

Whether you realize it or not, you are and have already been involved in violence. Statistics show that bystanders are the largest group of people involved in violence – they greatly outnumber both the perpetrators and the victims. You may say to yourself, *What are you talking about? I have never hurt anyone in my life!* However, the truth is that bystanders are connected to violent events on varying levels. One may know that an assault will take place, others may sense imminent danger, while some others are aware that violence, in general, happens. Because of this, we all have a responsibility to act!

## **Understanding Bystander Intervention**

A **bystander** is simply a witness, someone who sees a situation but may or may not know what to do. This person sees and does nothing, thinking others around them will act or they may simply be afraid. We have all been bystanders in our lives, but we must remember our role in eliminating sexual violence and choose to be an active bystander, one who witnesses and safely reacts to prevent danger to others.

The **Bystander Intervention Model** acts against the phenomenon of Diffusion of Responsibility, which states that larger groups are prone to allow negative actions to occur that would not otherwise be ignored. Studies show that the larger the group number, the more those group members feel that the responsibility to intervene should fall on someone else. This results in inaction.

The Department of Relationship Violence & Outreach is developing our **bystander approach** to give our campus community roles that they can use in preventing sexual violence, including naming and stopping situations before they happen, stepping in during an incident, and speaking out against ideas and behaviors that support sexual violence. This approach develops skills to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors before and after an assault has taken place.

## **Bystander Strategies**

Have you ever convinced a drunk friend that one more drink is not a good idea? Have you ever confronted a friend about their sexist jokes or behavior? Have you ever stopped

a friend from going home with someone when they were under the influence of alcohol? Congratulations, you were being an active bystander! There are several ways to actively respond to potentially dangerous situations without harming yourself or anyone else involved. It's all about what you say and how you say it. Some examples are listed below:

### **“I” statements**

Three parts: 1. State your feelings, 2. Name the behavior, 3. State how you want the person to respond. This focuses on your feelings rather than criticizing the other person.

Example: “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_. Please don't do that anymore.”

### **Silent Stare**

Remember, you don't have to speak to communicate.

Sometimes a disapproving look can be far more powerful than words.

### **Humor**

Reduces the tension of an intervention and makes it easier for the person to hear you.

Do not undermine what you say with too much humor. Funny doesn't mean unimportant.

### **Group Intervention**

There is safety and power in numbers.

Best used with someone who has a clear pattern of inappropriate behavior where many examples can be presented as evidence of his problem.

### **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 someone from dehumanizing his targets.

Example: What if someone said your girlfriend deserved to be raped or called your mother a whore?”

## **We're friends, right....?**

Reframes the intervention as caring and non-critical.

Example: "Hey Chad.....as your friend I've gotta tell you that getting a girl drunk to have sex with her isn't cool, and could get you in a lot of trouble. Don't do it."

## **Distraction**

Snaps someone out of their "sexist comfort zone."

Example: Ask a man harassing a woman on the street for directions or the time.

Allows a potential target to move away and/or to have other friends intervene.

Example: Spill your drink on the person or interrupt and start a conversation with the person.

(Adapted from Men Can Stop Rape, [www.mencanstoprape.org](http://www.mencanstoprape.org), 2006)

## **Take Our Active Bystander Quiz!**

**On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being "I would be very unlikely to help" and 10 being, "I would would most definitely intervene," how much of an active bystander are you?**

1. In the middle of the day, you are walking across the Drill Field and spot a man on top of Lee Hall standing very close to the edge. You walk up to the crowd that is gathering and begins to watch him. What is the likelihood that you as the onlooker will act in this situation?
2. It is 12:45a.m. outside a local bar in Starkville. You and three friends are headed back to campus and see three men arguing with one man, who seems to be intoxicated. The man is backing away from the crowd and has trapped himself between them and a brick wall. A group of other people leaving the bar also spots the altercation and is taking notice. What is the likelihood that you as the onlooker will act in this situation?

3. You and Stacy, your long time friend, have just pulled up to an off-campus house party. You know that these parties can get a little wild so you warn her to be especially careful about leaving her drink unsupervised. You both enter the party and are immediately separated after she sees that friends from her Residence Hall are also there. A couple of hours later you spot Stacy talking to someone in the kitchen. She seems unable to stand up without assistance and she is being given another drink. You go to check on her and she tells you that she needs to lie down. The stranger holding her up offers to take her upstairs. What is the likelihood that you as the onlooker will act in this situation?