

NVC and Bystander Intervention in the UK

(ongoing research and training by Ceri Buckmaster, Leonie Smith and others)

Description

“Not on my street”: Bystander intervention skills for racial and gender based harassment

At the end of this session you will have reflected on the choices of the bystander and will have gained some practical skills to intervene safely in situations of both intentional and unconscious racial and gender based harassment. This session is informed by Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and Bystander intervention training.

The session will involve reflection, discussion and role play.

We will run from 11am - 3pm with a short food break around 1pm. Please bring snacks/food to share.

Who is this session for?

- Anyone curious about learning ways of becoming an active bystander
- anyone interested in finding ways to promote peace and safety in our neighbourhoods
- anyone willing to use privilege they have for the benefit of all.
- anyone who will be nourished by participating in an empathic, pro-active and reflective space.

The space will be held by

Leonie Smith is a certified trainer of Nonviolent communication (NVC), consultant from The Centre for Efficient Collaboration, Bay NVC and NVC Academy, based in Canada and founder of NVC for People of Colour.

Ceri Buckmaster is a certified trainer of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) passionate about building skills and systems to transform conflict, heal from harm, and increase peace. She has been active in grassroots organising in the Brixton area for over 10 years.

What is a bystander?

A bystander is someone who witnesses an event. We are witnessing events all the time. Bystanders are part of the community of people affected by a conflict. Active bystanders do something to intervene in the situation. Passive bystanders do nothing or run away. Sometimes doing nothing is the only thing you can do.

Bystander Intervention develops your range of skills to help tackle the experience of separation from each other, and powerlessness.

Bystander Intervention practice gives you and others greater options. When you intervene in a situation, you support others immobilized by a situation.

Through practice, we can wire ourselves to respond, moving through freeze and hesitations.

Bystander Intervention leans into the principles of nonviolence, by aiming to stop unjust or harmful actions. Bystander intervention works well when there is awareness of whose experience is being centred and whose experience is being sidelined. It is particularly of use when there is clarity that one group's needs are being sidelined or harm of one group or person is happening.

In this session, we are going to practice standing alongside someone being verbally abused and supporting what they want. Traumatizing experiences are those we are unaccompanied in. The event itself is one thing, but it's the level of accompaniment surrounding the event that determines how traumatizing it will be.

(It's very important to get clear that you are not intervening to resolve the situation. There is a complexity to the system you are intervening into, and bystander intervention has a narrow focus of checking with the person being targeted, to support them to act.)

Optional activity to highlight bystander options

Breaking this down into **active and passive bystander (5 mins)**

1. **Scenario Part 1:** It's a lovely sunny day and you are sitting by the river on your own, no one else is around. Suddenly you hear splashing and screaming for help. A person is caught in the current and drowning. You are the bystander. There is no mobile phone signal. You can swim. There is a life ring on the riverbank. **What might you do?**

Looking for: - Jump in and save (presuming you can swim well) (being safe yourself is a very important factor – emphasise this) - Call emergency services (but no signal) - Throw a life ring

These responses are those of an active bystander

- Nothing? - Run away?

These responses are those of a passive bystander.

- **Scenario Part 2:** Let's say you save the person. No sooner have you swum them to shore or hauled the life ring to shore than another person is in the water drowning. You repeat the action. No sooner have you saved the second person than a third is in the water drowning. What might you be wondering now? What would you want to know? Looking for - Why are these people in the river? What's going on? - What is happening upstream so that all these people are in the river?

So it turns out that upstream there's a person pushing people into the river one by one. **Ask participants: How does this change the situation? How does it alter your prevention effort? What is an active bystander response now?**

So you might be better off at the source – i.e. preventing the person pushing the person in the river rather than saving them once they are in.

So the learning point – a bystander can intervene to stop events before they happen or while they are happening i.e. a bystander can PREVENT the potential outcome as well as deal with an outcome. (Demonstrates that issue can be systemic)

Why people don't intervene

Pairwork activity

1. Social influence and social identity (social psychology theory) (**no one else is doing anything so I shouldn't either – and I don't feel a connection to the target**)
2. **Fear of embarrassment** (audience inhibition)
3. Diffusion of responsibility (**assume someone else will intervene**)
4. **Fear of retaliation** (physical harm, others' reactions, can be overcome if have training in diffusion)
5. Pluralistic ignorance (social norms theory) Pluralistic ignorance is where individuals don't know others' internal beliefs and believe they are in the minority (I.e. **nobody else thinks this behaviour is wrong**). This is important in a bystander context because it means they are less likely to act.
6. **Fear of conflict**/ Fear of disrupting status quo. Fear of making it worse.
7. **Freeze response/ own trauma**

Role Play:

Situation: On a bus, Man verbally attacks Muslim woman wearing a Hijab.

Attacker

"What are you wearing that for? What's that scarf for? You're in England. You shouldn't be wearing that? Go back to own country if you want to wear that."

Active Bystander Moves

a. *Bring some transparency around your intervention*

"I'm not comfortable hearing what is being said to you."

b. *Ask if you can join them. IGNORE THE ATTACKER*

"Can I join you? I want you to be safe. Would that be all right?"

c. *Move away from the attacker*

"Would you like to move with me to sit somewhere else?"

d. *Galvanise support. Invite others to join you*

"We are just moving to a quieter place. Would anyone like to join us?"

e. *Post-intervention, self-connection.*

What if someone says no to you or responds to attacker with an aggressive response?

Self-connection, mourning, knowing that you've done your best. Despite your willingness to intervene, mourning that violence can sometimes beget more violence.

Pause and exit strategies

If on intervening, your intervention is rejected or unwanted, you could say,

"I'm getting a sense that my assistance is not needed. So I will leave you now"

If you have a sense of violence or hostility coming towards you, you could say/do,

Leave the situation with as little engagement as possible.

If you have a sense or there is a direct threat of violence towards the target person, you could say/do,

Leave the situation and out of sight and earshot, call the police*.

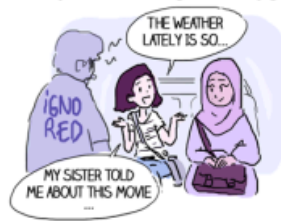
*Our sense is that while calling the police is not a last resort, engaging the police should be done with care, as interactions with police can carry greater risk for some populations.



- 1 **Engage conversation.**
Go to them, sit beside them and say hello.
Try to appear calm, collected and welcoming.
IGNORE THE ATTACKER.



- 2 **Pick a random subject and start discussing it.**
It can be anything: a movie you liked, the weather, saying you like something they wear and asking where they got it...



- 3 **Keep building the safe space.**
Keep eye contact with them and don't acknowledge the attacker's presence: the absence of response from you two will push them to leave the area shortly.



- 4 **Continue the conversation until the attacker leaves & escort them to a safe place if necessary.**
Bring them to a neutral area where they can recollect themselves; respect their wishes if they tell you they're ok and just want to go.



This guide was written & illustrated by Maeril | @itsmaeril - Translated in English for The Middle Eastern Feminist

<http://maeril.tumblr.com/post/149669302551/hi-everyone-this-is-an-illustrated-guide-i-made>

Post event intervention activity

Local Place of Worship is Defaced- What could you do as an intervention AFTER the event?

- Banners of support.
- Chalk loving comments.
- Attend services to connect with community.
- Contact local media.
- Contact local police, legislators, state and federal legislators and insist that perpetrators be found and brought to justice.

Compiled by Leonie Smith www.thethoughtfulworkplace.com and Ceridwen Buckmaster www.ceribuckmaster.co.uk with reference to Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition, Lore Baur and Ruth Zanoni's presentation **HOW YOU CAN INTERRUPT HATE IN A PUBLIC SPACE: *How to offer mindful, nonviolent bystander intervention and be an ally*** and the University of the West of England's [Intervention Initiative](#) (for gender based violence on campus)