

## Active Bystander Intervention

By Valerie Lenis



Every person has the power to intervene in a situation and be an active bystander; whether that means stopping harassment or bullying, preventing assault, or simply pointing out a disturbing or unpleasant comment. An extremely high number of people, especially teens, will experience some form of abuse in their lifetime. In fact, 1 in 3 teens report experiencing abuse in their romantic relationships, including verbal and emotional abuse (National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health). Additionally, 20.8% of students will experience bullying while in school (National Center for Education Statistics). Yet, when bystanders intervene, bullying stops within 10 seconds at least 57% of the time (Hawkins, D. L).

An engaged and effective bystander is someone that speaks up when they see something happening that seems wrong or potentially harmful. By simply intervening during these situations, you can support the affected person, and potentially stop future incidents. Intervening can be as simple as creating a distraction or removing the affected people from the situation.

However, there are also significant factors that might prevent a bystander from intervening. For example, it might be too dangerous to get involved in, and the bystander may not feel comfortable enough to intervene. Hence, in the case of a critically dangerous situation, a bystander can still make an impact by contacting the police or reporting the instance after. Additionally, there are several strategies to intervene safely and effectively. For instance, one can focus on diversion, and distract the people involved. Also, one can directly interact with the people involved, by either confronting the harasser or helping the victim. Furthermore,

one can assist by reporting to the situation to authorities, or in the case of teen violence, a responsible adult.

Women's Support Services offers more information on what it means to be an active bystander and an influential person in violence-prevention. WSS also offers bilingual services to victims of abuse regardless of their ability to speak English, their immigration status, or their financial state. WSS serves the Northwest corner of Connecticut and the border towns in New York and can help connect clients to the appropriate resources and agencies, such as Grace Smith House in Poughkeepsie. WSS is free of charge, and does not report to ICE.