

## WHAT IT IS

Bystander empowerment equips college students with the awareness, skills, confidence, and support necessary to safely and effectively intervene when they witness harmful, risky, or potentially dangerous situations involving their peers. It is commonly used to address bullying and sexual violence, as well as harassment based on individual differences. The goal is to transition students from being passive witnesses to active participants in creating a safer, more respectful, and inclusive campus community. This means shaping a community where caring for one another and addressing concerning behaviors is encouraged, valued, and recognized, rather than stigmatized or penalized. Some common programs include [Step Up!](#), [No Zebras](#), and [The Green Dot](#). These programs address a variety of harms that occur, including bullying behavior, discrimination, and harassment related to protected classes (disability, gender, race, and ethnicity), as well as addressing all forms of sexual violence.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

This educational approach to helping others is useful for both individuals and groups such as athletics programs, residential life programs, and Greek Life. It has also been used with individuals through student conduct, counseling, or other educational processes to teach the importance of intervention when witnessing concerning behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. What are some behaviors that could be addressed with a bystander empowerment/intervention process?
2. Why is it important to have a range of responses when we teach this approach, such as direct, distract, delegate, and delay?

## TEACHING INSIGHTS

Before any action can happen, we need to start with awareness. This means helping students recognize behaviors that are inappropriate, unsafe, discriminatory, harassing, or potentially escalating toward harm. There has been some evolution in the terms over the past decades.

- **Bystander Effect:** Describes why people are less likely to help in an emergency or harmful situation when others are present, often due to diffusion of responsibility, fear, or uncertainty. A prominent example is the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese in New York.
- **Bystander Intervention:** This term describes the act of directly or indirectly stepping in to prevent harm, stop inappropriate behavior, or support someone in need.
- **Bystander Empowerment:** This newer term expands on bystander intervention, offering a range of actions such as distraction or delay.

The 4Ds are described in the student sheet, but an easy way to think about these is:

Direct = “Call it out.” Distract = “Change the channel.” Delegate = “Find backup.” Delay = “Check in later.”

One of the challenges of teaching these concepts to students is finding relatable examples that align with their existing core values. Bystander empowerment can’t be taught like the old school “Just say no to drugs,” with overly simplified or fear-based approaches. It requires obtaining buy-in from the student, so the behavior is seen as an important one that they need to commit to make changes in the community.