



Bystander intervention

The only person responsible for committing sexual assault is a perpetrator, but all of us have the ability to look out for each other's safety. Whether it's giving someone a safe ride home from a party or directly confronting a person who is engaging in threatening behavior, anyone can help prevent sexual violence.

Who is a bystander?

A bystander is a person who is present when an event takes place but isn't directly involved. Bystanders are witnesses to an actual incident of abuse or sexual violence that is already occurring. Being an engaged bystander may mean intervening in violence that's already occurring.

Why is bystander intervention important?

We all play a role in preventing violence and looking out for each other's safety. Stepping in may give the person you're concerned about a chance to get to a safe place or leave the situation. Sexual violence and rape are 80% likely to be perpetrated by a person known to a woman. It's important to recognize the role bystanders can play in preventing crimes like sexual assault.

Leading up to every incident of abuse or sexual assault are all kinds of behaviors, words, and actions that normalize and condone violence in a community. Even actions like a sexist joke or victim-blaming remark contribute to a culture in which domestic violence and sexual assault are tolerated and not treated with the gravity and urgency that these crimes deserve.

Whether you're taking home a friend who has had too much to drink, explaining that a rape joke isn't funny, or getting security involved when someone is behaving aggressively. Choosing to intervene makes a difference in the way those around you think about and respond to sexual violence.

If we all view ourselves as engaged bystanders and learn strategies for speaking up to challenge the social norms that contribute to the culture of violence, all of us can play an active role in ending domestic violence and sexual assault.

How can I help?

Your actions matter. By stepping in, you are helping to change the way people think about their role in preventing violence and creating safe spaces.

Stepping in can make all the difference, but it should never put your own safety at risk. Always think about safety and consider possibilities that are unlikely to put you or anyone else in harm's way. Safety is a priority in deciding how and when to respond.

Learn how to intervene in a way that fits the situation and your comfort level. You don't have to be a hero or even stand out from the crowd to make a big difference in someone's life.

Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay and Direct are five methods that you can use to support someone who is being harassed.

Distract

Distraction is a subtle and creative way to intervene. The aim is simply to do what you can to interrupt the situation. Creating a distraction can give the person at risk a chance to get to a safe place.

Examples of what you can do:

- Pretend to be lost.
- Ask for the time.
- Pretend you know the person being harassed. Talk to them about something random and take attention off of the harasser.
- Get in the way. Continue what you were doing, but get between the harasser and the target.
- Accidentally-on-purpose spill your coffee, drop something, the change in your wallet, or make a commotion.

Make sure to ignore the harasser and engage directly with the person who is being targeted. Do not talk about or refer to the harassment - instead, talk about something completely unrelated.

Make sure you read the situation carefully and select your Distract method accordingly. The person who is being targeted will likely catch on, and hopefully your act or statement will de-escalate the situation.

Delegate

Delegation is when you ask for assistance, for a resource, or for help from a third party.

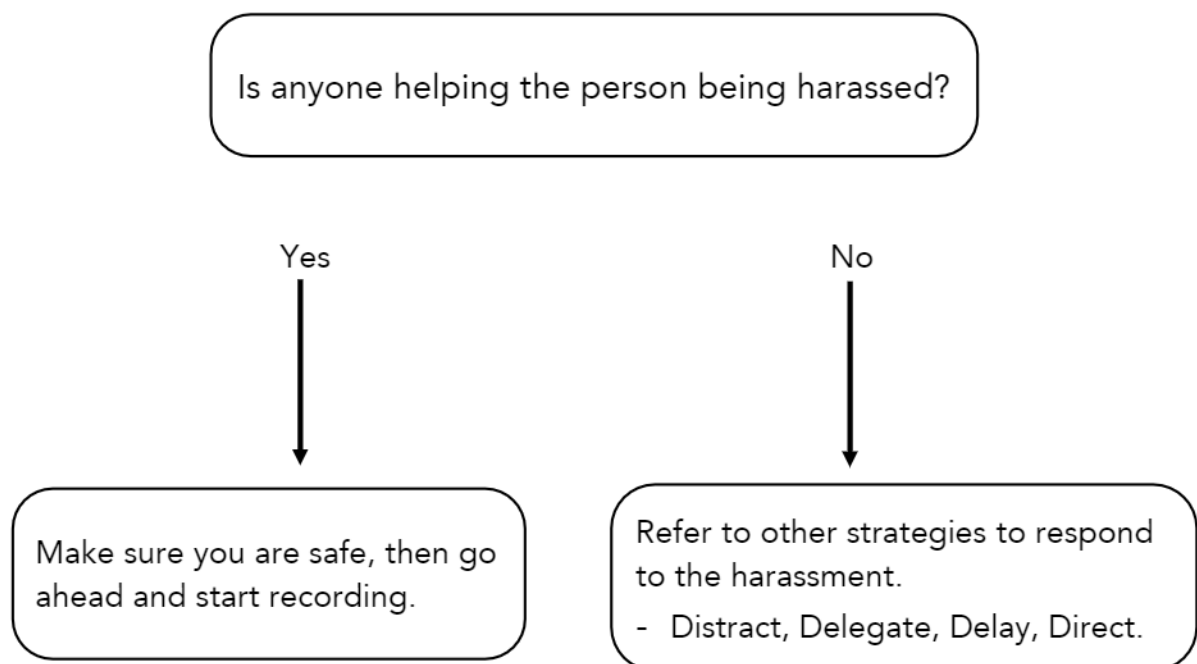
Examples of what you can do:

- Find an employee, store manager, bus driver, or security and ask them to intervene.
- Get your friend on board and have them use one of the methods of Distraction - such as asking for the time, directions, or striking up a conversation unrelated to the harassment to communicate with the person being harassed while you find someone to delegate to.
- Speak to someone near you who notices what's happening and might be in a better position to intervene. Work together.
- If it is appropriate and safe, call 911 to request help. Before contacting 911, use Distract to check in with the person being targeted to make sure they want you to do this. Some people may not be comfortable or safe with the intervention of law enforcement.
- Depending on the situation, you will need to use your best judgement.

Document

It can be really helpful to record an incident as it happens to someone, but you must [make sure to safely and responsibly document harassment](#).

First, make sure it is appropriate to document the situation.



If you documented the harassment:

- ALWAYS ask the person who was harassed what they want to do with the recording
- NEVER post it online or use it without their permission.
- Being harassed or violated is already a disempowering experience. Using it without their permission magnifies this experience, and can lead to make the person feel even more powerless.
- If the documentation goes viral, it can lead to further victimization and a level of visibility that the person may not want.
- The experience could have been traumatic. Publicizing another person's traumatic experience without their consent is no way to be an effective and helpful bystander.
- Further, posting footage without a victim's consent makes their experience public. In consideration of this, the footage may alert authorities and create legal issues for the victim.

Delay

If you can't act in the moment, you can still make a difference for the person who has been harassed by checking in on them after the fact.

Many types of harassment happen in passing or very quickly, in which case you can wait until the situation is over and speak to the person who was targeted then.

Examples of what you can do:

- Ask them if they're okay and tell them you're sorry that happened to them.
- Ask them if there's any way you can support them.
- Offer to accompany them to their destination or sit with them for a while.
- Share resources with them and offer to help them make a report if they want to.
- If you've documented the incident, ask them if they want you to send it to them.

Direct

You may want to directly respond to harassment by naming what is happening or confronting the harasser. Direct intervention can be risky - the harasser may redirect their abuse towards you and may escalate the situation.

Before you decide to respond directly, consider:

- ☐ Are you physically safe?
- ☐ Is the person being harassed physically safe?
- ☐ Does it seem unlikely that the situation will escalate?
- ☐ Can you tell if the person being harassed wants someone to speak up?

If you can answer yes to all of these questions, you might choose a direct response.

If you choose to directly intervene, here are some [examples of what you can say](#):

- "That's inappropriate, disrespectful, not okay, etc."
- "Leave them alone."
- "That's sexist, homophobic, racist, (insert type of harassment), etc."

The most important thing is to keep it short and to the point. Try not engage in dialogue, debate, or an argument, since this is how situations can escalate. If the harasser responds, try your best to assist the person who was targeted instead of engaging with the harasser.