

LET'S TALK ABOUT BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

It's 1:30am and you're slaying the d-floor with a group of friends at the club. You scan the crowd and notice a guy is dancing a little too close with a woman he clearly does not know; her body language tells you this. Her posture is turned away from him and she's looking out to the crowd. What do you do?

When we witness a situation that feels wrong or behaviour that makes us feel uncomfortable, chances are something is awry. Most of us want to do the right thing, to intervene – distracting the guy for a moment or providing an opening for the woman to dance with your friends if appropriate – but knowing what to do and feeling confident enough to step in can be difficult.

**DO YOU NOTICE SITUATIONS LIKE THIS
ON/OFF CAMPUS?**

WHAT DO YOU DO?

BE AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

1 NOTICE THE EVENT

Be present and notice what is occurring around you.



2 IDENTIFY IF IT'S A PROBLEM

Be critical of our own perceptions and attitudes of others.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

A Would you behave in the same way?

B Would this kind of behaviour be okay if it were occurring to a friend or family member?

C Does the situation at hand make you feel uncomfortable?

3 TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Perhaps the hardest step. If we all assume someone else will step in, nothing will happen.

4 MAKE A PLAN

Directly or indirectly. Just remember to be respectful and careful in whatever approach you take.

5 ACT

Not participating in a conversation or calling-out bad behaviour; derailing an incident from occurring by distracting the would-be perpetrator. These are all ways you can act.

HOW TO BE AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

An active bystander is someone who, when noticing a situation that concerns them, does something about it – they are everyday superheroes. This might be similar to the scenario mentioned on the previous page; or maybe you're looking out for your friends; maybe you're calling them out when they are making an offensive comment towards another person. Each situation is different, but there are some basic things you can do in any scenario:

1) Notice the event We've mentioned a few scenarios throughout this booklet – a friend showing you a nude that was sent to them privately, hearing someone making a homophobic, sexist or racist remark towards another person or group, or noticing a peer incessantly pursuing someone who is not interested – these are all situations where you might intervene.

2) Identify if it's a problem Interpreting an event as a problem requires judgement on your part, but as a guide, question whether the situation at hand makes you feel uncomfortable. Would you behave the same way? Would this kind of behaviour be okay if it were occurring to a friend or family member? If you are unsure about positively answering these questions, or the answer makes you feel uncomfortable, chances are a positive intervention is called for.

3) Take responsibility This is perhaps the hardest step; deciding to step up. In difficult situations we often assume that someone else will do something – surely the woman at the club has friends who will come to her aid – but if we all assume someone else will step in, nothing will happen.

4) Make a plan There are a number of different ways to intervene and take responsibility – either directly or indirectly – just remember to be respectful and mindful of your own safety and theirs in whatever approach you take, whether you decide to act in the moment or check-in with the person later to see how they feel.

5) Act Choosing to not participate in a negative conversation or calling-out bad behaviour; derailing an incident from occurring by distracting the would-be perpetrator (i.e. ask for the time, directions, what drink they're having); offering assistance to the victim by listening or helping them to report the incident – these are just some of the ways you can intervene and be an active bystander.

WHY IT CAN SOMETIMES BE DIFFICULT

Being an active bystander can be challenging at times – with great power comes great responsibility.

For starters, we all fall victim to apathy at times. You might fail to notice an incident is occurring due to noise or other sensory distractions¹⁶ (i.e. looking down at your phone), or you might find it difficult to judge whether an incident such as the woman in the aforementioned club is at ‘high-risk’ or not – what if you misread the signs?

Research suggests that our judgement is sometimes influenced by the myths¹⁷ we mentioned earlier. What we have to remember is that these myths are false – wearing provocative clothing does not constitute sexual availability, for example. Research also shows that people are less likely to help in situations where the perception of ‘need’ is ambiguous¹⁸. The trick is to be present and notice what is occurring around you, and to learn to be critical of our own perceptions and attitudes of others.

Second, you might feel uncertain about how to best intervene. You might not feel physically equipped to step in, or you might find the whole experience embarrassing, awkward or scary.

Looking out for someone is nothing to be embarrassed about. It demonstrates empathy and concern. Being an active bystander does not always require you to confront the situation yourself. You can contribute to defusing the situation by informing someone in a position of authority that an incident might be occurring – bar staff or campus security for example.

WHY MIGHT PEOPLE AVOID BEING AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER?

HOW MIGHT YOU CHANGE THIS?

ASSISTING OTHERS

As a friend or active bystander, you might find yourself assisting a victim of sexual assault or harassment immediately after an incident occurred. In the event of assault or rape, it’s important that you listen to them, let them know you understand what has happened and ask them how you might help. Remember that they are likely feeling vulnerable, having had their sense of control shaken, so it’s important to not rush them into making decisions or to tell them what to do. Be gentle and let them know their options. These include:

- Asking whether they would like medical attention for both their wellbeing as well as collecting evidence if necessary.
- Asking whether they wish to notify the police. An informal report does not mean they have to press charges, and it could be helpful if there is future legal action.

HEY, CAN I TALK TO YOU?

Helpful Responses

- Seek safety and privacy.
- Encourage them to take their time and take what they say seriously.
- Remember that they want to be heard by you. You don’t have to be an expert to listen.
- Acknowledge the courage it has taken for them to disclose to you.
- Assist them to get the information they want in order to make the best decision for them.
- Support them in accessing the medical or emotional support they may want.

HOW CAN I HELP?

Not So Helpful Responses

- Minimising what the person says.
- Forcing the person to seek help or do something they don't want to do.
- Insisting that they report the incident to the police.
- Asking for details that are not necessary or too much detail.
- Telling them that they need to forget about it and move on.
- Blaming yourself or the person, asking questions like "Why didn't you try to fight them off?". The perpetrator is 100% responsible.
- Making comments that might appear supportive, but could be upsetting, like "Where do they live? I'll kill them".¹⁹

Your instinct might be to comfort the person with a hug, but only do so if you're sure that they are comfortable with physical contact. The key is to let them lead the way and to work through this process at their own pace. Be an ear and an open heart.



COPING STRATEGIES & SELF-CARE

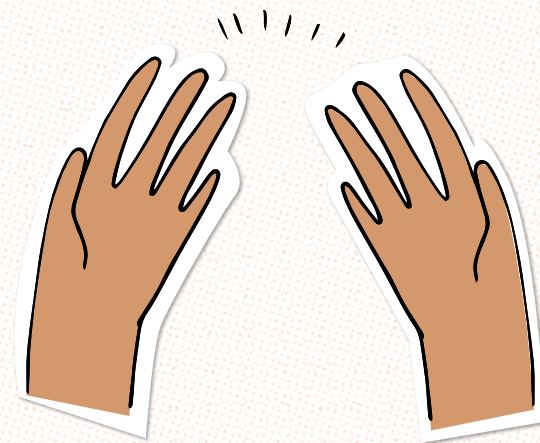


If you have experienced or witnessed something that has upset you, you may experience a range of short and long term psychological and emotional effects. Every person reacts differently and it is usual for feelings to change from day to day.

'Coping' describes all the different things people do to manage problems or difficult situations. How we choose to cope can have a big impact on our mental and physical health.

Coping strategies can be both positive and negative. For example, if you're going through a tough time, a negative way of coping is to use drugs or alcohol to 'numb the pain'. This kind of coping may provide a quick fix, but often it will make things worse in the long run.

Choosing positive coping strategies, such as the ones on the next page, will help you manage and reduce stress in a way that won't be harmful in the long term. You'll probably find that some strategies work better than others depending on the kind of situation or stressor that you are facing.



COPING STRATEGIES TO TRY

- Ask a trusted friend or family member for help and support. Sharing your thoughts with someone else may bring some relief, and might help you work through the problem.
- Look after yourself – try to eat well, get plenty of sleep and exercise regularly.
- Prioritise self-care each day. Exercise, meditate, listen to music, get close to nature – or whatever it is that makes you feel good – even if it's just for five minutes a day.
- Write down how you're feeling. This can really help to clarify things when you're feeling strong emotions. Write in a journal and keep it handy, so that you can look back at what you've written.
- Use positive self-talk and self-compassion to counteract negative thought patterns.
- Keep yourself active, but maybe look at reducing your load. Sometimes you just have to accept that you can't do everything. Make a list of the things you need to accomplish, and adjust your schedule according to how you feel each day.
- Remember to be patient, kind and caring with yourself.²⁰

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE REALLY STRUGGLING?

You don't have to work this stuff out on your own. Counsellors are available at Flinders to hear your case and help you with any problems you are facing. They're also good to talk to if you prefer not to talk to friends or family, or if your problems are making it hard to carry on with your day-to-day stuff. Key contacts and services can be found at the end of this booklet (page 42).

HAVE YOU SAID SOMETHING KIND AND CARING TO YOURSELF TODAY?

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20. Advice on this page was heavily influenced by content featured on au.reachout.com

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