

TALKING WITH ATHLETES ABOUT BYSTANDER INTERVENTION



Use the points below to introduce your athletes to bystander intervention. Go through the scenarios on the next page to help your athletes learn how to respond when witnessing inappropriate, hurtful, or abusive behavior. Consider changing the scenarios to fit your own sport or team context.

WHAT IS BYSTANDER INTERVENTION?

Bystander intervention is when a person does something to stop inappropriate, hurtful, or abusive behavior when they see it. They do not ignore the situation or hope someone else will act. **No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.**

THERE ARE FIVE STEPS IN BYSTANDER INTERVENTION.¹

- ❑ **Notice** a concerning or harmful event is happening (or may happen)
 - » *Is there anything in this situation that bothers me?*
- ❑ **Decide** whether action is needed in the situation
 - » *This is a gut-check moment. Does something need to be done?*
- ❑ **Assume responsibility** for acting or delegating
 - » *Is it my responsibility to do something? If I don't, who will?*
- ❑ **Figure out** your options for intervening and identify risks and barriers to acting
 - » *What actions can I take comfortably? What might make it difficult to act? What kind of power do I have in this situation?*
- ❑ **Understand** how to carry out the action safely
 - » *How will I keep myself safe while taking this action? What might help the person being harmed feel safer in this situation?*

Continues

1. Darley, J. M., & Latane, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8, 377-383.

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BYSTANDER INTERVENTION OPTIONS

There is no one best way to intervene in a situation. You may intervene differently than someone else, and that is okay. In deciding how to respond, it can be helpful to think of “5 Ds”²:

- **DISTRACT**
Create a diversion, like asking the people involved what time it is, changing the subject, or asking one of them to help you with a task.
- **DELEGATE**
Get someone else to address the concern, such as a friend, parent, teacher, or coach.
- **DOCUMENT**
Record the date, time, location, information about people involved, and a summary of what happened. Give the information to someone with more power to act.
- **DELAY**
Buy time until it is safer to intervene. You can also wait until you can have a private conversation with the person acting inappropriately about your concerns.
- **BE DIRECT**
If you feel safe, say something in the moment. You can tell someone to stop their harmful behavior or that their inappropriate joke is not funny. You can also ask the person being harmed if they want to leave.

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2. Adapted from “The “5 Ds” of Bystander Intervention.” Right to Be. (2024). righttobe.org/guides/bystander-intervention-training.

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BYSTANDER INTERVENTION SCENARIOS

How would you respond to the following scenarios? Think about realistic responses and choose an action you would feel comfortable taking. You can choose one or a combination of options, or you can make up your own.

SCENARIO 1

Two of your teammates are dating. One day, your teammate begins berating their partner for not returning text messages and accuses the partner of cheating with another teammate.

- » **DISTRACT:** Interrupt the couple or ask your friend to come help you with something.
- » **DELEGATE:** Talk to your coach or parent about your teammate's behavior and ask for help addressing the situation.
- » **BE DIRECT:** If you feel comfortable, tell your teammate to stop. When you and your teammate are alone, let them know that you are concerned they are being abusive and hurtful to their partner. Tell them that is not okay.

SCENARIO 2

You notice that one of your coaches often insults and taunts one of your teammates, who is gay.

- » **DISTRACT:** Ask your teammate to come help you with something whenever you see your teammate alone with the coach.
- » **DELEGATE:** Talk to another coach or a parent about your concerns.
- » **BE DIRECT:** Ask your teammate if they are okay. Tell them you think the coach is harassing them because they are gay and that is not okay.

SCENARIO 3

Your friends post mean and harassing comments online when another athlete's report of misconduct goes public. They are saying that the athlete is lying, ruining the sport for everyone, and should be kicked out of the sport.

- » **DISTRACT:** Try to change the subject so your friends stop talking about the athlete.
- » **DELEGATE:** Ask a coach or parent for help with the situation.
- » **BE DIRECT:** Tell your friends to stop insulting the athlete because public comments like that may make other athletes afraid to report abuse.