

HOW UPSTANDERS CAN INTERVENE TO PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

WHAT IS A BYSTANDER?

A bystander is someone who witnesses problematic language or behavior between people, either in person or online, and is not directly involved. A bystander can choose to do nothing or do something when they witness something concerning.

WHAT IS AN UPSTANDER?

An upstander is someone who witnesses problematic language or behavior between people, either in person or online, and decides to do something about it. An upstander is a bystander who has chosen to do something. Sometimes the term “active bystander” is used to describe an upstander.

HOW CAN UPSTANDERS HELP PREVENT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE?

Many instances of harassment and violence occur in the presence of bystanders. [Research](#) shows that a person is less likely to intervene in an emergency situation when others are present than when they are alone. It is a natural inclination to assume that someone else will address the problem. But what if no one else does? For many upstanders, this is the question that drives them to act. And when they do, it gives others permission to do the same.

HOW CAN BYSTANDERS BECOME UPSTANDERS?

In order for a bystander to become an upstander, they need to first identify problematic language or behavior and then decide to do something about it. Often, this is as simple as listening to their “gut” instinct and noticing when something just doesn’t feel right. If a person is exerting power or control over another person in some way, is pressuring someone to do something they may not be comfortable with, or is saying things about a person online or in person that is unwelcome or inappropriate, those may be opportunities for an upstander to step up and help shift the course of the situation. In some cases there isn’t a threat of immediate violence, but the actions are meant to degrade or disempower an individual or group. When we intervene in these situations, we can help disrupt harmful attitudes and maybe even prevent sexual violence.

Look at the Upstander Scenarios and Discussion Guide for some ideas on opportunities to be an Upstander.

WHAT CAN AN UPSTANDER DO WHEN THEY NOTICE A CONCERN AND DECIDE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

There are many options for intervening in a situation where there is a potential for harm, and they do not all involve direct confrontation. Every situation is different and may call for a different response. The [Rape Abuse and Incest National Network](#) offers a [model](#) for those who choose to be upstanders which includes 4 tactics:

- **C**reate a distraction.
- **A**sk directly.
- **R**efers to authority.
- **E**nlist others.

In some cases, more than one intervention may be necessary. For example, if initially an attempt to create a distraction is made and the behavior continues, it may be necessary to enlist others or refer to a person of authority. Additionally, depending on the nature of the situation, the approach taken with each of these tactics may look very different. And in some cases other strategies may be needed. The Upstander Scenarios and Discussion Guide document offers intervention options to consider in a variety of situations related to sexual harassment and violence.

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DOES TALKING ABOUT BEING AN UPSTANDER PUT THE ONUS ON GIRLS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE?

We all can be part of creating a community where girls and all young people are safe, respected, and valued. While we want all girls to feel empowered to intervene when they see problematic language and behavior, we also want them to know that they should not feel unduly responsible for protecting their peers, especially if violence does occur. The ultimate responsibility to prevent violence among youth rests on those initiating the act and on adults.

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

Girls Inc. Resources

A number of Girls Inc. toolkits and publications address upstander behavior, including providing support and intervention. Although many of the activities focus on bullying and teasing, especially for younger girls, the behaviors and situations may be useful for discussing sexual harassment or laying a foundation for later discussions. The activities and resources help girls build an understanding of the harmful nature of teasing, bullying, and harassment; gain a sense of their and others' right to be safe; and figure out how they can stand up, be supportive, or seek help in such situations.

Girls Inc. Project Bold:

[Be Bold](#): Cluster 2 is about friends and peers, starting on page 167. Some of the key messages in this cluster help girls understand that they can seek help and stand up.

[Action for Safety](#): Session 6 is on teasing and bullying, starting on page 125 (includes Facilitator Resource on discussing bullying with girls and an activity on cyberbullying). One point of discussion concerns the impact of standing by and doing nothing.

[Living Safe & Strong](#): Session 3 focuses on teasing and bullying, starting on page 137. You might find Session 4 on defining sexual harassment helpful as well.

Girls Inc. Healthy Sexuality:

[Informed and In Charge](#): Module I, Session 11 is on standing up to sexual harassment, starting on page 209. Module 2, Session 7 is on breaking down bullying, starting on page 325.

External Resources

More information about upstander behavior and options for intervening can be found here:

[ItsOnUs.org](#): A National Movement To End Sexual Assault

[RAINN.org](#): Steps You Can Take To Prevent A Sexual Assault

[StopBullying.Gov](#): Research and Resources on Bystander Intervention