappropriate scenario by directly intervening, de-escalating, disrupting, or distracting. An effective bystander sees something and says something, does something, or enlists the help of others to intervene.

What does bystander intervention look like?

Being a bystander can take many shapes. It can be as direct as a request to stop or as subtle as making eye contact. Small gestures can go a long way in showing support for someone in a potentially difficult or uncomfortable scenario that may escalate and get worse.

Sometimes, it can feel like we only have two choices: acting in the moment or doing nothing. But if an interaction seems harmful in retrospect, or you froze and didn't know how to intervene in the moment, you can try a delayed response. This could mean checking in with the person harmed or offering feedback to the person who did the harassing behavior.

Can bystander intervention be practiced online?

Absolutely. Online harassment is extremely common. *According to research*, "69% of people report doing something abusive to someone else online. Even more troubling, nearly 90% of teenagers report witnessing bullying online."

Just like with in-person intervention, you can disrupt online harassment by reporting harmful comments, creating new threads of conversation to distract attention, showing direct support for the victim, or addressing harmful content when it happens.

In practicing bystander intervention, what other harms are we addressing?

Harassment and bullying directly intersect with gendered violence, ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression. *Research shows* that victims of harassment were not only more likely to identify as women, transgender, people of color, queer, Muslim, or disabled, but that the misconduct itself was more severe. When we practice bystander intervention, we send a message that pushes back against all forms of hate.

Can I really make that big of an impact?

Yes – never underestimate what a difference you can make in preventing violence, sexual harassment, and hateful conduct. It's everyone's duty to create safe spaces around us and support survivors by showing resistance to problematic behavior that continues cycles of violence and abuse. Even just remaining present as a witness is a symbol of pushback against violence and can prevent normalizing it.

90% of teenagers report witnessing bullying online.



It's vital that bystanders are guided by their own personal boundaries when intervening and are attentive to the safety of themselves, the person being targeted, and others nearby. In addition to de-escalating potentially harmful or dangerous situations, some survivors have spoken of the affirmation they experience when others practice bystander intervention, as it helps make them feel seen and heard and emphasizes that they matter.

No one deserves to be harassed, assaulted, abused, or bullied. Together, we can stop it.

Examples of Bystander Intervention Online and Offline

If you're wondering what bystander intervention looks like in practice, here are some example scenarios:

- A supervisor pressures members of their team to turn on cameras during a virtual team meeting, so one of the team members says, "We get to decide for ourselves if and when to turn on our cameras."
- A guest at an online dance party changes their profile picture to a graphic, sexual image, which violates the explicitly stated community agreements. Another guest alerts the moderator so they can remove the person.
- A key client sends sexually explicit jokes to someone at your company. The person wants the jokes to stop but worries about losing the client. A colleague catches wind of the situation and offers to help bring it up with management.
- Someone posts on social media a picture they took of a stranger along with a comment making fun of their appearance, and the poster's friend comments to say that it's not okay to post pictures of someone without their consent or to make fun of people's appearance.
- A bus rider sees another passenger filming someone who is asleep and says out loud, "Is anyone else as uncomfortable with this as I am?"
- A social media user reports or flags a harmful comment.



No one deserves to be harassed, assaulted, abused, or bullied. Together, we can stop it.

Similarly, in-person responses might look like this:

- A restaurant patron notices someone pressuring another to leave with them and creates a distraction by asking one of them, "Do you know what time it is?"
- An internet commenter sees someone being bullied online and writes a positive, affirming reply to the victim.
- Someone at a bar alerts the staff that another patron looks noticeably uncomfortable by unwanted attention and asks them to check.
- A person at a party sees someone touching another partygoer who is passed out and says, "I don't think they gave consent to this. I'm not okay with that."
- A pedestrian who sees someone aggressively yelling at their partner says to the victim, "Is there something I can do to help you?"