



What is Bystander Intervention?

Bystander intervention is making a choice to interrupt problematic or dangerous behavior in order to stop someone from experiencing harm. In this case, bystander intervention is used to help prevent and stop sexual assault and/or sexual harassment.

Scenario:

You're at a bar and your friend doesn't look like she's feeling very well after a couple drinks. There's a guy following her around who makes constant attempts to touch her arm, her lower back, and talk to her. As he passes by you, he says he's going to get her one more drink and "that should do the trick". What can you do?

1. Distraction:

Call/text your friend's phone or walk up to her. Ask if she's alright or express that it's time to go. You can also distract the person harassing her by striking up conversation "Hey, didn't I see you in this one class?" or "Hey I think your friends are looking for you."

2. Group Intervention:

Ask your/her friends to help out with distraction or separation. They can pull her aside to check in with her, or they can confront the other person and say "We can see what you're doing and it's not okay."

3. Get an Authority:

Ask a bartender, bouncer, or any other authority figure to help intervene and get support. If the situation becomes escalated, it is always ok to call 911.

Some Other Ways to Intervene:

- **Having a conversation beforehand** with your friends and agreeing upon secret "cues" that will let your friend know that it's time to go, or to communicate if there is someone displaying concerning behaviors. Let them know you will help them get away from a potentially unsafe situation if needed.
- **Trust your instincts.** If a situation or person doesn't seem "right" to you, trust your gut and follow one of the steps above.
- Note: Although in this scenario the person who is at risk for being assaulted is your friend, **you can also intervene in a situation in which you observe concerning behaviors happening to a stranger.**
- Intervening in a situation can be as simple as striking up a conversation with the potential victim or alerting authorities to the behavior. **By drawing attention to a situation, you may be disrupting or preventing a sexual assault.**

Bystander intervention can also occur when someone is sexually harassing another person, or is telling jokes that perpetuate "rape culture" (see rape culture document for further explanation). This type of intervention is crucial to creating a culture that does not support sexual assault.



Scenario:

You are hanging out with several people, and someone makes a rape joke. What can you do?

1. Call the Person Out.

Ask the person to stop telling jokes like that; tell them you don't find sexual assault amusing.

2. Explain the Joke's Impact:

Let that person know that statements or jokes such as those create a culture that continues to allow perpetrators to get away with their behavior and to think that rape and sexual violence is sometimes something to laugh about.

3. Play Dumb:

Pretend not to understand the joke and ask them to explain to you why it's funny.

Oftentimes, the more the person tries to explain what makes the joke or statement funny, the more obvious it becomes that what they are saying is inappropriate.

Perpetrators tend to believe that everyone shares their same distorted attitudes about sexual assault. When you hear a joke and do not say anything, you are reinforcing the idea that sexual assault is "funny" or something that shouldn't be taken seriously. Speaking out against ideas like this lets perpetrators know that the way they think and behave is not ok.

One in four women, one in six men, and one in two people who identify as transgender will be the victim of an attempted or completed sexual assault. In addition, 80% of women and 30% of men with disabilities have experienced some form of sexual assault.

When you hear a joke and do not say anything, you are reinforcing the idea that sexual assault is "funny" or something that shouldn't be taken seriously.

By standing up to someone who is making inappropriate comments, you are letting victims know that they are supported and believed, and are helping to change our society to one that does not condone sexual violence.