

The Power of the Bystander:

10 Situations of Violence Where Your Response Matters



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10 Situations of Violence Where Your Response Matters



What to Do in Case of Peer Violence

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology, “bullying is a form of aggressive behavior in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying can take the form of physical contact, words, or more subtle actions. The bullied individual typically has trouble defending himself or herself and does nothing to ‘cause’ the bullying. Cyberbullying is verbally threatening or harassing behavior conducted through such electronic technology as cell phones, email, social media, or text messaging”.

Psychologist Olweus suggests that for a bullying intervention program to be successful, schools must do the following:

- ▶ Place primary responsibility for solving the problem with the adults at school rather than with parents or students.
- ▶ Project a clear moral stand against bullying.
- ▶ Include both system-oriented and individual-oriented components.
- ▶ Set long-term and short-term goals.
- ▶ Target the entire school population, not just a few problem students.
- ▶ Make the program a permanent component of the school environment, not a temporary remedial program.
- ▶ Implement strategies that have a positive effect on students and on the school climate that go beyond the problem of bullying.



Scenario 1:

A student in elementary school is exposed to physical violence by an older student on a daily basis. An older student hits him and forces him to give him his pocket money. The victim is afraid to report the violence because he is afraid of revenge and isolation from his peers.

Suggested bystander interventions:

- 1 Distract:** The next time you find yourself as a bystander, go approach the victim. **If you are a student, ask him:** “Can you come and help me with my homework? I really need help.” or “Hey, do you happen to know where I can find materials for the next class? Would you be kind enough to come with me and help me find it?” or “Look at this video that I just saw! It’s wild!” **If you are a teacher, say:** “Students, what do you think about having a lecture outside today?” or “Hey, thank you for recommending that book the other day, it is great, have you finished it?” If you are a parent try: “Could you show me the way to the sports hall? My daughter is waiting for me there.”
- 2 Delegate:** Seek help from the adults if you are a student (teachers, pedagogue, psychologist, administration or parents). If you are a parent, make sure to seek help from the school administration and pedagogical and psychological service. Think about including government institutions, if needed, like social services.
- 3 Document:** Make a picture/video that you could use as a proof of the situation and only use it as such! Write down who was present in the situation as other bystanders - they can serve as witnesses.
- 4 Delay:** To delay, you can ask/say: “What is happening? How are you feeling? What can I do for you?” or “Can I bring you anything, food or water? Is it okay if I bring help?”
- 5 Direct:** If it is safe enough for the victim and yourself, try confronting the perpetrator. Say: “I am witnessing this for the second time. What you are doing is not okay. You are hurting him and this must stop.”



Scenario 2:

In sports class, you are divided into groups for volleyball practice. One group does not want to accept a Roma girl. They call her vile names and insult her.

- 1 **Distract:** Ask the group: “What is the tactic you use for this game?” or: “This rivalry is high, how about we take it to the field”.
- 2 **Delegate:** Share what is happening with a teacher and ask the teacher to intervene and take charge and address the situation.
- 3 **Document:** Write up the names of the group that would insult the victim. Include the vile names. Record the sound, but possibly avoid the video as all actors are underage and could pose problems if used in a wrong way.
- 4 **Delay:** Ask the group to wait for the teacher to divide groups.
- 5 **Direct:** Support the victim by picking her to your group. Say: “She has the best skills for smashing. We want you in our team, we have better chances to win.”

What to Do in Case of Sexual Harassment

Intervening in the case of sexual harassment is essential to protect the victim, provide support and prevent further abuse. We arrange every form of action with the victim of violence so that we can choose the steps we need or should not do. Below are suggestions on how to resolve the situation if the victim agrees.

The most important thing is to ensure the safety of the victim. If you are currently in a dangerous situation, call an ambulance or local police to ensure quick action.

Example: If someone shares their experience of sexual harassment with you, you can say something like, “I trust you. You’re not alone in this. I understand how hard it is for you.”

Listen and trust the victim. It is important to support the victim and trust him/her. Listen to his/her story without judgment and do not doubt his/her sincerity. The story he/she shares is his/her truth.

Example: You may ask yourself, “What do you want to do? Do you want to talk to someone? Should I help contact the relevant authorities?”

Encourage the victim to report the incident to the relevant authorities, such as the police or school/business authorities. If the victim wants it, you can offer to help them file a report.

Example: You can say, “You have the option to report the incident to the relevant authorities, seek legal help, consult a therapist, or contact organizations that provide support to victims of sexual violence.”

Recommend that the victim seek legal help. This may include contacting lawyers, victims’ rights organizations or victim support centers.

Example: You can offer an escort, provide information on how the application was filed, or offer to contact legal aid together.

Recommend that the victim seek medical attention, if necessary. These include injury screening, STD testing and possible contraception, if applicable.

Example: You can advise: “It is important to seek medical attention to check for possible injuries and undertake the necessary testing for SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STD).”

Adjust the support to the victim. Respect the victim’s wishes and boundaries. If the victim does not want to take some steps, support their decision.

Example: If a victim decides that she does not want to report the case to the police at that point, respect their decision and offer other forms of support.

Encourage the victim to turn to experts for support and counseling.

Example: You may suggest that you contact victim support centers, psychologists, psychotherapists, or organizations specialized in victim assistance.

Encourage conversation about sexual violence in your social environment to raise awareness and work on prevention.



Scenario 1:

In public transport, a man inappropriately touches a woman in front of him. You notice that she is aware of it but looks scared to react in public.

- 1 **Distract:** Approach the woman and pretend that you know her. Say: *"Hey, we haven't seen each other in such a long time. How are you?"*
- 2 **Delegate:** Ask a person next to you to react, explaining that you don't feel safe enough to do so.
- 3 **Document:** Take a picture of the abuser. If it is too "obvious" and you fear further escalation, write down the description of the abuser, what time it happened and the number of the vehicle in which it happened. Try to provide as much information as possible. You can offer it to the victim as the information to be shared with the authorities.
- 4 **Delay:** Try to stand between the abuser and the victim. Ask the victim if she is okay, what she would like to do and if she wants you to react in a specific way.
- 5 **Direct:** Be vocal about what is happening if the victim is okay with that. Say, *"What you are doing is sexual harassment, sir, if you do not stop immediately I will call the police."*



Scenario 2:

A group of your friends during a school break sends explicit and unwanted messages to a boy you go to class with. He is sitting on the stairs alone, visibly upset.

- 1 **Distract:** Find a thing that will interest your friends more than harassing the boy, like a video or a hot topic about your favorite famous person.
- 2 **Delegate:** Go approach the boy's closest friend and ask for help. Make a strategy on how to approach the situation - one can intervene directly and confront the abusers, while another one can offer help to the boy. Include the adults (teachers, pedagogue or psychologist) if the victim agrees.
- 3 **Document:** Discreetly take a picture of the content and the abusers, making sure that the victim's identity is safe. Use these materials only to seek further help and as evidence. Ask the victim to keep screenshots of the messages as evidence.
- 4 **Delay:** Wait to come home to ask your parents for help, while protecting the identity of the victim.
- 5 **Direct:** Confront your friends. State your values and boundaries. Say: *"As I remember, our group's value is respect. What you are doing is not showing respect for our classmates. It is a form of abuse. I am not sure if I want to stay in such an environment and I think I might report this to our school management"*.

What to Do in Case of Domestic Violence

The bystander intervention in domestic violence situations plays a key role in protecting the victims, providing support and preventing further abuse. Here are a few steps a bystander can take in case of domestic violence:

- ▶ First of all, the bystander should ensure the safety of the victim. If the victim is at risk, calling local police can be the first step to ensure emergency intervention.
- ▶ It is important to stay calm so you can intervene reasonably and effectively.
- ▶ Do not engage directly in physical confrontations. Avoid physical confrontation with the abuser in order to avoid further danger to everyone present.
- ▶ Distress call: If you are a witness to violence, call local police so that experts can respond quickly.
- ▶ Provide a safe place for the victim.
- ▶ Provide emotional support. Listen to the victim, trust the victim and show

understanding for the difficult situation the victim is going through.

- ▶ Do not blame the victim. Instead, focus on support, safety and security.
- ▶ Encourage the victim to seek professional help. Recommend that the victim contact local humanitarian organizations dealing with victims of domestic violence, which provide counseling, legal assistance and safe shelter.
- ▶ If possible and safe, try to record relevant details such as date, time, location and description of the event so that this information can be used later in legal proceedings.
- ▶ Encourage the victim to file a report. If the victim is ready, support the victim's decision to report violence to the relevant authorities.

It is important to keep in mind that the safety of everyone involved in the process is paramount. If the situation becomes dangerous, give up and call local authorities for help.

Scenario 1:

In the apartment below, you hear an adult person shouting, loud banging and a child crying over a long period of time.

Try using “The 5 Core Questions” to assess the situation.

- 1 What is the goal?** Your goal is to find the best way to respond to the situation. Your need is to protect the child and the others who might be in the room where the violence is happening. As you are not in the room, your task is to collect as much information as you can by observing and noting in order to be able to seek help.
- 2 Go through the five decision-making steps:**
 - Notice the event** - Note down when you heard the first signs of the violence - banging, crying, voices (count the voices to find out how many people there are in the room, how long it has lasted, whether you noticed right away or you were distracted before and heard when it became too hard to not notice...)
 - Interpret it as a problem/emergency** - A child and possibly other people are in the closed environment and might not be able to leave that space, therefore, the risk for serious injuries and consequences is higher. Your responsibility is important - how fast do you react?
 - Assume personal responsibility** - You list all the possibilities for your actions - going to the



door and knocking to distract and potentially enter the room to directly confront the abuser or give support to the victim(s); calling police or social services to seek institutional support; informing and calling other residents to create a group response...

Have the skills to intervene - You assess your skills and knowledge of what are you capable of doing the best and what would give the results. (e.g. you are not so strong therefore you don't feel safe to confront the abuser alone, but you have group chat with the number of residents with whom you hang out - you decide first to inform them and then to ask for help)

Implement the Help – Step UP! - Other residents respond and you approach the situation together: a group goes to the apartment to intervene directly, one person calls the police and others offer space for the victims as a shelter once they get out of the abusive situation.

- 3 What could you do to make the intervention safe, early and effective?** First, ensure your own safety and call the local police if the situation seems dangerous, inform others, provide shelter, reach out to the victim with empathy and compassion to encourage the victim to feel safe and supported.
- 4 Costs/Rewards** – What are the benefits of intervening? What are some costs? What are some costs of NOT intervening? - Benefits: security of the victims, gives others the confidence to speak up, personal satisfaction in providing help and saving a person from the potential harm, influences others to change their behavior. Costs: your own safety is put at risk, retaliation or attack in the future by the abuser; Costs of NOT intervening: victims could suffer serious injuries that can end up even with death, abuser perpetuates abusive behavior and continues violence, abuser is not held accountable.
- 5 Perspective Taking** – How would you feel if you were the “victim”? What would you be thinking? What would you want others to do for you? - Possible feelings could be fear, isolation, being trapped in the situation and space. Shame, guilt could arise too, with a fear of being judged by others. Possible thoughts that could arise could be about the ways to protect yourself, on how to escape the situation. Thoughts on self-blame could arise too. Possible expectations from others could be understanding, support, shelter providing, reacting fast and helping without judgment and with belief in what has happened.



Scenario 2:

You witness a physical confrontation between your parents in the living room. Your parents do not notice you are there.

- 1 **Distract:** Seek help from the victim parent - pretend that you are hurt by a friend or that you just now found out about a low grade you got in school.
- 2 **Delegate:** Call your grandparents to share what is happening and ask them to come and help.
- 3 **Document:** Find the phone of your parents or yours if you have it and record the situation.
- 4 **Delay:** Ask a friend or family if they have ever been in such a situation and what they did, ask them to help you learn how to react the best.
- 5 **Direct:** If you feel safe, react directly - confront the parent abuser and help shield the parent victim. You can do so by just coming into the room and hugging the victim parent.

What to Do in Case of Substance Abuse

Bystander intervention in a situation of drug abuse can be key to providing support and assistance to a person facing an addiction problem.

Bystanders can be educated about the signs and symptoms of drug, alcohol and other substance abuse to better understand the situation. A bystander can participate in drug and alcohol abuse prevention education to reduce risks and raise awareness of this important topic. **For that it is important that the bystander pay attention to physical, emotional and social signs that indicate possible abuse.**

Example: Notice behavioral changes such as loss of interest in hobbies, changes in appearance, or a decline in academic/business scores.

Bystanders can openly and sympathetically initiate a conversation with the person about their behavior and possible drug abuse. It is important to provide support and express concern for their health and well-being. Offering support to the person and offering understanding for their challenges and difficulties they are facing is very important.

Example: Tell the person that you are there for him/her and that you want to help find solutions to his/her problems.

Beside personal and individual support, bystanders should aim to encourage a person to seek professional help - meaning doctors, therapists, counselors or organizations that provide support for addicts.

Example: Suggest a person to contact a doctor or a therapist who specializes in drug addiction (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this support system is provided through the institutes, centers and alcoholism and drug addiction treatment communities).

Bystanders should avoid condemning and stigmatizing a person who abuses substances. Instead, it is important to provide support and help find resources for recovery. Do not blame the person for his or her situation, but focus on working together to solve the problem. Ask the person what change he or she wants for herself to examine options of the support system. Offer concrete assistance in finding resources, driving to treatment or participating in activities that support a healthy lifestyle, accompany the person to a clinic, therapist, or support group.

Bystanders can encourage a person to think about the possibilities of change and support them in the recovery process. They can talk to the person about their goals and help them identify steps toward healthier living. One way is to define the benefits and risks of the changes that the recovery process brings.

In this case it is also important for bystanders to be aware of their own safety and boundaries. If the situation becomes dangerous, bystanders should contact specialists for help.

It is important to keep in mind that drug abuse intervention requires compassion, patience and support. A person struggling with addiction should be treated with respect and dignity preserved.



Scenario 1:

During a night out with friends, one of your friends orders an alcoholic drink even though she is underage. The waiter brings her a drink.

- 1 **What is the goal?** Understand why your friend is drinking alcohol even if it is illegal for her. Emphasize to the waiter that the person is underage and that it is illegal to serve minors alcoholic drinks. Offer support and help if needed.
- 2 **Discuss the five decision-making steps:**
 - ▶ **Notice the Event** - Observe what is happening - your friend is ordering an alcoholic drink and the waiter is bringing it to her.
 - ▶ **Interpret it as a problem/emergency** - The red flag in the situation is that the person is a minor and should not order or be served an alcoholic drink, but she is.
 - ▶ **Assume personal responsibility** - As a friend, you can ask: "Is everything okay? I haven't seen you drink alcohol before. This is quite a change. What is the reason for this occurrence?"; As a customer, you can find a waiter when your friend is not nearby so it would not create an embarrassing situation for her. Inform the waiter that your friend is underage. There is a possibility that the waiter did not assume or figure out that the person is a minor.
 - ▶ **Have the skills to intervene** - You should be informed about the minimum legal drinking age and at what ages it is prohibited. You should be sympathetic towards your friend and show understanding for her.
 - ▶ **Implement the Help – Step UP!** - Make a conversation with a friend, dive into reasons behind ordering the drink. Ask the waiter or waitress to retrieve the drink from your friend and bring a non-alcoholic beverage. Make sure to call on laws regarding alcohol drinking.
- 3 **What could you do to make the intervention safe, early and effective?** - As a friend, you can offer space to talk and discuss the situation, and act before the consumption starts.

- 4 **Costs/Rewards** – What are some rewards of intervening? What are some costs? What are some costs of NOT intervening? - *Rewards: Your friend does not start drinking at an early age, you respond as a responsible citizen and remind the workers of what their obligations are. Costs: Your friend can get mad at you, you can get the label of not being "fun" as a teenager and that can affect your friendship. You can experience backlash also from the worker. Cost of NOT intervening: Your friend is a potential substance abuser. The bar faces legal consequences by performing illegal acts.*
- 5 **Perspective Taking** – How would you feel if you were the "victim"? What would you be thinking? What would you want others to do for you? *Potential feelings: frustration, guilt, shame. These could be caused by family problems, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, struggle to gain control of the life at the moment with the need to "escape" the reality; also peer pressure, thinking that it is fun since it is forbidden, feeling rebellious... Possible thoughts: "I can't function without alcohol", "It helps me cope with my situation", "It is fun, and I enjoy myself with it, it makes me relaxed and more friendly", "I don't really like it, but all the friends started doing it, so I want to too". Expectations from others: understanding why I am using it, compassion, support by seeing that it is wrong but without judgment. A friend is there to encourage my other qualities and help me focus on what to improve without taking substance.*



Scenario 2:

A group of your classmates have started experimenting with drugs, and one person is starting to show signs of addiction.

Try “The 5 Point Formula”

- 1 **I Care:** Hey Andrew, would you like to go out with me to get some fresh air and take a walk? You are one of my closest friends, and I would like to talk to you about something very important.
- 2 **I See:** I’ve noticed recently that you have started mowing the weed very often. You’ve changed your behavior since hanging out with the street gang, before you used to spend your time playing basketball, but now you spend your time in the hallways smoking marijuana. You even started to miss college lectures.
- 3 **I Feel:** I am worried about you - I feel like it could create problems for you. Honestly, I am a little scared that you could start using some stronger drugs.
- 4 **I Want:** I understand that these are your decisions, and I only want what is best for you, so I would be happy to see that you reduce consumption. If you need to just talk or if something is bothering you, you can always come to me. But also, our psychologist at the faculty, she is great! She can help you. You are great in your field of interest, I would be sad to see you miss out on some good things in your life because of a bad decision.
- 5 **I Will:** I would be more than happy to come with you to see the psychologist. I want to be there for you and support you when you are ready to take action. You are very important to me, and I cannot help but tell you what I see and feel. I worry, I hope you understand.

What to Do in Case of Suicide Risk

When a bystander suspects that someone is experiencing suicidal thoughts, planning, or potential realization, it is important to act immediately to provide help and support to the person. Here are the steps a bystander can take in such a situation:

- ▶ **Stay calm:** It is important to maintain peace so that you can intervene soberly and effectively.

Example: *Breathe deeply to stay calm and clear in thinking.*

- ▶ **Talk:** It is crucial to open a dialogue with a person who shows signs of suicidal ideation. Ask questions that show concern and understanding.

Example: *“I’ve noticed that you may experience some challenges. I want to talk about it and help if I can.”*

Examples of questions: *“How do you feel? Do you have thoughts of serious self-harm? What is troubling you? In what situations do these thoughts arise? How do you overcome these situations with thoughts? What would be helpful/supportive in this situation?”*

- ▶ **Listen carefully:** Give a person space to express his feelings and thoughts. Listening without judgment can be extremely important.

Example: *Actively listen to what a person shares and express sympathy, e.g. “I understand that it is difficult for you and that you are struggling”.*

- ▶ **Do not promise secrecy:** If a person shares suicidal thoughts, especially if they accompany planning, it is important to inform responsible adults, especially if it is

a child. The promise of complete secrecy can make it difficult to provide proper assistance.

Example: *In these situations, it’s best to include people who can help you. “I want to help you, and not including them would mean I didn’t help you. We can go through this together.”*

- ▶ **Ask about the plan:** If a person is expressing suicidal thoughts, ask if he or she has thought about a specific way to hurt himself or herself.

Example: *“Are you thinking about causing a serious harm to yourself?” “Do you have a plan?”*

Example question: *“Do you have a specific plan for how you could do this?”*

- ▶ **Encourage contact with mental health professionals:** Encourage the person to turn to mental health professionals, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist or counselor.

Example: *“I recommend talking to a therapist or psychiatrist who can provide professional help.”*

- ▶ **Offer an escort or help in seeking help:** If possible, offer to accompany the person to a mental health professional or call an ambulance if the situation is urgent.

Example: *“I can take you to a therapist or call an ambulance together if you think it’s necessary.”*

- ▶ **Involve other people:** If it is a child or adolescent, notify parents, guardians, teachers, or other relevant adults.

- ▶ **Stay with the person:** If the situation is acute and if there is an immediate danger, stay with the person until professional help arrives.
- ▶ **Do not leave the person alone:** If the situation seems urgent and there is a real danger, call local emergency services or take the person to the nearest hospital.
- ▶ **Follow the instructions of a mental health professional:** If the person is already undergoing treatment, follow the instructions of a specialist and help the person stay for treatment.

- ▶ **Provide support for yourself:** Meeting a person who is experiencing suicidal thoughts can be a very emotional experience. Seek support from your friends, family or mental health professionals.

It is important to understand the seriousness of the situation and act quickly to provide the person with the necessary help and support. If there is an imminent danger, do not hesitate to call local emergency services.



Scenario 1:

Your friend is showing signs of depression, withdrawal and talks about self-harm. You've noticed that she has started carrying sharp objects with her and you can see marks of self-harm on her arm.

Try "The 5 Point Formula"

- 1 **I Care:** Nina, would you sit next to me during the lunch break? We always have such good talks together, and I love spending time with you. I have been thinking about you a lot in the past period.
- 2 **I See:** I've been noticing that you are withdrawing from the group and that you are talking less. You've joked a few times about how it would be interesting to inflict pain to yourself. Are you thinking about inflicting serious harm to yourself? I've seen today some sharp objects in your bag while it was on the desk.
- 3 **I Feel:** I am worried about you. How are you feeling? I am scared of what could happen.
- 4 **I Want:** I understand that it is a difficult period for you, and that you are struggling. Maybe it's best to include someone who can help. I want to help you, and not including someone experienced for me would mean I didn't help you. We can go through this together.
- 5 **I Will:** I could arrange a session for you with the local therapist. I can accompany you to her office. You don't have to go through this alone. What else would be helpful in this situation? I will stay with you and take action when you need me to. You can overcome this, you are strong and you are not alone.



Scenario 2:

You find a letter from your friend in which he expresses feelings of hopelessness and in which you recognize suicidal thoughts. He has been withdrawing from social activities for quite some time, he has no interest in school and spends most of his time at home.

Try using “The 5 Core Questions”

- 1 **What is the goal?** - Your goal is to help a friend, provide support and involve a professional who can help your friend feel better.
- 2 **Discuss the five decision-making steps:**
 - ▶ **Notice the event** - When you find the letter, you connect withdrawal from the group of friends and the lack of interest in school with his suicidal thoughts. The letter shows that there is a big problem.
 - ▶ **Interpret it as a problem/emergency** - Red flags are his expressions of hopelessness which he addresses in the letter. This requires immediate attention and action.
 - ▶ **Assume personal responsibility** - As a friend, you feel a responsibility to act. You think it would be best to inform his parents and a school psychologist about the letter.
 - ▶ **Have the skills to intervene** - You feel like professional help is needed and that you lack these skills. You can offer a space for listening and emotional support but not much beyond that.
 - ▶ **Implement the Help – Step UP!** - You decide that the best thing is to inform the school psychologist. You talk with them about what you should do next. You plan together how to approach the situation.
- 3 **What could you do to make the intervention safe, early and effective?** - You don't make a hesitant action as it can lead to a hasty reaction from your friend and that would be counterproductive. You try to remove all hazards or objects for potential self-harm when

around your friend. You initiate more socializing to keep an eye on your friend be with him.

- 4 **Costs/Rewards** – What are some rewards of intervening? What are some costs? What are some costs of NOT intervening? Rewards: saving your friends' life, providing the support they need, preventing long-term mental health issues. Costs: creating discomfort for your friend, a strain on your friendship and an emotional scar for yourself by witnessing the situation. Costs of NOT intervening: potential loss of your friends' life, mental health that worsens, guilt for not taking action.
- 5 **Perspective taking** – How would you feel if you were the “victim”? What would you be thinking? What would you want others to do for you? - Possible feelings: despair, hopelessness, pain, struggle, heaviness of not seeing a way out of problems. Thoughts: “I cannot do this anymore”, “I am alone and unseen”, “No one would miss me”; Expectations from others: support, understanding, being seen, having people express their care and take action.

It is important to note that the implementation of these steps may vary depending on the specific situation and circumstances. The safety of bystanders, victims and other persons present should always be paramount and should always be guided by caution. It is especially important to pay attention to the psychological harm that can be caused by any form of violence and when implementing the 5D's methods of bystander intervention, it is necessary not to forget to involve professional psychosocial, psychological and/or psychotherapeutic support.



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