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Bystander Intervention

Grace Cathedral

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Introduction

Bystanders play an important part in stopping harassment and bullying in both the workplace and social environments. The helpless feeling we experience when we witness or are the recipient of harassing behavior is real, and we have many unhealthy defenses we use to "get out" of the situation.

Today I would like to share ways to have the external awareness to be safe and create a safe place for others. We are going to discuss the internal triggers and biases that get in the way of you being effective in your intervention. Then, we will share the 10 ways you can assist and stop someone from being harassed, bullied, or harmed.

Here are the tools, skills, principles, and practices to help stop the violence:

External Awareness

Your own personal safety

It is important that you are aware of your own abilities, concerns, and fears regarding your personal safety. Your abilities will determine the amount and type of intervention you will want to do. In some situations, the attention of the aggressor might turn towards you. At that point, you want to have the internal, external, and physical skills to stop someone from harming you.

Here are some of the personal safety skills you can implement now:

- ✦ Be aware of your exits and escape routes.
- ✦ Be aware of safe places in the immediate area and the general neighborhood.
- ✦ Make sure you're not in a confined space when you begin your intervention.
- ✦ Have a physical object between you and the perpetrator before intervening.

Assertiveness

Often when you're intervening, you have to use your voice at different levels to bring attention to what is going on. Many people mistake assertiveness for being aggressive; aggressiveness is just one part of asserting yourself.

To intervene effectively and correctly, one must use their voice and their body to say what they mean. This means, at times, you will have to raise your voice or speak in a way that clearly conveys you mean it.

Strong body

When you are speaking assertively, it is important that your body says *I mean what I'm saying*.

- ✎ Set your weight in your hips.
- ✎ Square your feet.
- ✎ Make eye contact.
- ✎ Direct traffic.

We practiced this during the lecture; it would be helpful if you also practice before a full-length mirror.

Internal Awareness

To effectively intervene for others' safety as well as your own, you must have an internal awareness of what you bring to the situation. If you can be aware of and manage the unhealthy internal agreements and fears you bring to situations, your intervention will have more of an effect.

Trusting your intuition

Because every situation, location, and person is different, the only way to choose the right intervention tool is to be able to listen and trust and follow your intuition.

Intuition is a very powerful ally when you are in these situations, and the key is to know when it is speaking to you, have the tools it needs to resolve the situation, and act on what it tells you to do.

Where in your body does your intuition get activated?

Knowing your fears

One of the things that stop us from trusting and hearing our intuition is our own particular fears, especially the ones that we have around violence, abuse, and possibly dangerous behaviors.

If there are certain situations that you are fearful of, it's important to not put yourself in those situations or seek assistance if there's no other option.

To help you find your courage in the face of fear, practice in a safe environment or situation where you are not isolated.

Knowing your triggers

It's important to know what triggers you—what situations cause you to automatically react in a fight, flight, fold, freeze, or attach mode.

Being triggered will cause you to react based on your past traumas, which may not be the most effective solution at that moment.

Effective intervention is to Take Action in the present moment.

Being aware of your own biases and affinities

We all have biases and affinities. It's important to know what yours are, so that you don't habitually judge situations based upon your resentments, past traumas, or even things you are familiar with or like.

Bystander Intervention Techniques

1. Just your presence works

There are times, especially if the situation is domestic abuse, that your presence—you witnessing the situation and getting others to witness—stops it.

This is not to say you should not intervene in domestic violence, but it's important to know that most of the time, both people turn on the person who is trying to intervene.

2. Get others to witness

Getting one or more people to witness the abuse or violence is an effective tool to stop the perpetrator. Getting the crowd to join you in your intervention takes you being able to:

- ✚ Cause a scene
- ✚ Raise your voice
- ✚ State what is going on and that you need help

3. Address the person who's being harassed

Confidently, powerfully, and with a strong voice and body, ask the person who's being harassed if:

- ✚ They are uncomfortable.
- ✚ Do they want this to happen?
- ✚ Do you need assistance?
- ✚ Do you want me to call 911?
- ✚ Do you know this person?
- ✚ How can I support you?

This helps them to:

- ✚ Find their voice
- ✚ Know that they're not alone and
- ✚ Brings awareness to the situation.

This also empowers the person who is being harassed.

4. Know your rights (policy) in the space you're in

Know the policy of the places that you visit, work, and attend so that you feel comfortable and confident about intervening. There are No Harassment Zones that have strict outcomes for those who harass, such as restricting their access to participation and places.

5. Remove the one who is being harassed

There are several ways you can remove the person who's being harassed from the situation. Doing this takes confident and direct movement and action. Here are several ways that are important to practice:

- ✎ Simply walking up to them, taking them by the hand, and walking away
- ✎ Make an excuse to remove them
- ✎ Cause a distraction
- ✎ Get some to help

6. Tell someone who can effect change

If there is a way that you can seek help from someone who can stop the harassment, do so. If possible, do this while still being within earshot of the situation.

- ✎ An official person who has the power to change the situation
- ✎ Call 911
- ✎ Someone to whom the perpetrator will listen

7. Code Words

Code words are words that are established and used amongst family, friends, and people you know to indicate that someone needs assistance, that there is danger, or that you are uncomfortable with a particular situation.

This word should be able to be said in front of or to someone when you need to discuss something, without others becoming suspicious or aware. Code words can be used by either the person needing help or the person seeking to assist.

Use a person's name or phrases like:

- ✎ Your partner (say person's name) Stella is on the phone
- ✎ Did Stella call?
- ✎ Is Stella coming to get me?

8. Physically intervene

Only do this if you are physically able and confident that you can handle the person who is harassing. Physically touching somebody can only be done legally if the person is physically harming someone who is requesting help.

9. Record the interaction

Make sure you are safe, take out your phone, and record the event. If you are in a crowd, there is a chance that others will do the same.

Make sure you are at a safe distance and there is something between you and the perpetrator.

10. Bring up inappropriate behavior

This is when your assertiveness will be important.

Here are the tools and reminders about assertiveness:

- ✚ Educate people on how to treat you and others.
- ✚ Bring up what is going on as soon as you see it.
- ✚ Be ready for the pushback.
- ✚ Be specific.
- ✚ Sometimes politeness works against you.
- ✚ Resist the need to have the last word.