Step Up: Bystander Intervention

“When everyone looks out for each other to make the environment safe; it reduces harm and keeps the party fun” — Alex, sophomore

Bystander intervention is being a “Good Samaritan” for the people around you – being a proactive member of the community. It's looking out for others in order to reduce harm. Most of us already are bystanders - we either act or we stay silent.

Every semester Cal student bystanders do act – either directly or by getting others involved. We help prevent sexual assault by “checking in”, stop fights before they happen, save lives by calling 911 or cutting someone off who's had too much to drink, keep friends safe by walking them home, and reduce harassment by re-directing conversations and raising awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Why Take Time to Help?
We do it because it makes the party better and the community safer. It builds the kind of community which will aid you or someone you love when needed. Great thing is - you don’t have to be a superhero. Usually just taking a few minutes of your time to check in and ask if everyone is alright makes a difference.

Is Intervening Difficult?
Recall a situation at a party where you thought about doing something – but chose not to? What happened and how did you feel about your choice? If this sounds familiar, you’re part of a well-documented phenomenon that happens to all types of people called the “bystander effect” – people are more likely to help others if we’re alone but less likely to help others when more people are around. Common barriers to action include:

- I wasn’t sure it was a problem.
- Nobody else seemed to notice or react to the situation.
- I thought someone else would or should take care of it.
- I didn’t want to embarrass myself or the other person.

There are no personal qualities that differentiate those who act from those who don’t. There is, however, one thing that has been shown to combat diffusion of responsibility: knowledge of it and a personal commitment to overcome your own barriers to act. Above all, try something. There’s no single right or wrong way to step up.

Key Tips

- Be prepared to notice high risk behaviors and situations at parties and gatherings. Unfortunately it’s not a question of “if, it's a matter of “when”.
- If you notice something ambiguous, investigate it further. Ask others what they think.
- Expect social pressure to stay uninvolved and be prepared to stand your ground. Chose to be respected rather than liked.
- Don’t assume someone else will do something.
- Keep your own safety a top priority. Don't be afraid to get help from others including authorities, e.g. RA, police, especially if it seems like violence or emergency might escalate.
- Decide whether to intervene directly or to delegate it to another. Does it need to be addressed immediately or is it better to wait until the next day? Is it better to address it in public or in private?
- State your intention and willingness to help. By verbalizing your intentions, you’re more likely to follow through.
- Trust that you aren’t alone – others will help once you step forward or if you talk to them before you take action. Enlist them to help.
- If someone is injured or ill, call the paramedics – Don’t wait to see if it will get better; don’t risk their lives and well-being to avoid temporary awkwardness.

Party Observations are one way to improve your scanning abilities and learn about the obvious and not-so-obvious high risk behaviors and situations. Use the Party Observation Form on the next two pages for the last gathering you attended or a party this weekend. What high risk behaviors and situations do you notice that you haven’t before? It’s especially good for Designated Sober Hosts and Social Hosts to think about and build scanning skills in advance.

Pledge to Intervene
Two negative incidents that we’re especially concerned about at Cal are alcohol poisoning and sexual assault. Take the Bystander Pledge to:

- Learn about the high risk behaviors signs and situations related to alcohol poisoning and sexual assault.
- Notice and intervene in high risk situations to reduce harm.
- Accept responsibility for establishing what is acceptable in our community.

For more information, contact partiesafe@berkeley.edu or (510) 643-9073.