What is a Bystander?

Bystanders are the largest group of people involved in violence – they greatly outnumber both the perpetrators and the victims. Regardless of how close to the assault they are, bystanders have the power stop assaults from occurring and to get help for people who have been victimized.

*Bystanders often know that behavior is inappropriate and potentially illegal, but may not know what they can do to make a difference.*

We have all been bystanders in our lives, and we will all be in situations where we are bystanders in the future. The choice, then, becomes whether we are going to be active bystanders who speak up and say something, or whether we will be passive bystanders who stand by and say nothing.

We are not advocating that people risk their own safety in order to be an active bystander. Remember, there is a range of actions that are appropriate, depending on the situation. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, calling 911 is the best action a bystander can take.

As opposed to being the bystander who stands by and does nothing, we want to create a culture of bystanders who are actively engaged in the prevention of violence.

**Power of bystanders**

Has anyone stopped a friend from going home with someone when the friend was drunk or high? Has anyone tried to stop a friend/teammate/peer from taking advantage of someone or doing something else inappropriate? Both of these actions are examples of bystanders using their power to stop violence.

What else can bystanders do to make a difference?

- **Believe someone** who discloses a sexual assault, abusive relationship, or experience with stalking or cyberstalking.
- **Be respectful** of yourself and others. Make sure any sexual act is OK with your partner if you initiate.
- **Watch out for your friends and fellow classmates** – if you see someone who looks like they are in trouble, ask if they are okay. If you see a friend doing something shady, say something.
- **Speak up** – if someone says something offensive, derogatory, or abusive, let them know that behavior is wrong and you don’t want to be around it. Don’t laugh at racist, sexist, homophobic jokes. Challenge your peers to be respectful.
- **Get involved** – apply to be a peer educator, volunteer or join another campus or community group working on these issues.

http://www.stopabuse.vt.edu/bystander.php