



Bystander Intervention for Witnesses to Bullying - What Can I Do?



Bullying can only exist in environments and cultures that tolerate it. If you see bullying behaviors, say something. Remember: preventing and stopping workplace bullying starts with each of us. As bystanders we might think “it’s not my responsibility” to intervene, especially if no one else does. We can also decide that regardless of others’ actions, we can take the responsibility to act. You decide how, to what extent you intervene, and when to enlist assistance from other bystanders.

Pay Attention

- We all need to be active bystanders and make a conscious effort to watch for bullying behaviors.
- Don’t assume “someone else” will notice and intervene.
- In a group setting, you may be less likely to notice when intervention is needed.

Assess the Situation

- Determine if it requires intervention:
 - Decide for yourself whether this is a situation that requires intervention.
 - Base your response on the situation, not on the behavior of those around you.
 - Check to ensure you are not projecting your own biases.
- If the target of bullying needs help:
 - Determine if you are in an appropriate position to intervene.
 - If not, seek out someone who is.
- Be aware that alleged perpetrators may not recognize the impact of their behavior.
 - Simply acknowledging or calling attention to the issue can interrupt the behavior.

Intervene Safely

- There are situations when public intervention might be counter-productive.
 - In such situations, try to make eye-contact with the target to communicate your support.
 - If possible, speak to the bully later in a more appropriate setting.

Techniques for Intervening

- Decide
 - Take a moment.
 - Breathe.
 - Try and process the situation before responding.
- Diffuse
 - Ask the bully a question.
 - Call the bully over to an area away from the target.
 - Remove the target from the situation.



Techniques for Intervening (continued)

- Delegate
 - Seek support – you don't have to do this alone.
 - Support can be provided by bystanders, colleagues, supervisors, or management.

- Dialogue
 - Exercise empathy – it can be effective.
 - Respond in a non-judgmental, non-argumentative tone.
 - Tell the bully you are uncomfortable with their behavior and it is not acceptable.
 - Ask the bully what they are experiencing.
 - Be aware that direct intervention can be dangerous, especially if alcohol or drugs are involved.

- Document
 - Take a cell phone picture.
 - Take notes of what you see happening.
 - Take notes about other potential witnesses.

After the Intervention

- Debrief
 - The effects of bullying aren't limited to the target. If you intervened you may want to seek support for yourself.
 - Continue the conversation around bullying in the workplace with colleagues and supervisors to discourage unacceptable behavior.

For more information on how to stop bullying, harassment and intimidation, visit

btshelp.org/stopbullying.