

FACT SHEET:

Bystander intervention

Bystanders can help prevent discrimination, harassment, or other negative behaviours from escalating, and can help the perpetrator of this behaviour to be held accountable for their actions.

A bystander is someone who sees an act of violence, discrimination, harassment or vilification take place, but who isn't the perpetrator of the act or its victim.

Intervening if you see someone being subjected to discrimination, harassment, vilification, or a breach of their human rights, is not a requirement under the law – but it is something you can do to help it getting worse and sometimes to help bring the perpetrator to account for their actions.

Here are some positive actions you can take - but only if it is safe to do so. You should never put yourself or others at risk.

In person

If you see a person harassing someone, there are a couple of ways you might go about intervening.

You could speak up and call out the person's language or behaviour, in a way that lets them know that what they're doing isn't okay. Try and do this calmly. You might say something like:

- He/she's okay. Why don't you just leave him/her alone?
- I don't think it is okay to say/do that, and most people agree with me.
- Laws protect people from being vilified, bullied and harassed and you may have broken the law.
- It's not okay to treat people like this.

Speaking up is hard but it lets the person know directly that other people don't agree with their behaviour.

Sometimes you might be able to defuse a situation just by distracting the people involved. Asking if they know the time, or directions to a particular place – anything to take their attention for a second might be enough to end the harassment or allow the person they're victimising to leave or move.

Record it

If it is safe to do so, use your mobile phone to take video or photos of the incident. Vehicle registration plates or other identifying details may help to identify the perpetrators. If the incident occurred in public, note the location details so CCTV footage can be obtained, if it is available.

Support the victim

- Ask the person if they are okay.
- Offer to go with them to somewhere safe.
- Help them contact a friend or family.
- Tell them where they can get help.

If anyone has been physically harmed you should seek medical assistance.

You might want to give your details to the person subjected to the abuse or harassment so you can be their witness if they need one.

Encourage the person subjected to the harassment or abuse to seek help from a community or an organisation which can assist in dealing with the effects of the incident. If it's serious and involves violence or a threat of violence, let them know they can report it to the police.

Online

If you see something online that you think is discriminatory, vilifying or generally offensive, don't spread the inappropriate material. You might want to engage with the person posting the content, in a way that makes it clear you don't agree.

Social media platforms have policies about the publication of material that bullies, intimidates, harasses, is hateful, threatening, unlawful or discriminatory. You can report posts that contain this sort of material to the platform. You might also want to screenshot the offensive content in case you need to lodge a complaint with us at the Commission.

Report it

Whether or not you or the person subjected to the abuse or harassment want to lodge a formal complaint, you can contact the Commission to report incidents of public vilification or discrimination, including comments or posts made online.



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Violence, physically threatening abuse or other hate crimes should be reported to the police.

When reporting incidents, it is important to give as much information as possible about what happened, where it happened, when it happened and any witnesses present.