

Bystander Intervention Information

You can actively help prevent incidents before they occur and help to keep your classmates, colleagues, and our campus community safe. Bystander intervention empowers and mobilizes individuals to recognize, intervene, prevent, and/or stop inappropriate comments, actions, and behaviors. All of us play a valuable role in preventing acts that violate the dignity, safety, and welfare of an individual.

Why bystander intervention matters:

Often people do not intervene because they may assume the situation isn't a problem or feel it is none of their business. They may assume that someone else will do something or believe that other people weren't bothered by the problem. In some cases, a person might feel their personal safety is at risk. When people intervene in a situation, they often say it was the right thing to do and that they would want someone to intervene if the roles were reversed. Research shows that this technique is effective in helping prevent sexual violence across campuses and communities.

The common components of bystander intervention are:

- A. Awareness. A key first step is to heighten awareness so individuals and groups are better able to identify instances of sexual violence.
- B. 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).
- C. Perceptions of Norms. Perceptions of peer norms about helping (whether you think your friends are likely to help), and perceptions of authorities' (like teachers') 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. Studies show links between perceptions of helping, trust, and commitment among community members; trust in campus authorities; and their willingness to take action as a bystander.
- D. Weigh Pros and Cons. People weigh the costs and benefits of getting involved in risky situations. 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 Complainant.
- E. Confidence. People who feel more confident in their ability to help are more likely to act. A consistent research finding is that prevention programs, particularly in-person educational and skill workshops, increase individuals' sense that they can take effective action.
- F. 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 say 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. Some of the promise of bystander intervention training is that it can give motivated community members skills to intervene in ways that protect their own safety and are truly supportive to Complainants.
- G. Context. Bystanders also need safety nets for themselves – resources they can call upon and community policies that support intervention.