



EQUAL AT WORK

Manager Guide

Bystander Awareness

What is a bystander?

A bystander is a person who is present but not involved in a situation or event. A bystander could be someone who sees or knows about unwanted, threatening or inappropriate behaviour happening to someone else.

The bystander isn't the target of the harassment, bullying or discrimination, but rather a witness that can take action to interrupt the situation, prevent harm and report the incident.

The role a bystander can play

Bystanders have a unique opportunity to lead, help others, and positively shape their work culture or environment.

Bystander action can set a precedent for the rest of the team and serve as a role model for company values and inclusive behaviour. A bystander does not have to be a hero to practice bystander action, but they do play a part in helping to create a safe and comfortable environment for everyone at work.

When might an employee be a bystander?

Employees may be bystanders when they:

- Overhear inappropriate jokes, comments or banter
- Notice a team member being talked over, dismissed or undermined during meetings or discussions
- Become aware of gossip, rumours or negative talk about a colleague who is not present
- See someone being excluded from meetings or team activities without clear reason
- Observe bullying, harassment or misuse of power
- Hear about concerning behaviour after the event

Why take action as bystander

Victims of bullying, discrimination or sexual harassment rarely report the incident either because they were fearful that reporting would have a negative impact, they did not think they would be taken seriously, or they were worried it may make the situation worse.

Because so few people report their experiences of these negative and sometimes unlawful behaviours, bystanders have a unique opportunity and responsibility to send a powerful message about acceptable behaviour at work. Bystander action might empower a co-worker in need and strengthen the team and work culture.

How to take action

A bystander can take action if they witness negative behaviour, or if someone tells the bystander it has occurred. The action a bystander may take depends on the situation, however every action can make a difference.

Notice and name it: Recognise negative behaviour when it happens. Don't dismiss or ignore it, acknowledge it for what it is.

Speak up or escalate: If it is safe to do so, address the behaviour directly and ask for it to stop. With the affected person's permission, raise the issue with a supervisor or manager.

Support the person affected by:

- listening and taking their concerns seriously
- helping them understand relevant workplace policies and procedures
- providing information about reporting or complaint options
- encouraging them to take action
- offering to support or accompany them if they choose to report

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How to intervene safely and effectively

Intervening as a bystander doesn't have to be confrontational or risky. Small, considered actions can help prevent harm and change the outcome of a situation. A bystander can choose the approach that feels safest for them and is most appropriate for the situation. There is no single "right" way to intervene, different strategies work in different circumstances.

The 5 D's below outline practical ways an employee can take action as a bystander. (A downloadable A4 poster of the 5D's is also available for employees)



DISTRACT the participants to interrupt the incident.

You could knock something over or spill something by 'accident', anything to break the focus of the person provoking the incident.

You could ask a colleague being targeted for help with something you're doing.

You could ask a customer being targeted for more information on their order, pretend you know them, or talk to them about something completely random.



DELEGATE by recruiting others to help.

Look for a delegate close by who is ready and willing to help. Call for your supervisor/team leader/manager, security, or seek help from your colleagues or even members of the public if the situation is getting worse.



DOCUMENT what is happening.

Be sure to include the date, time, and place in recordings or notes and keep them on file. They may be needed later. After the incident is over, offer what you documented to the person being targeted. **Do not post any recording online without the consent of the person being attacked**, it could just cause them more trauma.



DELAY stepping in until the incident is over.

Let the person being targeted know afterwards that you saw what happened and it wasn't okay. Ask if they need help or support to contact a friend or family member, or just sit with them for a bit and debrief. Offer them any notes or recordings you have made.



DIRECT approach (use caution with this one).

ASSESS THE SITUATION FIRST to decide whether you and the person being harassed are physically safe before speaking out. Calmly tell the person doing the harassing that it's not okay. You could say things like:

"This is a WE'RE EQUAL venue. We're committed to equal respect for everyone."

"This business values equal respect for everyone. Being disrespectful is not okay here."

"That person has the right to feel comfortable here, just like you do. Being disrespectful is not okay."

"Please be respectful or leave the premises."

It takes courage to speak up but don't underestimate the positive impact that calling out workplace bullying, harassment, or discrimination can have