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## CHOOSE UPSTANDER INTERVENTION

### What is upstander intervention?

Upstander intervention refers to the practice of safely and effectively responding when witnessing harassment, discrimination, or violence. Rather than remaining a passive bystander, an upstander makes a conscious choice to take action—protecting the person targeted and challenging the harmful behavior.

The *5 D's of Bystander Intervention*—**Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, and Direct**—offer a simple, adaptable framework for responding to harmful situations.<sup>1</sup> These strategies equip individuals to assess a situation and act according to their comfort and safety level.

1. **Distract** – Interrupt the incident indirectly by shifting attention.
2. **Delegate** – Seek assistance from someone with authority or responsibility.
3. **Document** – Record details safely without escalating the situation.
4. **Delay** – Check in afterward to offer support and care.
5. **Direct** – Address the behavior calmly and clearly if it is safe to do so.

The concept of upstander intervention has roots in social psychology and peace education, particularly research on the “bystander effect,” which suggests that people are less likely to help in emergencies when others are present.<sup>2</sup> Training in upstander skills aims to reverse that effect by empowering people to step in rather than stand by.

### How do people learn upstander intervention?

Many people first encounter upstander intervention through community workshops, school programs, workplace trainings, or public campaigns. Organizations like [Right To Be \(formerly Hollaback!\)](#) and [the UCLA Center for the Study of Women](#) provide free guides and interactive trainings that teach participants how to apply the 5 D's in real situations.

In these trainings, individuals learn that intervention doesn't always mean confrontation—often, subtle actions like creating a distraction or quietly checking in afterward can de-escalate harm and show solidarity.<sup>3</sup> Repetition and practice are key; the more people familiarize themselves with the 5 D's, the more likely they are to act confidently when the need arises.

### How do people implement upstander intervention?

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<sup>1</sup> Right To Be. (n.d.). *The 5 D's of Bystander Intervention*. Retrieved from <https://righttobe.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). *Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377–383.

<sup>3</sup> Right To Be. (2021). *How to be an upstander when harassment happens*.

The 5 D's framework helps bystanders choose responses that fit their personality and the situation:

- **Distract** – Interrupt the incident indirectly by starting a conversation, dropping something, or otherwise diverting attention.
- **Delegate** – Find someone else who can help, such as security personnel, a teacher, or a manager.
- **Document** – Record details safely, without escalating the situation. Documentation can later support accountability or justice efforts.
- **Delay** – Check in with the targeted person afterward, offering emotional support or assistance.
- **Direct** – Address the behavior directly if it's safe, by calmly stating that the behavior is inappropriate or unacceptable.

Whether used in schools, workplaces, public transit, or online spaces, upstander intervention helps transform environments of silence into cultures of care and accountability.<sup>4</sup>

### For what types of circumstances is upstander intervention suited?

Upstander intervention is suited for any setting where harassment, discrimination, bullying, or violence may occur—including workplaces, classrooms, public gatherings, and digital spaces.<sup>5</sup> It's especially valuable in situations where those targeted might otherwise feel isolated or powerless.

Upstander intervention is well suited for situations involving:

- harassment or intimidation
- hate- or bias-motivated remarks
- bullying or exclusion
- discriminatory behavior
- escalating interpersonal conflict
- harmful online interactions

Because it offers multiple strategies, the 5 D's framework is flexible across diverse environments—from addressing a rude remark to responding to hate-motivated harassment. Each act of intervention, no matter how small, reinforces the message that harm will not go unchecked.

### Does upstander intervention work for preventing or controlling social distress?

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<sup>4</sup> Green Dot Institute. (n.d.). *Violence prevention strategy*.

<sup>5</sup> U S. Department of Education. (2017). *Preventing bullying through upstander culture*.

Research indicates that bystander intervention training increases the likelihood that individuals will take safe, supportive action when witnessing harassment or violence.<sup>6</sup> Studies in schools, workplaces, and public settings show that when communities are equipped with intervention tools, rates of harassment decline, and targets report feeling safer and more supported.<sup>7</sup>

When people intervene:

- targets of harassment report increased feelings of safety and support
- harmful behaviors decrease over time
- community norms shift toward accountability, empathy, and collective care

Moreover, repeated exposure to upstander education helps shift social norms—encouraging empathy, shared responsibility, and collective care. In this way, upstander intervention not only reduces immediate harm but also fosters long-term cultural change toward inclusion and peace.

### Where else might I go to learn more about upstander intervention?

- [Right To Be](#) — Global leader in bystander intervention training using the 5 D's framework.
- [Green Dot Institute](#) — Offers community-based violence prevention programs.
- [StopBullying.gov](#) — U.S. government resource on youth upstander action.
- [UCLA Center for the Study of Women](#) — Research on bystander intervention, gender-based violence prevention, and community accountability.
- [Anti-Defamation League](#) — Provides education and advocacy tools to confront bias and hate.

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*If you have suggested additions to this information, send to [inbox@peacethroughaction.org](mailto:inbox@peacethroughaction.org).*

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<sup>6</sup> Banyard, V. L., & Moynihan, M. M. (2011). *Variation in bystander behavior related to sexual and intimate partner violence prevention*. *Psychology of Violence*, 1(4), 287–301.

<sup>7</sup> Coker, A. L., et al. (2015). *Evaluation of the Green Dot bystander intervention to reduce interpersonal violence among college students across three campuses*. *Violence Against Women*, 21(12), 1507–1527.