



**ENGAGING BYSTANDERS**  
in Sexual Violence Prevention

## **National Sexual Violence Resource Center**

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, opened in July 2000 as the nation's principle information and resource center regarding all aspects of sexual violence. The NSVRC provides national leadership in the anti-sexual violence movement by generating and facilitating the development and flow of information on sexual violence intervention and prevention strategies. The NSVRC's work is supported in large part with funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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## **About the Author**

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Written by  
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National Sexual Violence Resource Center

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## Introduction

In 1964, the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese shocked Americans from coast to coast. While a man attacked, raped, and killed this young woman for over half an hour, 38 men and women witnessed the assault and did nothing to help. The shock and confusion surrounding this single event captured the country's attention and launched a substantial debate into how caring people could watch such an attack, and yet do nothing. This one event launched new research and programs about the 'bystander effect'.

This one event also marked the beginning of an approach by programs and researchers to move bystanders to act more responsibly. People in a bystander role often describe feeling scared, alone, and afraid to say or do something in the face of violence. They say that they fear making someone angry, possibly misunderstanding the situation, or even triggering further violence. Yet over the years, the bystander intervention approach has recognized that saying or doing something is not necessarily a single event by a single hero. In fact, in many situations, there are a variety of opportunities, and numerous people who can choose to intervene.

With this new perspective or approach, people might intervene in less extreme situations, such as saying something at a party when a man is harassing a woman, or supporting a family member when confronting an abusive relative. This expanded approach includes a broad range of opportunities to intervene that can be as simple as a word here or there or more involved behaviors that let people know that you will take action.

This booklet reviews the concept of bystander intervention and some factors that lead people to act; it considers who bystanders are and some circumstances that would motivate people to get involved. The document also includes relevant research, future directions, helpful tools, resources, and training activities.



## **Importance of a Bystander Approach**

Although some anti-sexual violence groups focus much of their efforts on stopping victimization and others on stopping perpetration, both approaches share common goals, namely to create a safe community and to hold the perpetrator responsible for his or her crime. Much of the important work in both fields takes place AFTER someone has been harmed. However, with the bystander intervention approach, the work is broadened to address the behaviors of others - the friends, families, teachers, clergy, and witnesses that surround any act or pattern of abuse - thus offering an opportunity to also address behaviors BEFORE sexual violence has been perpetrated in the first place.

***The bystander approach offers opportunities to build communities and a society that does not allow sexual violence. It gives everyone in the community a specific role in preventing the community's problem of sexual violence.***

*Banyard et al, 2004*

In the field of public health, primary prevention refers to intervention before anyone has been harmed. The bystander intervention approach is key to finding and expanding the possibilities to stop sexual violence BEFORE it is perpetrated. This bystander approach has been successfully used with a variety of social ills such as combating racism, intimate partner violence, and drinking and driving.

In many ways, willing bystanders are already part of the environment of those working in sexual violence prevention, response, and treatment. A significant number of clients in most rape crisis centers are family and friends of the victims, people who want to learn how to support victimized women,

children, and men. Programs that work with child sexual abuse cases also involve the child's family in the healing process. By incorporating the bystander approach into these existing services, the families and their communities can become more educated about how to take action to prevent sexual violence. They may also be more willing to say something or do something when they see an opportunity to act.



**The bystander approach offers several clear benefits:**

- **Discourages victim blaming**

Breaking the silence around sexual violence is a critical strategy in prevention. Yet, often the ensuing dialogue includes questions to the victim like “How could YOU let this happen?” or “Why didn’t YOU say anything?” With bystanders as active participants, the sense of responsibility shifts away from victims and toward the family, friends and the whole community. The questions then become, “How could WE let this happen in our community?” and “How can WE learn to say something?”

- **Offers the chance to change social norms**  
With more bystander intervention, society’s collective responsibility takes on a new role. Studies show that social norms can play a significant role in violence prevention, especially in communities such as college campuses (Banyard et al., 2004). Just as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), for example, shifted social norms of our society with their slogan, “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk,” a similar shift is also possible for sexual violence: “Friends don’t let friends hurt others.”

- **Shifts responsibility to men and women**

In previous decades, rape prevention programs focused almost exclusively on the dynamic of men as perpetrators and women as victims of sexual violence. Child sexual abuse programs began as programs teaching children to say “no” and teaching adults to listen. The bystander approach shifts this framing and engages adults as agents of change - both men and women become equals in prevention. In support of this promising practice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has funded a number of sites to develop programs to shift the responsibility of preventing child sexual abuse to the adults.

Our lives  
begin to end  
the day we  
become silent  
about things  
that matter.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## Bystanders

The term bystander conjures up many, and sometimes conflicting, images. For some the word connotes a passiveness, an innocent bystander who could not, or did not, do anything in a dangerous situation. For others the term includes more engagement such as someone who witnesses a car crash and calls for help or someone who “stands by” a friend when he or she is being harassed.

While the term “bystander” is embedded in the research, we challenge each of us to create more engaging words and images. The reality is that everyone is a bystander, every day, in one way or another to a wide range of events that contribute to sexual violence.

Everyday, we witness situations in which someone makes an inappropriate sexual comment or perpetrates sexual harassment. Sometimes, we say something or do something, but at other times, we choose simply to ignore the situation. How do we make those decisions? Is there a safe way to increase the number of times and situations in which we might choose to act, and could that way also make sense for others?

Anyone who lives in today’s society likely feels the impact of the sexual violence surrounding us. The visibility of sexual violence has become more apparent in the mainstream media, the news, on talk shows, and in the memoirs of famous people. In fact, most of society bears witness - is a bystander - to sexual violence.

The impact of sexual violence extends beyond its visibility. Research in the last ten years has revealed much about the lifelong impact of sexual violence on the lives of many survivors (Feletti et al., 1998). More recently, researchers have considered the impact of sexual violence on those who come into contact with victims and perpetrators (Bird-Edmunds, 1997). Friends and family of victims and/or perpetrators of sexual violence are particularly affected, as are the professionals who work with them.

If we accept the premise that all of us are affected in some way by sexual violence, how do we decide whether it makes sense to say or do something as an act of prevention? In this booklet, we will look first at what individuals, families and friends can do. Then we will look at what can be done as a community and in our society.

***How do we decide whether it makes sense to say or do something?***



## Moving toward Individual Bystander Intervention

### When to intervene

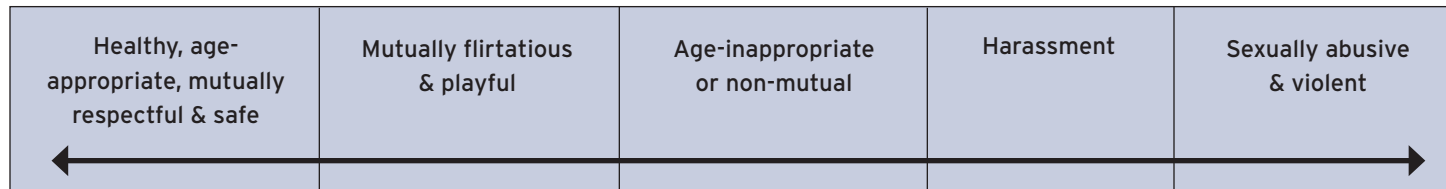
When we consider stopping sexual violence, we usually think of intervening in individual acts of child sexual abuse or rape. But rarely is the individual act the only opportunity to intervene. Rather, there are literally hundreds of little comments, harassments, and other forms of abuse that lead up to what we think of as the sexually violent act.

*I know what she might have to face. I just could not live with myself if I sat there and did nothing.*

*Bystander who stepped in to intervene*

If we limit our interventions to a culminating “event,” we miss multiple opportunities to do something or say something before someone is harmed. Instead, think of the “event” as being on a continuum of behaviors that demand specific interventions at each step. At one end of the continuum are healthy, age-appropriate, respectful, and safe behaviors. At the other end are sexual abuse, rape, and violent behaviors. Between the ends are other behaviors, ranging from those that begin to feel inappropriate, coercive, and harassing. Each situation is an opportunity to intervene by reinforcing positive behaviors BEFORE a behavior moves further towards sexual violence.

## Continuum of Behaviors



*When looking at all of the behaviors along this continuum there are a number of ways to either say something or do something in each category. There are many ways to take action and many opportunities to take action with no one right answer.*

*(Adapted from The Touch Continuum, Anderson, 2000.)*

### **Steps to intervention**

In the wake of the Genovese case, researchers Darley and Latane (1968) published an important work on bystander apathy. They introduced five steps that bystanders must move through before they are able to take action: bystanders must first notice (or recognize) the event as something that falls along the continuum of behaviors that lead to violence; then, they must consider whether the situation demands action; next, they must decide whether they have the responsibility to act; then, they choose the form of assistance to use; and

### ***Five Steps Toward Taking Action***

1. Notice the event along a continuum of actions
2. Consider whether the situation demands your action
3. Decide if you have a responsibility to act
4. Choose what form of assistance to use
5. Understand how to implement the choice safely

*Darley and Latane, 1968*



finally, they must understand how to implement the choice. Given the complexity of most sexual abuse or sexual assault situations, bystanders often find these five steps overwhelming and choose to do nothing. Several decades of research has detailed **situational factors** that may affect a person's willingness to act. These include: the presence and number of other witnesses, the uncertainty of the situation, the perceived level of urgency or danger for the victim, and the setting of the event. These factors are not static, but constantly affect one another.

For example, some research has shown that people are less likely to act if there are other people around because an individual may feel that someone else is in a better position to say or do something. This finding is fairly consistent when the bystander perceives a low level of danger. However, when the bystander thinks that someone is in a highly dangerous situation, then the number of bystanders has no affect on whether the individual acts.

Research also considers ***characteristics of the bystander*** that may influence his or her decision to intervene, including: relevant skills and experience, relationship to the victim and/or the perpetrator, feelings and attitudes, and perception of the relative personal costs of either intervening or doing nothing. Studies have shown that the bystander's relationship with the potential victim has a significant impact on whether they will act.

From a programmatic point of view, the easiest characteristic to influence is someone's relevant skills. Studies indicate that bystanders who feel it is their responsibility to do something and are confident about HOW to intervene, from either past experience or from skills training,

are more likely to intervene (Christy and Voigt, 1994; Crick and Dodge, 1994).

Some characteristics and situational factors that impact individual decisions cannot be easily changed by any kind of program design. However, programs that address key factors, such as skills, are likely to be successful.



# ACTIVITY ONE

## A Call To Action

### Materials:

Flip chart and markers

### Time:

5-20 minutes, depending upon discussion time

### Objective:

Participants will understand more about what motivates or prevents people to act in certain situations.

### Suggested Use:

This exercise is a brainstorm that can be used with a small group of 3-4 people or a larger group up to 50 participants. It will provide an exploration of why people choose to act or not act in the same situation and whether those decisions are conscious.

### Step 1:

Begin with a quick brainstorm about why people don't get involved in a given situation. Allow the group some thinking time and encourage their answers, but if they need help getting started, here are a few reasons you could suggest:

- It is not my problem.
- It is not my job.
- It is not my responsibility.
- I just don't want to go there.
- I don't want to make things worse.
- I don't feel safe.
- I don't know what to do or say.
- I don't want to be a snitch.
- I don't get into other people's business.
- I believe in the rights of the individual.

### Step 2:

Brainstorm a list of reasons people DO get involved. Again, let the group develop their own ideas, but if they need a few ideas, offer a few of these reasons:

- The person involved is someone I care about.
- Someone helped ME once.
- I didn't think about it, I just reacted.
- I was just doing what I would want someone to do for me.
- I knew he was drunk, and I wanted to be sure no one got hurt.

### Discussion Points:

This exercise is a launching point for participants to see the complexity of what it means to be a bystander. It will reinforce the concept that we are all bystanders, every day, as a unifying

concept. It may also offer an opportunity to talk about hope – hope for mobilizing individuals, communities and institutions to prevent sexual violence before anyone is harmed.

As you examine the various responses with your audience, point out that there are multiple good reasons to get involved and multiple good reasons to be cautious - especially when there is a possibility of violence. If time allows, you may want to explore the multiple times and ways to intervene (e.g., take a particular situation and explore what an intervention would look like if you intervened earlier or later in that day, in that family, or in that person's life.)

*Trainer's Note: Your role is to pose a question and then let people offer their ideas.*

## Changes that Support Bystander Intervention in Communities

*The cigarette companies said they would pay for any educational program as long as we stopped our policy work... That's when I realized we were taking the right approach.*

*Larry Cohen, Prevention Institute*

We cannot underestimate the power of community and societal policies to affect individual actions. Although 'no smoking' campaigns began as an individual choice for better health, the movement became most successful when it took on a larger advocacy position. Organizations advocated for policies that stopped smoking in public places, prevented companies from marketing to children, and filed class-action

law suits that held corporations accountable for selling addictive tobacco products. In the early stages of this work, the cigarette companies tried to persuade activists to focus exclusively on individual change strategy, but the larger societal approach is what truly shifted the tide towards a healthier, non-smoking norm.

When empowering individuals to become more engaged it is important to consider conditions and organizations at the community level. As one study asserts, "It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural and physical environment conspire against such change" (Smedley and Syme, 2000).

So, programs that shift social norms, develop institutional policies, and create legislative initiatives will support individual behavioral change by transforming the forces surrounding the individual. Our rapidly changing technology may also make it easier for people to reach out for help or offer assistance. For example, it is easy to imagine that if someone were to attack Kitty Genovese in today rather than 1964, someone would be able to call 911 on their cell phone to attract immediate attention.

Mandated reporting laws exemplify how social policies can shift the costs and benefits for bystanders to promote intervention in sexually violent behaviors.

Until the early 1980s, if a child disclosed abuse or someone who knew the child told someone else that the child was being sexually abused, that person - a bystander - was under no legal obligation to report the abuse or get help for the child. A shocking number of adults, and even professionals, did nothing, even when they believed a child was being sexually abused. When mandated reporting laws and anonymous reporting options passed in all 50 states, the number of reports of sexual abuse immediately skyrocketed. These mandated reporting laws carry specific costs for those who do not report (e.g., fines or jail) which contributed significantly to the dramatic increase in reports.

## Shifting Social Norms

Researchers have described the decision-to-do-nothing as bystander apathy. But few people are truly apathetic when it comes to sexual violence. When someone chooses to do nothing, it is often rooted in a social norm. Programs that promote bystander involvement recognize the importance of shifting existing social norms so that there is social pressure to do or say something instead of nothing (Berkowitz, 2003).

*Social norms are a set of standards or expectations in a community that subtly guides a group's behavior.*

Consider what new social norms might look like:

- **Encourage help-seeking behaviors.**

Because it is often hard for many of us to ask for help, a key role for bystanders is to invite and encourage requests for assistance. This could be accomplished by highlighting stories of hope, responsibility, and change for survivors, and by making sure that those at risk to abuse know that they can get help. More recently, there have been a number of efforts to encourage those at risk to abuse to reach out for help while holding them accountable for any crime they had committed.



- **Adopt policies to encourage engagement.**

There are many policies that organizations can adopt to promote the social norm of involvement and action. For example, policies may reinforce healthy sexual development in youth, such as the Our Whole Lives curriculum developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. Policies may also focus on sexual harassment training sessions such as those conducted by public agencies working with youth. When leaders in organizations and communities begin to see themselves, and the people they work with, as involved bystanders, bystander engagement can become the norm.

- **Celebrate the actions of bystanders.**

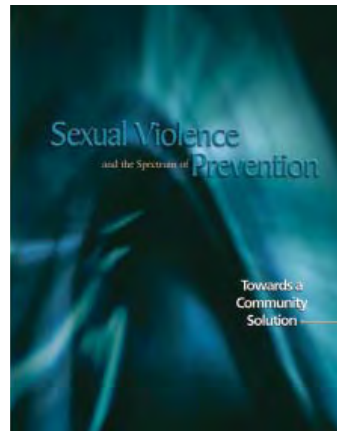
When we hear of a bystander intervention, we often breathe a sigh of relief rather than celebrating the bystander's actions. Consider the impact of giving positive recognition; when a New York City worker recently leaped onto the subway tracks to save a student having a seizure, he was given the highest honors possible in that city. Each organization can begin their own award program to honor those bystanders who choose to intervene in situations big and small.

## Develop a Multi-level Approach to Bystander Intervention

Research indicates that a multi-level approach is necessary to address the root causes of sexual violence in our society. A single simple message will not do the job. Any effective programming must address a continuum of forces that includes individuals, relationships, communities, and society at large.

*Sexual Violence and the Spectrum of Prevention: Towards a Community Solution*

**This document offers strategies for creating a comprehensive, multi-level prevention program.**

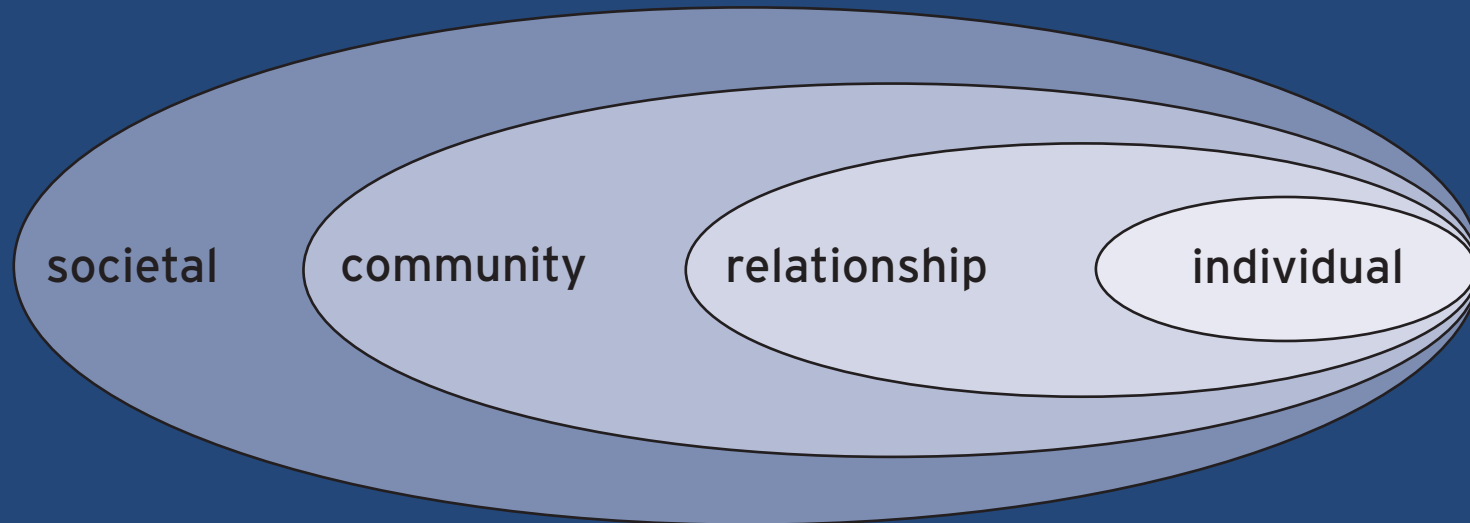


### **Individual Level:**

Provide knowledge, skills, and training on how to help. It is important that individuals learn to recognize a pattern of warning behaviors that demand a conversation or an action. Becoming an active bystander means making focused observations, asking compassionate questions, and having knowledge of what to do at various points on the continuum of inappropriate and violent behaviors.

All too often, responses to sexual violence are based on shame and denial. For example, when a family member has perpetrated sexual abuse, denial may feel easier for other family members than opening the door to an

## The Social-Ecological Model



*This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to address the factors that put people at risk for experiencing or perpetrating violence.*

*Dahlberg and Krug, 2002*

investigation that would bring shame upon the entire family. In our society, there is little motivation for individuals to speak up and tremendous pressure to keep silent when they see or sense something is wrong. Often, people do not respond because they are concerned about their own safety, or they do not know what to do; they may also feel that the level of behaviors they witness do not warrant intervention.

Individuals will more likely intervene when they have specific skills to recognize behaviors that are unhealthy or problematic and know how to intervene before abuse is perpetrated. This means that programs should teach the skills needed to reward healthy behaviors and to say or do something when unhealthy or

problematic behaviors are observed. An important and common feature of many programs is giving people an opportunity to practice what to do and say in various situations. Programs also need to outline what can be said or what to do with the friend or family member who demonstrates any of the behaviors along the continuum. This may include information about what to say around healthy relationships, especially between teens or between children.

Again, it is critical that people learn how to assess the danger in a situation, and also, when not to intervene for safety reasons. In some situations, intervention may mean seeking out other people, including professionals, and sometimes the anonymity of those involved must be assured.



# ACTIVITY TWO

## Notice and Choose Each Day

### Materials:

Flip chart and markers

Several sheets of newsprint onto which you've drawn the Continuum of Behaviors outlined below.

### Time:

5-20 minutes, depending upon the size of the group

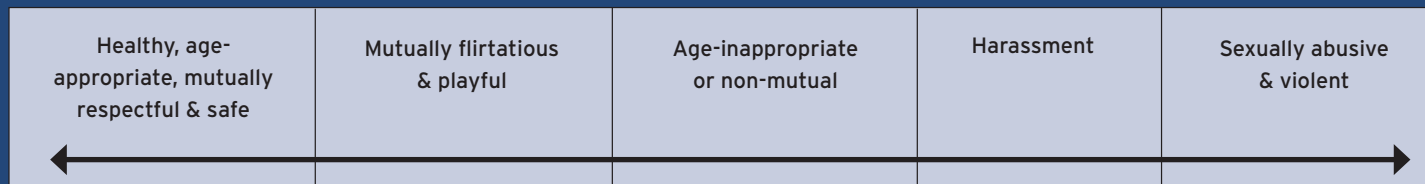
### Objective:

Participants will expand their concept of how many times and how many ways an individual (or community) can choose to become engaged.

### Suggested Use:

This activity demonstrates the concept that we all have multiple opportunities to intervene for the prevention of sexual violence every day of our lives. This exercise is appropriate to use in multi-day trainings or as an assignment prior to the beginning of a training. The exercise works best in small groups where people can share their own stories.

### Continuum of Behaviors:



### Discussion Points:

As participants begin to share their ideas about the continuum of behaviors, you can point out just how many times it is possible in any given day to say or do something. Other possibilities include how to reinforce a boundary, to ask a friend about their behaviors, to echo someone in your family who had confronted a harassing behavior and so much more. You can also point out how to reinforce the positive in relationships, especially as a way to open conversations that are not always confrontational.

### *Trainer's Note:*

*Ask participants to think about a day in their own lives and to find examples of what they saw (or did) along the continuum of behaviors that is posted in the front of the room.*

*Even during this observation phase, emphasize to participants that no one has to intervene in each situation, however, if they identify an immediate danger, it is necessary to call the police. Direct participants to write down examples of what they observed on the continuum of behaviors. Repeat that no one can reasonably respond to everything on their list, and ask them to consider what is feasible for them in any given situation. Advise them to think about which behaviors should be reinforced, which behaviors need an intervention, and which behaviors could be left alone.*

Life's most  
persistent and  
urgent question  
is 'What are you  
doing for others?'

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.





**Relationship Level:**

Tell stories and be a role model that promotes engagement.

We rarely hear or tell stories of assault in which we mention someone who tried to intervene. This absence in our stories conveys an unintentional message that no one could have changed the course of events.

To counter this message, it is important to tell survivor stories that include a friend or family member who spoke up to change the course of events. Stories of bystander intervention should also be included when we talk about offenders or those at risk for perpetration, sexual harassment, or violence.

Asking some follow-up questions after someone tells his or her story may reveal that other people played a role in how the situation unfolded. Such questions include:

- Did anyone do or say anything to help?
- Is there anything that someone could have done to help, but did not?
- Who else is/was in a position to do or say something?

For centuries, storytelling or mythology has shaped how people within a particular culture think and act. Telling stories and asking questions can show how bystanders may impact situations.

# ACTIVITY THREE

## Materials:

Flip chart and markers

Handout of scenario

## Time:

30-40 minutes, depending upon the size of the group

## Objective:

Participants will recognize how many people have the ability to do something or say something in each and every abusive situation. The exercise will also expand their concept of how many ways an individual (or community) can choose to get engaged.

## Suggested Use:

While most people agree that abuse is not perpetrated in isolation, most of us still think in terms of the victim and the abuser. Few of us immediately connect these two individuals to families, friends, work, schools, faith-based organizations or any other context. This activity is incredibly helpful in identifying the huge number of people who are in a position to say something or do something. When the visual map of everyone and their interconnections are put up in a clear diagram, the feeling of isolation is lifted. This exercise can be used with a full group or can be broken into small discussion groups and then brought together again.

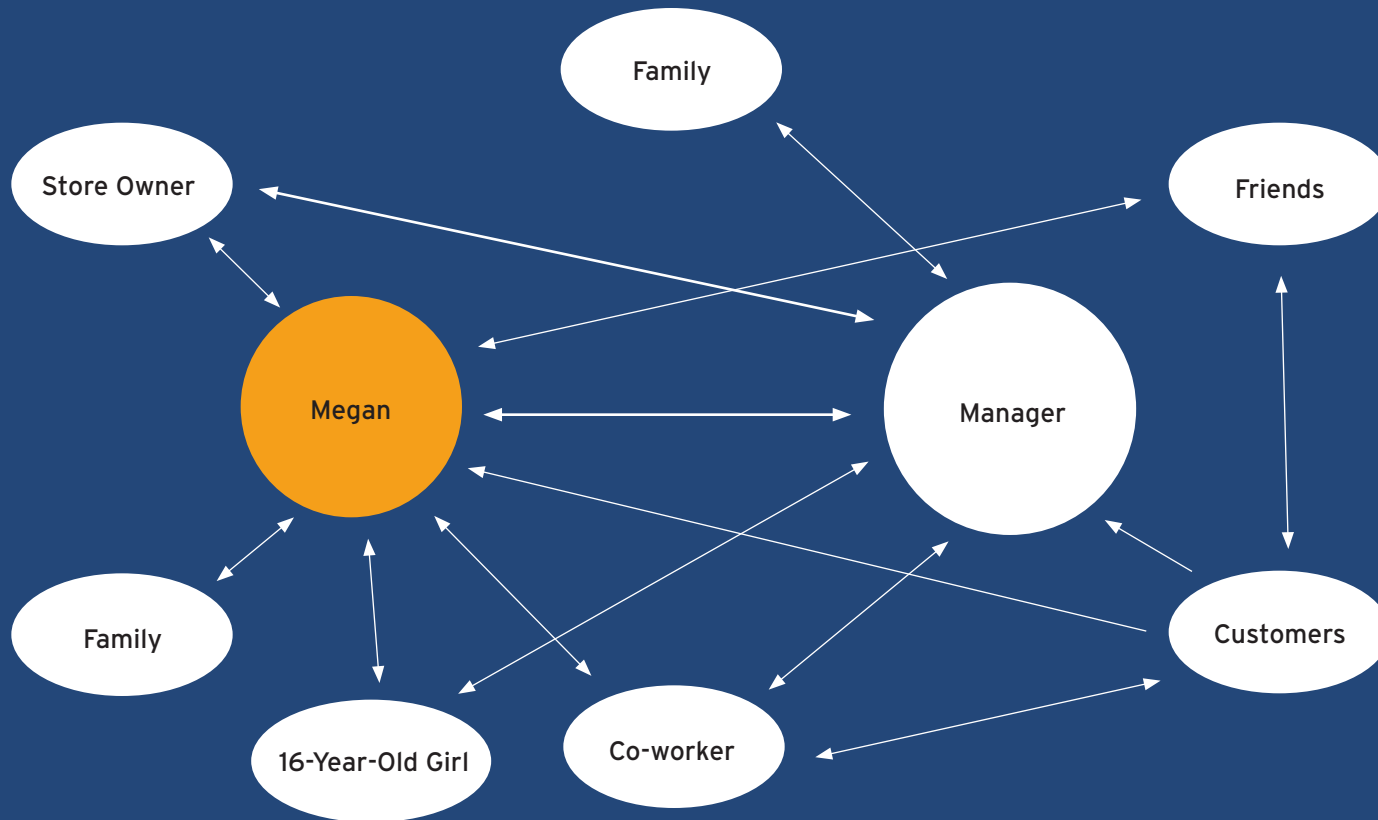
*Trainer's Note:*

*Hand out the short scenario and ask one member of the audience to read it.*

*Megan is 25 years old and works in a local food store. Her 39-year-old boss often makes sexually inappropriate jokes around the staff. Most of the staff ignores him. One day he begins to flirt with a 16-year-old customer in the store. When she leaves, he laughs and asks Megan if she thinks it is OK since it is, after all, only flirting. Faced with this question, Megan says, "It is not OK. I don't think it is healthy for anyone when a 39-year-old man sends sexual messages to a 16-year-old girl."*

*Then discuss the situation and outline the risks and benefits for Megan to say something to her boss. Next, begin to discuss who is in this scenario and whether there are other people who could take some action.*

## Paradigm Shift for Prevention: New Abuse Dynamic



### Discussion Points:

Megan gave a powerful answer. She could have shrugged off the question, afraid, perhaps, to challenge her boss. The action Megan chose to take can be framed as a bystander intervention. When one accepts the premise that everyone is a bystander, the opportunities to intervene are everywhere. List the other people in this kind of situation who could intervene:

- Other customers
- Co-workers
- Store owner
- Friends and family of the manager
- Friends and family of the 16-year-old customer
- Other stores in the area who may be familiar with the manager

Then literally map out each individual and who they are related to in the picture. (See facing page). Once you have exhausted talking about each individual and what they could do, step back and observe how many people are in the picture. This is a snapshot of everyone who can say something or do something.

**Community Level:**

Create organizational policies that encourage bystander engagement.

Promoting bystander intervention at the community level can be accomplished by changing the dynamics of a particular peer culture (Katz, 2006) or by creating organizational policies that encourage bystander engagement. It is also effective to design and offer programs and resources that support individuals to take action as bystanders. College programs and policies provide a good example of some of these changes.

In recent years, an increasing number of programs address men and women as bystanders in their college or university (Foubert et al., 2006; Banyard, 2004; Katz, 2006). Official university endorsement of these programs sets the stage for a new social norm that encourages “standing up” and “speaking out.” The education programs, especially those that involve student leaders in their outreach, reinforce this stated norm and also provide the needed skills and information. Although various bystander programs exist in a range of venues spanning all ages, it is at the college level that we see most of the bystander programs that have been formally evaluated and assessed.

## Programs Working at the Community Level

**Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)** is one of the first programs of its kind that focused on linking individual skill-building to the shifting of the social norms in college and high school environments. The program trains student leaders, including college and high school student-athletes, to use their status as respected members of the campus community to speak out against rape, battering, sexual harassment, gay-bashing, and all forms of sexist abuse and violence. Male student-athletes were targeted for prevention education programming because of their high social status and

their ability to establish and maintain masculine social norms. For more information: [www.sportinsociety.org](http://www.sportinsociety.org)

More recently, through their “strength clubs,” the organization **Men Can Stop Rape** has created a culture that encourages young men who respect girls and who refuse to join in school rituals that disrespect women. In child sexual abuse programs, there has been a similar shifting of social norms to include the explicit concept of adult responsibility in prevention. For more information: [www.mencanstoprape.org](http://www.mencanstoprape.org)

**Society Level:**

Advocate for and establish bystander programs, research, evaluation and policies.

At the societal level, positive messages in the culture and in media coverage along with policy and legislative changes may significantly impact incentives for action; such changes also illuminate the cost of doing nothing. For some, they offer a sense of hope that more action and bystander intervention will keep everyone safer.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has changed the landscape of anti-violence work, validating and funding key victim and survivor services across the country. VAWA also provides Rape Prevention Education (RPE)

funds, which is the only funding for prevention programs available to most states. Many other laws (e.g., residency restrictions for sex offenders) have focused on increasing punishment for all sexual offenses. These may have unintentionally created disincentives for many individuals, families and communities to take appropriate action in less severe cases.

These legislative changes did not happen in a vacuum, but were, in part, propelled by powerful stories told by victims and survivors over the past twenty years. In fact, as society began to recognize the prevalence and impact of sexual violence it also increased its commitment to stopping it. We can mark this growing recognition through statements from key



organizations such as the American Medical Association, who declared sexual violence as an epidemic (AMA, 1995), and through the increased media reporting on sexual violence. Additionally, the number of television programs which have story lines discussing sexual assaults as a form of violence has skyrocketed. This more sustained focus in the media helped create an environment for policy and legal changes that may ultimately improve the status and frequency of engaged bystanders.

In the end we  
will remember  
not the words  
of our enemies  
but the silence  
of our friends.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



## Summary

Many incidents of sexual violence - from the inappropriate comment at a party to sexual abuse and rape involve others; that is, others beyond the victim and the perpetrator. While in most cases, there is one person who is clearly hurt, often there are others who are affected. There may be others who saw and heard things that made them feel uncomfortable, but they did nothing to intervene. As a result, they may be haunted by their missed opportunity to prevent pain and suffering, especially when the event involved a person they love or care about.

Bystanders represent a web of people surrounding a progression of inappropriate behaviors, harassment or violence, including those who make a choice to speak up or

intervene in some way and those who do not. Bystanders can have a powerful impact on sexual violence prevention.

How do we increase the number of situations and the number of people who are willing to say or do something in the face of sexual violence?

Bystander programs represent an opportunity to influence individual decisions across a variety of communities. Some college campuses, family-based service organizations, and faith communities have already established such programs. A common goal among bystander programs is developing ways to increase people's awareness of knowing when to intervene, and how to do it safely and effectively.

Many bystander programs include these basic elements:

***Five Steps Toward Taking Action***

1. Notice the event along a continuum of actions
2. Consider whether the situation demands your action
3. Decide if you have a responsibility to act
4. Choose what form of assistance to use
5. Understand how to implement the choice safely

*Darley and Latane, 1968*

Each of these programs also offers participants the chance to practice saying or doing something in various scenarios. Even more importantly, they offer an opportunity to create and share positive stories where bystanders did act and their action made a positive difference.

Making the change from being a society of passive bystanders to one of engaged and responsible bystanders will take more than just individual actions and scattered programs across the country. We must focus on developing social norms, laws, organizational policies, and a culture that encourages people to ask questions or intervene. To create long-term social change, we must begin with individual actions and also support the actions of others. To sustain changes, many suggest that we must engage all of our communities and our society to shift these social norms and create the policies that increase the incentives and decrease the costs of taking action.

At one point in our lives, we have all been silent when we were unsure about what to do or say in a situation within our family, our circle of friends, or our community. We all know what it feels like to miss an opportunity to help someone and what it feels like to safely say something or do something that has a positive impact on someone in our lives. Imagine a time when we will be able to count on our friends and family and those in our community to stand with each other against sexual violence and to actively promote healthy relationships.



# SCENARIO INSTRUCTIONS

The following scenarios provide an opportunity to practice ways to get involved in a situation. If you want to use the scenarios in a training session, then the overview below offers some guidelines about engaging an audience in these issues.

**Materials:**

Flip chart and markers

**Time:**

Approximately 45 minutes, depending upon the size of the group and discussion time

**Objective:**

Participants will explore and share ideas about how different people in a particular situation can act.

**Suggested Use:**

This activity should be used by small groups of 4-6. Multiple groups can use a single scenario and then discuss their ideas in the larger venue.

*Trainer's Note:*

Hand out the following scenario to each small group. Review the five steps that Latane and Daley outlined in their original article:

**Five Steps Toward Taking Action**

1. Notice the event along a continuum of actions
2. Consider whether the situation demands your action
3. Decide if you have a responsibility to act
4. Choose what form of assistance to use
5. Understand how to implement the choice safely

Explain the scenario and then let each small group discuss their ideas independently. When bringing each group back to a larger discussion, emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is good to have multiple options in any given situation.

Notice the event:

What did you see or hear that concerns you?

Consider whether the situation demands action:

How does the situation affect you?

How does it affect someone else?

Decide if you have a responsibility to act:

What are the risks for taking action?

Are there others in a better position to act?

Choose the form of assistance:

What can you do?

What can you encourage in others?

Understand how to implement action:

Do you know how to implement your choice?

Do you have the resources you need?

Discussion Points

Focus the discussion on two points:

- Who could say or do something?
- What can be done?

Because it is a written scenario most will assume that it is a situation that needs an intervention.

However, if the participants have different backgrounds, professional experience or personal experience, the discussion about “who” should act and “what” should be done can often be quite engaging. The two questions above are rich for discussion purposes.

# SCENARIO ONE

## Movie Nights

*It is Friday night and you are walking by the local movie theatre with a group of friends. A male friend of yours spots a beautiful woman. He makes some loud comments about her body and starts to hassle her (Adapted from Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan, 2004).*

Some perspectives that may arise or could be pointed out to the group include:

**Consider when to intervene:** Since the “perpetrator” is a friend of yours, you have the chance to intervene immediately, later in the evening, or even the next day. The situation does not seem to impose an immediate danger. If your friend is drunk, you may not be able to reach him effectively unless you wait until he is sober.

**Acknowledge the situation:** If you decide to wait to talk with your friend, you can still acknowledge the impact on the woman. Have someone in your group steer your friend away while another apologizes to the woman for the harm caused. You can also let her know that the behavior will be addressed at a later time.

**Have the conversation:** Think about the best person(s) in your group to talk with the friend; it should be someone who cares about him and understands the impact of his actions. Begin by telling your friend you care about him. Then let him know that because you care, you are talking about the impact of his behaviors. Then describe his specific behaviors and how those behaviors make you feel. Lastly, point out how it might feel if they were directed at someone he loves.



# SCENARIO TWO

## Designated Dancer

*You are dancing in a bar with a group of friends. A young man joins your circle of dancers and begins to monopolize one woman's attention. It is loud, so you can't hear what they are saying to each other. He has moved in the way of seeing her face, cutting her off from the rest of your group. (Adapted from Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) discussion group).*

Some perspectives that may arise or could be pointed out to the group include:

**Find out what she wants:** The first step is to make eye contact with your friend to see if she wants help. If she does, find ways to pull her out of the situation (e.g., you can walk up to your friend with a concerned look and ask

if she will come to the bathroom). If you are not sure what is needed, you can ask her directly or even text message her to ask how she's feeling.

**Add an ounce of prevention:** Before going out, groups of friends may talk about how to look out for each other in the bar. Some may talk about strategies to intervene safely without escalating the situation. Others may talk about how to do a "dance block," to dance away the friend in need. It may be possible to have a "designated dancer" who will interrupt a dance if someone wants to get out of a situation quietly.

# SCENARIO THREE

## Adults are Talking

*Your friend tells you about how a six-year-old boy neighbor is pushing her five-year-old daughter into playing “pants down” games. The daughter is uncomfortable with doing what the boy wants, but is not sure what to do. Your friend teaches her daughter to say “no” and to call her whenever it happens. She wants to know if there is anything else she should do.*

Some other perspectives that may arise or could be pointed out to the group include:

**Acknowledge what went well:** Your friend has done a lot right and should be complemented. She has a relationship with her daughter in which the daughter will talk with her. She asked gentle questions about what happened. She let her know that she is not alone and will be

available whenever her daughter needs her. She also gave her daughter some clear messages about what to say.

**Monitor behaviors:** The children in this situation are young and may need help in changing their dynamic and behaviors. Some simple ideas are to ask the children to play in sight of an adult and make a clear rule that closed doors are not allowed. While they are playing, take the time to come into the room to pick up a laundry basket, deliver snacks, or in other ways look in to see what is happening.

**Discuss adult responsibilities:** Your friend asked what else can be done. She has advised her daughter to talk with the little boy. Your friend can also talk with the other mother, father or guardian. Their discussion does not

# SCENARIO FOUR

need to be an argument, but rather a connected conversation between concerned parents. Suggest that they talk about how they set boundaries in each of their families and how to send a consistent message to their children about appropriate touching.

## You Don't Know My Life

*You see a man and woman in the supermarket checkout line begin to argue. He yells at her for what she has bought, how much she wants to spend, and how she cooks. He continues to yell and begins to criticize how she looks. You see the woman cringe at the yelling, but she makes no effort to leave. (Adapted from BARCC discussion group).*

Some other perspectives that may arise or could be pointed out to the group include:

Leave the decision to those involved. It may feel good to you to yell at the man, but you don't know the impact it will have on the woman. It is better to find a way to quietly ask her what she needs or to offer her a ride or some other way to leave the situation. Depending upon the circumstance, it may also be possible to interrupt the situation for a moment with humor or other distraction, so they have a prompt to interrupt their own escalation. (e.g., Gently say "Excuse me sir, can you please pass the bar to separate the groceries?")

**Talk about her options:** If she takes the ride or another option, ask her more about her situation, about any friends or relatives who can support her, about any available resources in the community, and what she may want to do.



# SCENARIO PLOTS

## PLAYING DOCTOR

Your 5 year old daughter just told you that a six year old boy in the neighborhood wants to play “doctor” every time they get together. You talk with your daughter about how to say “no” and commend her for bringing this up to you. You ask a close friend if there is anything else that could be done in this situation.

## LOUD STUMBLING

As you enter a residence hall at your college, you see a couple stumbling down the hallway. Their hands are all over each other in a clearly sexual way. A few minutes later, you hear a struggle, then loud voices and yelling coming from the room they entered. (*Adapted from Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan, 2004*).

## CARPOOL BRAVADO

You are driving your teen son and his friends home from a movie and one of them says to the rest, “yeah, you know she is always up for it, I can’t wait to ‘hit that’ Saturday night!” (or “yeah, my uncle’s bachelor’s party is this weekend, and my dad’s gonna get us all set up for what we really need...”).

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