



While some forms of sexual violence aren't illegal, such as sexist jokes, catcalling or vulgar gestures, this does not make them any less threatening or harmful to the person being victimized. These behaviors contribute to a culture that accepts sexual violence. Bystanders can speak up when they witness these actions to foster healthy sexuality and safer communities. Many opportunities exist in daily life through which society can prevent behaviors that promote sexual violence.

WHAT IS AN ENGAGED BYSTANDER?

An engaged bystander is someone who intervenes before, during or after a situation when they see or hear behaviors that promote sexual violence. It is common for people to witness situations where someone makes an inappropriate sexual comment or innuendo, tells a rape joke, or touches someone in a sexual manner. Bystanders might also witness other forms of sexual violence. Bystanders can intervene in a way that will help create a safer environment. Research has shown that bystander programs can produce positive results by increasing participants' knowledge of sexual violence, decreasing participants' acceptance of rape myths, and increasing the likelihood that they will intervene (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). Engaged bystanders help create healthy communities and help others build safe and respectful environments by discouraging victim blaming, changing social norms that accept sexual violence and shifting the responsibility to prevent sexual violence to all community members (Tabachnick, 2009).

WHEN AND HOW TO INTERVENE

Every situation is different and there is no universal response when intervening to prevent sexual violence. Safety is key in deciding when and how to respond to sexual violence. Every person must decide for themselves the safest and most meaningful way to become an engaged bystander. Some ideas on how to maintain safety while being an engaged bystander:

- If you witness sexual violence, get support from people around you. You do not have to act alone. If you do not feel safe, contact the police.
- Practice with friends and family about what you would say and how you would say it.
- When intervening, be respectful, direct and honest.
- Contact your local sexual assault center to see if they offer resources or trainings. For contact information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/lkdsbd8>.
- Download a free copy of NSVRC's *Engaging Bystanders to Prevent Sexual Violence Information Packet*: <http://tinyurl.com/n92ze24>.

WHEN ALCOHOL IS INVOLVED

Unfortunately, bystanders are less likely to intervene when alcohol is involved, particularly when both the victim and offender have been drinking. However, alcohol is never a cause of rape or an excuse for committing a crime; consent cannot be obtained when someone is incapacitated due to alcohol or other substances.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

During and after acts of sexual violence, social media and online anonymous spaces could provide venues for harmful comments and abusive behavior toward others. This might include threatening to distribute photos or videos of the assault. Responsible bystanders play a powerful role in showing support for survivors, challenging disrespectful comments, and changing the culture to end violence (Bluett-Boyd, Fileborn, Quadara, & Moore, 2013).

CHECKLIST FOR BYSTANDERS

- Is there a problem? Does someone need help?
- Is it safe to intervene? What are my options?
- What should I do? Should I call on others to help?

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION EXAMPLES

Some common scenarios and possible reactions:

At work: Someone overhears a female supervisor say that she wishes her boyfriend had a butt like one of her male employees. An engaged bystander could talk with the supervisor directly or report the incident based on the workplace's sexual harassment policy.

Online: There are comments posted in regard to a story about a sexual assault that imply that the victim deserved to get raped because of how they were dressed and how much they had to drink. An engaged bystander could respond to the comments by posting that it is never the survivor's fault if he or she is sexually assaulted, and that the responsibility lies with the person who chose to commit sexual violence.

At a party: A friend starts flirting with someone. The other person is not interested, but the friend will not leave them alone. An engaged bystander could approach the friend and start a conversation to distract them from the uninterested person.

At school: A group starts making sexual gestures and comments to another student. The student tries to ignore the comments, but becomes upset. An engaged bystander could tell the group to stop harassing the student, or ask the student if they want to leave and tell a teacher or principal.

REFERENCES

- Banyard, V. L., Moynihan, M. M., & Plante, E. G. (2007). Sexual violence prevention through bystander education: An experimental evaluation. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*, 463-481. doi:10.1002/jcop.20159
- Bluett-Boyd, N., Fileborn, B., Quadara, A., & Moore, S. (2013). *The role of emerging communication technologies in experiences of sexual violence: A new legal frontier?* (Research Report No. 23). Retrieved from the Australian Institute of Family Studies: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport23/rr23.pdf>
- Tabachnick, J. (2009). *Engaging bystanders in sexual violence prevention*. Retrieved from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center: http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Booklets_Engaging-Bystanders-in-Sexual-Violence-Prevention.pdf