

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

engaging individuals in active bystander behaviors



Primary prevention focuses on stopping violence before it happens and reducing the influence of dangerous norms and cultural practices. Research on risk factors, or conditions and circumstances that increase the chances of violence occurring, is an important tool for preventionists. Addressing risk factors through comprehensive prevention challenges social norms and beliefs that support sexual violence and sexually violent behaviors. This resource offers information on **bystander intervention**, a strategy that seeks to address risk factors and increase protective factors, or behaviors and conditions that lessen the likelihood of sexual violence victimization or perpetration, at the individual and relationship levels.

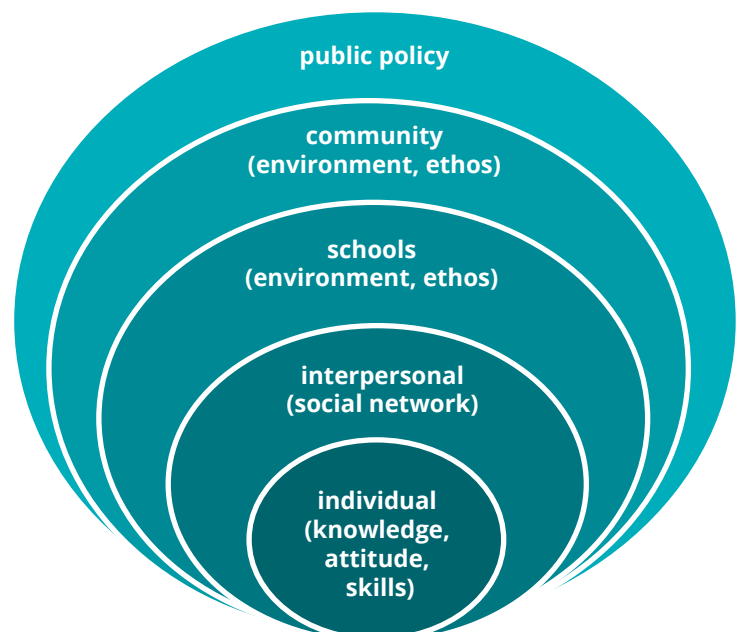
WHAT DO WE KNOW?

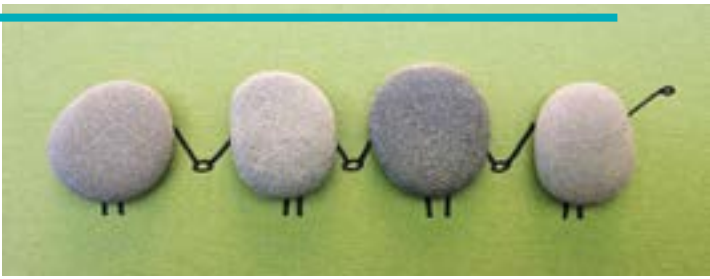
Social psychology has explored the phenomenon of inaction (or action) on the part of community members and witnesses to crime. The sexual assault and murder of Catherine “Kitty” Genovese in 1964 spurred interest in exploring how so many individuals could be aware of a brutal crime and do little to stop or address it. The **“Bystander Effect,”** as it has come to be known, refers to a collective assumption that another witness or person in the vicinity will take action. Nothing happens because most of the group is assuming someone else is taking responsibility.

A **bystander** has traditionally referred to someone who witnesses something, but does not take action or may experience harm as part of witnessing the event (e.g. “an innocent bystander”). Bystanders have not been regarded as individuals with very much power or agency; they are merely in the wrong place at the wrong time.

▶ bystander effect:

a collective assumption that another witness or person in the vicinity will take action.





Bystander intervention strategies seek to undo that notion by helping people see their role as an engaged bystander. An **engaged bystander** is someone who intervenes before, during, and/or after a situation, because they understand it to be harmful or dangerous to everyone. For example, while hanging out with a group of friends, you may express disagreement or disappointment in a friend who makes an inappropriate sexual comment or tells a joke about rape.

These interruptions help create a safer environment by changing norms and group expectations.

Bystander intervention seeks to increase a person's likelihood of assuming responsibility and taking action in a number of ways.

The more we can counter the forces that prevent inaction, the more we can support safe and effective action. We are also seeking to create new patterns and norms for others. Bystander intervention strategies seek to address individual- and relationship-level risk factors for sexual violence perpetration:

Attitudes and Beliefs

- Victim-blaming
- Lack of empathy or empathic responses
- Accepting rape myths as truths or reality
- Hypersmasculinity or adherence to dominant masculine norms

Behaviors

- Lack of non-violent conflict resolution skills

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION & PRIMARY PREVENTION

Primary prevention efforts focus on addressing the root causes of sexual violence; bystander intervention programs aim to change norms regarding sexual violence through mobilization and education of potential bystanders.¹ Instead of programming focused on speaking to men as potential perpetrators and women as potential victims, bystander programs approach all community members as potential change agents and helpers who can prevent violence from occurring and assist those who have already experienced violence. These programs need time and space for individuals to explore how inaction perpetuates harmful norms, as well as practice new skills and behaviors.

Bystander intervention strategies are comprehensive in their aim to dismantle a number of nuanced value systems and behavior patterns.

Programs typically:

- Help participants recognize sexual violence as a continuum of norms, attitudes, and behaviors, rather than a single random occurrence or series of acts.
- Dispel commonly-held myths about sexual violence and replace them with facts and accurate information about the realities of sexual violence.
- Teach people ways to respond when they see behaviors that promote a culture of sexual violence, as well as provide time to practice these (new) behaviors.
- Offer guidance on responding to victims of sexual violence and ways to support individuals on their journey of healing and safety.

Effective intervention is often presented as “the four D’s”: Direct, Distract, Delegate, and Delay.

Direct is when **you step in**, directly, and interrupt whatever is happening.

Distract draws everyone’s attention and allows for a swift intervention. For example, someone sees two young men guiding a visibly intoxicated woman up the stairs at a party. He may shout, “Hey Mitch! Is that your car getting towed?” This could **distract one of the two men away from what they’re doing** so someone can check in on the young woman.

Delegate encourages people to **recruit help** or seek out an authority figure or resource. This could mean



All bystander intervention strategies need to **consider the personal safety** of the person intervening; **assess the risk of physical harm and act accordingly**.

calling 911 or asking for others to join in addressing the problem.

Delay isn’t as proactive as the others, but does offer a role for individuals who may not be able to act in the moment or learn about something after the fact. It focuses on reaching out to a victim of the harmful behavior and **seeing how to be of service or support**.



DIRECT



DISTRACT



DELEGATE



DELAY

PREVENTION STRATEGIES PROMOTING ACTIVE BYSTANDER BEHAVIORS²

Bystander intervention programming has emerged as a promising way to help prevent the widespread problem of sexual violence across college and university campuses³, school communities⁴, and the military⁵. One strategy or curriculum may work for some communities and not others, and a few strategies are designed for working with specific members of a community, such as young men or coaches of athletic teams. Below are a sampling of strategies that have undergone either preliminary or rigorous program evaluation and have been found to be effective in changing bystander behaviors and attitudes in participants.

*Bringing in the Bystander*TM

Developed by the University of New Hampshire, *Bringing in the Bystander* teaches college students safe ways to intervene before, during, and after an incident of power-based personal violence. There are two versions of the program; a single program or a multi-session program of single-sex groups led by a

multi-gender team (e.g. one facilitator is a woman and the other is a man). Both versions of the program have shown long-term changes in knowledge, attitudes, and prosocial behaviors among campus groups and students.^{6,7}

Coaching Boys Into Men

Coaching Boys Into Men is a relationship violence prevention program that seeks to change norms and behaviors by focusing on the bond between high school athletes and their coaches. The program consists of a series of 11 brief coach-to-athlete trainings that offer alternatives to harmful norms and provides ways to model respect and promote healthy relationships. The program instructs coaches on incorporating the themes of teamwork, integrity, fair play, and respect into their daily practice and other routines. The program showed positive effects on dating violence perpetration (including physical and sexual violence), but effects on other forms of sexual violence were not assessed.⁸

Green Dot

Green Dot is a program primarily designed for campus communities that consists of two parts: a motivational speech and a five-hour interactive training with peer educators that offers examples and skills on how to be an engaged bystander. A study found a decrease in reported sexual victimization and harassment, stalking, and dating violence on a college campus that implemented the program, compared to two comparable campuses that did not.⁹

Students Challenging Realities and Educating about Myths (SCREAM) Theater

Based out of Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance, SCREAM Theater uses a peer educational and interactive theater program to engage college students in the prevention of interpersonal violence. Evaluation of this program indicated its effectiveness regarding attitude change, an increase in active and prosocial bystander behaviors, and decreased acceptance of some rape myths.¹⁰



REFERENCES

¹ Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2011). *Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing violence against women: Preventing violence against women by increasing participation in respectful relationships*. Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

² The inclusion of all strategies referenced or listed in this resource should not be interpreted as an endorsement. NJCASA includes available research and evidence-based practices as examples of how theory is operationalized and/or incorporated into practice.

³ Moynihan, M., Banyard, V., Arnold, J., Eckstein, R. & Stapleton, J. (2010). "Engaging intercollegiate athletes in preventing and intervening in sexual and intimate partner violence." *Journal of American College Health*, (59/3), 197-204.

⁴ Miller, E., Tancredi, D. J., McCauley, H. L., Decker, M. R., Virata, M. C. D., Anderson, H. A. ... Silverman, J. G. (2012). Coaching boys into men: A cluster-randomized controlled trial of a dating violence prevention program. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 51, 431-438. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.01.018

⁵ Hollingsworth, C., Ramey, K. J., & Hadley, J. A. (2011). Bystander intervention pilot: Final report. Retrieved from Mentors in Violence Prevention: <http://www.mvpnational.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/12/MVP-Navy-BI-PilotFinal-Report-2011.pdf>

⁶ Moynihan, et al. (2010).

⁷ Moynihan, M., Banyard, V., Arnold, J., Eckstein, R. & Stapleton, J. (2011). "Sisterhood may be powerful for reducing sexual and intimate partner violence: an evaluation of the Bringing in the Bystander in-person program with sorority members." *Violence Against Women*, (17/6), 703-719.

⁸ Miller et al. (2012)

⁹ Coker, A.L., Fisher, B.S., Bush, H.M., Swan, S.C., Williams, C.M., Clear, E.R., & DeGue, S. (2014). "Evaluation of the Green Dot bystander intervention to reduce interpersonal violence among college students across three campuses." *Violence Against Women*, (21/12), 1507-27.

¹⁰ McMahon, S., Postmus, J.L., Warrenner, C., & Koenick, R.A. (2014). "Utilizing Peer Education Theater for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence on College Campuses." *Journal of College Student Development*, (55/1), 78-85.

RESOURCES

Bystander Intervention Resources

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/engaging-bystanders-sexual-violence-prevention/bystander-intervention-resources>

Bystander-Focused Prevention of Sexual Violence

NotAlone.gov

<https://notalone.gov/assets/bystander-summary.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all women, men and children.

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