Developing a Bystander Intervention Program
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The Bystander Effect is a “social psychological phenomenon that refers to cases where individuals do not offer any means of help in an emergency situation to the victim when other people are present.” Berkowitz defines the bystander as someone who witnesses a problem behavior and does not do something about it. The presenters have utilized an expanded definition for developing campus prevention initiatives: Bystanders: individuals who witness negative situations that could result in some form of harm to another person or persons and by their presence may have the opportunity to provide assistance, do nothing, or contribute to the negative behavior.

Many colleges and universities have started to see the importance of developing bystander intervention programs to teach college students ways to help in problematic situations. Dr. Berkowitz research has found: “Most health problems and social injustices in our schools and communities are witnessed by bystanders. Although many of us are uncomfortable being in a bystander role and want to do something when we observe problematic behavior, often we don’t.”

Bystander intervention programs can serve as a preventative program aimed to encourage prosocial helping behavior as well as reduce negative outcomes from problematic situations. When developing a bystander intervention program, many components must be considered. First, someone needs to start the conversation. Bringing key stakeholders together is an important component for program development. A high-level administrator may appoint a committee, or the committee may start from the ground up from interest of either students or staff.

The committee first needs to define the behavior that they are attempting to change as well as define the problem. Some programs focus on one specific issue such as sexual violence prevention and other programs are more comprehensive. We have created a model for each type of program that parallels one another. However, it is important to understand that the target outcomes are different. For example, a comprehensive bystander intervention program may be targeted toward increasing helping behavior in general that focuses on increasing awareness and helping skills, while a specifically defined issue will be narrower in problem identification and behavior change. Both types of programs can have strengths and weaknesses associated with them. What is important is for the campus stakeholders to identify their aim and focus for behavior change and to research evidence-based programs, theory and research associated with increasing helping behavior or changing the norms associated with that behavior. It will also be important to identify your target audience, as that will also be a key component for determining what type of program you will select to create and/or implement on campus.

Before we move forward with content, we have a few key points that we would like you to be aware of prior to this initiative. They are simply recommendations based on experience, research, and student development theory.
• **Involve students in your initiatives** – This is a key component for developing programs. You can ask students to serve on the committee as stakeholders, meet with them for focus groups to get input and feedback based on the type of program your campus needs, or create a student committee that has similar initiatives to your program. We have found that this is key as peers are more likely to turn to one another for support. Their buy-in is critical for a bystander intervention program to work.

• **Use a Prevention approach to your program design** - Campuses are diverse settings, and there is no “model” prevention initiative that will work at every institution. Accordingly, the presenter’s recommend a set of principles and a process that campus and community members can use to collaborate on issues like the development of a bystander intervention initiative. This approach allows planning groups to create an initiative that is tailored to their campus circumstances and to the needs of specific groups.

• **Social norms** play a significant role in either encouraging bystander intervention or discouraging bystander intervention. We encourage you to gain a better understanding of social norms theory and how social environments influence behavior. Individuals do not act in silos, but rather as part of groups. This influence can be extremely negative, however, if it is changed, it can be a positive influence on an environmental level. Additionally, it may be helpful to implement the bystander intervention program within social support groups such as athletic teams, fraternities and sororities, or residence halls. Students can learn about bystander intervention together, and this may help shape a new cultural norm of intervening on one another’s behalf.

How to Develop an Intervention:

1) Conduct a needs assessment/define the problem – with community support
2) Define what you want to change
   a. Behavior for individual and environmental change
   b. Performance Objectives
   c. Select important and changeable determinants
3) Identify theoretical methods and practical applications
4) Develop intervention program
5) Implement intervention program
6) Evaluate the program
Key Definitions

**Ambiguity:** The situation is ambiguous and people don’t interpret it as a problem

**Bystander Effect:** A social psychological phenomenon that refers to cases where individuals do not offer any means of help in an emergency situation to the victim when other people are present.

**Bystander:** A person who is present at an event or incident but does not take part; a chance spectator

**Bystander Intervention:** Willingness to assist a person in needed of help

**Conformity:** The process by which people’s beliefs or behaviors are influenced by others. People can be influenced via subtle or even unconscious process or by direct and overt peer pressure

**Diffusion of Responsibility:** Phenomenon whereby each bystander’s sense of responsibility to help decreases as the number of witnesses increase

**Groupthink:** A type of thought exhibited by group members who try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without critically testing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas

**Informational conformity:** When one turns to one’s own group to obtain accurate information

**Normative conformity:** When one conforms to be liked or accepted by the members of the group

**Pluralistic Ignorance:** The majority know there is something wrong, but no one else looks concerned so you think you must be the only one and thus, don’t do anything

**Prosocial Behavior:** Voluntary behavior intended to benefit another”; consists of actions which “benefit other people or society as a whole”; helping, sharing, donating, cooperating, and volunteering are examples of prosocial behavior

**Social Norms Theory:** Individuals incorrectly perceive the attitudes and/or behaviors of peer and other community members

**Spiral of Silence:** A theory that asserts a person is less likely to voice an opinion if one feels that one is in the minority for fear of reprisal or isolation from the majority
Resources used:


Step UP! Program: http://www.stepupprogram.org/about/