

# **Bystander Intervention– Considerations & Actions for Engagement**

**Target Age:** Grade 9-12 & beyond

**Source:** Men Can Stop Rape

**Overview:** Bystander intervention refers to a person deciding to voice their opinion about someone else's language and/or behavior, thereby working to prevent violence or abuse. This activity provides participants with intervention strategies that they in turn apply to given scenarios. Consequently, participants discuss when, why and how they feel comfortable or uncomfortable intervening when they hear or see something inappropriate, hurtful, abusive or dangerous and leave the session equipped with the tools they need to intervene in the future. Reacting to the scenarios gives participants a chance to practice intervening in a safe environment and to witness the attempts of others.

## **Objectives:**

- Identify unhealthy and potentially abusive behaviors of others.
- Learn and practice strategies for interrupting or objecting to unhealthy and abusive behaviors of others.

## **Timing:**

Overview of Bystander Intervention Strategies – 20 minutes

Scenarios by teams – 40 minutes

10 minutes to plan

15 minutes for three groups to act out

25 min for each scenario to be read and discussed by groups who did it

## **Materials Needed:**

- Bystander scenarios (one per group) – Some of the given example target a high school audience and others may be more appropriate for a college or adult audience. Facilitators should adapt the scenarios to fit the age and specific audience when possible.
- Handout of Bystander Intervention strategies
- Power point slide or flipchart with 7 Strategies
- Youtube or other video of abusive or unhealthy behavior (optional)
- Copies of White Ribbon Campaign article (optional)

## **Activity:**

- 1) Review what unhealthy or abusive behavior means. Give examples through video or discussion with group about what they experience or see in their lives.
- 2) Discuss things they have done or watched others do to try to interrupt the situation. Again watch a video or act out a skit.
- 3) Review the Intervention Strategies Handout – discuss which strategies seem doable, realistic, something they might try? Which are too different than them, too off the wall or don't seem like they would work?

- 4) Break the group into small teams – at least three people per team. Give each team a large print scenario. Ask them to discuss what strategy might work with the scenario and how the people in the scenario might react. Tell them that three teams will be asked to act out or talk out their scenario, their strategy and the results. Have a power point slide or flipchart with the 7 strategies for their reference. They have 10 – 15 minutes to discuss and plan.
- 5) Three teams volunteer to act out/talk out their scenario.
- 6) Whole group talks about
  - Other options that bystanders might have used
  - What goes through our minds when we encounter unhealthy or abusive behavior

**MATERIALS:**

This is a sample power point slide that could be available to remind the small groups what strategies they are pulling from.

## Intervention Strategies

- “I” Statements
- Silent Stare
- Humor
- Group Intervention
- “Bring it Home”
- “We’re Friends, Right”
- Distraction

# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

## 1) "I" STATEMENTS

- Three parts: 1) state your feelings, 2) name the behavior, 3) state how you want the person to respond.
- Focuses on the confronter's feelings rather than criticizing confrontee.
- Example: I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_. Please don't do that anymore.

## 2) SILENT STARE

- Remember, you don't have to speak to communicate.
- Sometimes a look can be far more powerful than words.

## 3) HUMOR

- Diffuses the tension inherent in an intervention.
- If you are witty, this may fit well with your style.
- CAVEAT: Be careful not to be so humorous that you end up mocking or making light of your own feelings or reaction. **Funny doesn't mean unimportant.**

## 4) GROUP INTERVENTION

- There is safety and impact in a united front.
- Best used with someone who has a clear pattern of behavior where many examples of his own behavior can be presented.

## 5) "BRING IT HOME"

- Prevents someone from distancing himself from the impact of his actions.  
EXAMPLE: "I hope no one ever talks about you like that."
- Prevents him from depersonalizing his targets as well.  
EXAMPLE: "What if someone said your girlfriend deserved to be raped, or referred to your mother as a whore?"

## 6) "WE'RE FRIENDS, RIGHT..."

- Reframes the confrontation as a caring, non-critical gesture.  
EXAMPLE: "Hey, Roger. As your friend, I've gotta tell you that the centerfold pictures in your room are killing your image, especially with the women on our hall. Why don't you do yourself a favor and take them down?"

## 7) DISTRACTION

- Most effective for street harassment.
- Snaps someone out of their "sexist comfort zone."  
EXAMPLE: Ask a man harassing women on the street for directions or the time.

## Bystander Scenarios

You're walking down the street with a group of friends both female and male. The group gets slightly separated with the women together in front of the men. A car drives by, honks and yells something out of the car at the women. One of the men comments to the others about how he used to do that all the time with his friends.

## Bystander Scenarios

You are at a get together after work. Several co-workers have brought their friends. You overhear a group of your male co-workers rating the women that have come to the party that don't work with you.

## Bystander Scenarios

You are out to dinner with three other couples. Conversation is going well with people moving in and out of several topics and sometimes the whole group is talking and other times separated conversations happening. At one point you overhear one of the men tell a joke that you find to be homophobic and sexist. You look across the table and notice someone else looking uncomfortable, while some people laugh.

## Bystander Scenarios

Your friend keeps texting the new person he is dating. He gets visibly angry and annoyed that she's not texting back so he wants to drive by her house and see if he can find her.

## Bystander Scenarios

You're in the locker room at the gym after a workout with your weight lifting partner, the club instructor and a couple of other men. The club instructor starts talking about his date tonight. He mentions that he's been with the woman for several months but sometimes she gets bitchy. She complains that he spends too much time at the gym and he jokes that he just "needs to show her who's boss".

## Bystander Scenarios

You are in gym class and overhear another student say to one of your classmates "you throw like a girl".

## Bystander Scenarios

You are at a party and notice a friend and his partner in the corner. You see him grab his partner's arm, shake her and get in her face. He's talking quietly but very forcefully. You can't hear what is said and can't see her reaction except her physical efforts to pull away from him.

## Bystander Scenarios

In your neighborhood the kids play in the street and outside in the neighborhood yards a lot. They go to a different school and you don't know them well but you know them by name and always say hi. One day, you and your friend are walking to your house to do a homework project together and you hear two of the boys calling another boy "fag" and "pussy" and he fights back by swearing at them. One of their parents comes over but makes no mention of the name calling.



# The White Ribbon Campaign

*Men working to end men's violence against women*

## **SAY SOMETHING.**

### **CHALLENGE SEXIST JOKES AND SEXIST LANGUAGE**

Your buddy says, "I have a good joke for you." You get a little smile on your face waiting to have a good laugh but instead you hear a joke that degrades women. It describes women as incompetent, weak, constantly hysterical, or as mere sexualized body parts. Many jokes speak of horrible violence such as rape in a supposed "lighthearted" manner. That frozen smile is still on your face but you feel very uncomfortable inside and you know that this just does not feel right. You want to say something but the rest of the guys seem to be enjoying it. They have smiles on their faces and you don't want to be the downer of the party. But maybe, just maybe some of them are thinking the same thing you are and that smile on their face is just as uncomfortable as yours.

#### **What can you say?**

Here are some suggestions: "Hey man that's actually not very funny. Too many guys joke about rape when rape is a traumatic event and a violent crime. Joking about it kind of makes us forget what it really is, and how serious it is." There's a good chance that someone in the room has known someone close to them who has been raped or sexually assaulted - conservative stats say 39% of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of sexual assault since the age 16 - (The Violence Against Women Survey -Statistics Canada, 1993). You may be surprised at the positive support you get. If you don't and you are told to "lighten up" you can simply say "I still don't find it funny. Would you be as comfortable telling a joke about people of color or Jews?" This is especially effective if there are men from different cultures and backgrounds in the room. Although don't be surprised if many of them tell you "you don't have a sense of humor." But at least you've planted the seed with these guys letting them know where you stand. Challenging guys about this stuff may be a difficult thing to do but it's worth it, knowing you're doing your part to create a world where ending violence against women is taken seriously and sexism and violence are no longer a laughing matter.

### **CHALLENGE A MAN WHO IS ABUSING HIS PARTNER**

If you knew your friend was abusing his girlfriend, what would you do? Many men have told us at the White Ribbon Campaign, that they would want to say something but wouldn't know where to start. Challenging someone about abuse is never easy and there is no one way to go about it. Here are a few things to keep in mind: Before confronting any man about his abusive behavior, keep in mind that this may aggravate him to the point that he will take it out on his partner. The best thing to do is to talk to his partner about what you want to do. Make sure she has a safety plan in case he was to become abusive again. Inform her of her options such as the availability of local women shelters and crisis lines. Does she have friends or family to stay with? Discuss your concerns with her and let her tell you how you can be the best help to her. If you ever



believe that she may be in immediate danger, you should consider calling the police and/or helping her find a safe place to stay. Don't become hostile or aggressive since that will likely put that person on the defensive, and besides, you're trying to talk to him about non-violence so the last thing you want to do is follow his lead. You can simply let him know that what he's doing isn't right and that it is really hurting someone he cares about. You may find that he will react in two different ways. He may deny the whole thing, make excuses (such as being drunk) try to blame her, or become angry at the insinuation that he was abusive. Or on the other hand, he may tell you that he feels ashamed of his behavior. He may ask for help in ensuring that it does not happen again or he may just want to talk about it with you. When listening to him, it is important never to excuse his behavior but to remind him that you are not judging him as a person but that you cannot allow his behavior to continue unchecked. Let him know that he has control over his behavior and what he does about it. If he is ready to make some changes, ask him to visit the White Ribbon web site ([www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com)) to obtain a contact number of a local group for abusive men in his area (Canada only).

### **She kept saying “no”**

If your friend tells you how he “convinced” his date to sleep with him even though she kept saying “no”, you have a perfect opportunity to say something. Any unwanted touching or sexual act committed upon another is sexual assault. You may get the same reaction as described above in the physical abuse situation but still you must say something. You should tell your friend that what he has described to you is sexual assault, which is illegal, and that he must be accountable for his actions. You may suggest to him that he seek professional help and to cooperate with the authorities if they become involved. Again, this is not an easy thing to do and not one to be taken lightly. But imagine that the girl or woman was your future wife, your daughter, sister, niece or mother. You would want someone else to say something, wouldn't you?

### **DON'T SUPPORT PROGRAMMING THAT PORTRAYS WOMEN IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT**

Another way of *saying something* is to refuse to support programming that portrays women in a negative light or refuses to acknowledge the seriousness of violence against women. Write letters to the editor of a newspaper who seems to dismiss the importance of funding women's shelters. Write to TV network executives letting them know that you will not watch programming that portrays women in stereotypical roles such as unintelligent sexual playthings, “bitchy” corporate go-getters, and submissive “man-trappers” only looking to snare a man. Write to advertising agencies to let them know that sexually objectifying women to sell products is irresponsible and degrading.

### **ALWAYS DO IT FOR THE RIGHT REASON**

Always remember that you are not speaking out because you are a hero, or because you're saving a woman with chivalry, or because you want to be patted on the back. You are speaking out because it is the right thing to do and it is a meaningful way to do your part in ending violence against women.

### **SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF**

When thinking about putting an end to violence against women, remember the importance of taking a look at yourself and how you view and treat women. Do you share household duties?

Do you share childcare responsibilities? Do you support equal work for equal pay? Do you dominate conversations with women or are you a good listener as well? Do you believe there is ever a time where a woman “asked” for abuse? Do you support your local women’s shelter? Do you use degrading language when referring to women? Do you view women as mere sex objects?

**Take some time to talk to the women in your life and ask them what their thoughts are on the issue of violence against women. Most of all, listen to them, truly listen.**

The best way to help influence other men about ending violence against women is to set an example and then spread the word. And finally, support other men who are working to make a difference and are standing up for what is right. Let them know that they are part of a larger community of caring men, since many men stay quiet simply because they think they will be alone in their stand. Direct them to the White Ribbon web site ([www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com)) and they’ll realize they’re not alone.

### **WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN**

We welcome all men, who are serious about taking a stand against violence towards women, to use the White Ribbon Campaign as a vehicle to help create positive change for all men and boys and to make the world safer for women and girls. Please visit our web site for more information about the White Ribbon Campaign and the resources available.

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