Bystander Intervention Strategies

Bystanders are the largest group of people involved in violence – they greatly outnumber both the perpetrators and the victims. Bystanders have a range of involvement in assaults. Some know that a specific assault is happening or will happen, some see an assault or potential assault in progress, and some know that assaults do happen. Regardless of how close to the assault they are, bystanders have the power to stop assaults from occurring and to get help for people who have been victimized.

We have all been bystanders in our lives, and we will all be in situations where we are bystanders in the future. The choice, then, becomes whether we are going to be active bystanders who speak up and say something, or whether we stand by and say nothing.

As opposed to being the bystander who stands by and does nothing, we want to create a culture of bystanders who are actively engaged in the prevention of violence.

Courtesy: Virginia Tech Women’s Center http://www.stopabuse.vt.edu/bystander.php#strategies

“I” statements • “We’re Friends, Right?”
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.”

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.”

Silent Stare
Remember, you don’t have to speak to communicate. Sometimes a disapproving look can be far more powerful than words.

Educate about Consequences • Offer Options
Harm is done to the victim, and also can result in possible arrest, expulsion or other sanction for the person committing the action. Offer options and other alternatives to what is happening, options that respect everyone involved. Assume the best of everyone involved, and don’t wind up with anyone being disrespected or hurt.

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 the problem.

Bring it Home • Value Women
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?”

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: “Where Do You Stand?”, Men Can Stop Rape, 2011