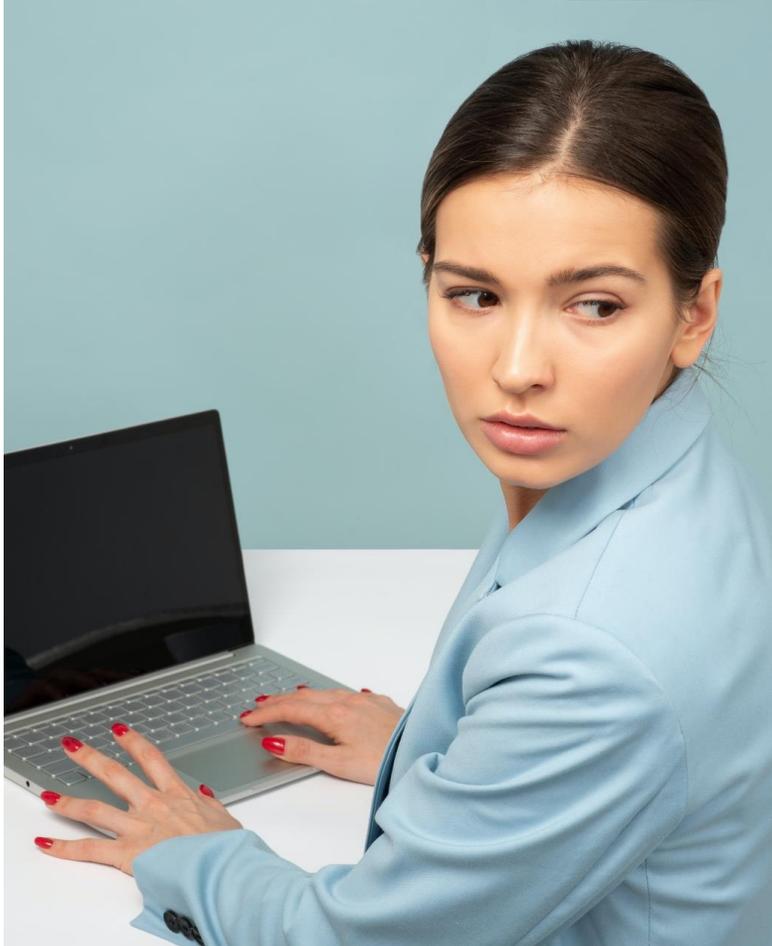


The Queen Mary Bystander

Organisational & Professional Development

What is bystander intervention?



You might have heard of **the bystander effect**, or **bystander apathy**.

This is the idea that if we see something happening that we feel is wrong – like harassment of a colleague – and there are other people around us, we might feel unwilling or unable to help. This can be because:

- We see nobody else is responding, which makes us think it's **not a problem**
- We feel it's '**not our job**' or that someone more senior ought to deal with it
- We **don't know how** to respond – what to do or say
- We're **worried about being labelled** as 'oversensitive', or facing retaliation

Bystander intervention is about overcoming these concerns and speaking up:

- Relying on **your own judgement** to decide when something isn't acceptable
- Feeling **shared responsibility** to create a positive working environment
- **Using the 5Ds toolkit to respond**, either directly or indirectly
- Knowing that Queen Mary's policy and Values are **on your side**

When should I intervene?

What makes you feel uncomfortable? Looking at the people around you, how are they reacting to others' behaviour?

Often, people don't mean to cause offence or harm with their behaviour, but it's the impact on other people which is important.

Everyone thinks differently about what 'unacceptable behaviour' looks and sounds like. Think about...

- **Bullying:** Behaviour (possibly involving the misuse of power) which makes someone feel humiliated, undermined or threatened.
- **Harassment:** Bullying on the basis of a protected characteristic: sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, etc.
- **Making jokes** about people on the basis of where they're from, what they look like, how they speak, etc.
- **Aggressive behaviour** such as raised voices or swearing
- **Talking over others**, or undermining what they say or do
- **Copying in** extra people on emails to embarrass one person or team
- **Gossiping** or spreading rumours
- **Micro-behaviours** like rolling eyes, ignoring certain people at meetings, whispering during presentations etc.

Sadly, there are many more examples. Remember that just because something isn't illegal, that doesn't make it OK.

Keep in mind that what happens 'at work' includes channels like email, WhatsApp groups or Microsoft Teams, social events (like departmental Christmas parties), and off-site events (like conferences).

The Five Ds: Tools for acting on unacceptable behaviour

Direct	Distract	Delegate	Delay	Document
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the perpetrator (by name if you know it). • Name the behaviour: “Acting like that is rude/aggressive”, “That comment sounds homophobic/sexist”, etc. • Keep it short: don’t engage in debate about whether the behaviour was inappropriate or not. • Show your support for the target of the behaviour (if there is one). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-escalate or disrupt the situation instead of tackling it directly • In meetings, suggest taking a break or moving onto the next agenda item. • Remove the target from the situation: ask if they want to get a coffee, or go out for some fresh air. • Don’t worry about being subtle. The perpetrator might realise what you’re doing - and that’s OK! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell someone about the behaviour you’ve observed. • This might be the perpetrator’s manager, HR, the Report & Support service, or a friend/colleague of the perpetrator who could talk to them. • Be specific about what you saw or heard, and the impact that it had. • Follow up to make sure some action has been taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whatever you do, you don’t have to do it right away. • Make sure the target knows you support them, and you know that what happened was wrong. • Offer support; you could go with them to speak to the perpetrator or their manager. • Take another action. Silence helps bad behaviour become ‘normal’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you see or hear inappropriate behaviour, it can be useful to have a record in case of further investigation. • Take a note of what you saw, when you saw it, and who else was there. • Be reasonable – nobody expects you to pull out your phone and start recording a meeting! • Take another action whenever possible. 

I should do or say something, but...

I don't feel safe.

Only get involved if it feels safe. You have other options!

It's not my problem.

We **share** a responsibility to challenge behaviour that isn't right, and create the culture we want to work in.

Disagreement is normal in academia.

Disagreement is fine. But when debates start to involve personal comments or aggression (like shouting, swearing, etc), it's not appropriate.

Everyone else seems fine with what's going on.

They might seem fine, but you can't know how they really feel! You can choose to - for instance - not laugh at an offensive joke for the sake of 'fitting in'.

What I'm seeing isn't serious – I'll seem oversensitive if I intervene.

The behaviour we tolerate becomes 'normal'. What then tends to happen is that the behaviour slowly gets worse and more widespread. Set a high standard for the behaviour you want to see!

This behaviour doesn't have a target, so it's harmless.

If someone is (for example) telling jokes about women in a room full of men, they're still sexist jokes, and they'll still influence team culture.

I don't think they'll listen to me.

One person might be ignored. Two, three or ten people won't be! This is why we **share** a responsibility to speak up. You can also choose to delegate to someone more senior.

I'm worried about being thought of as a trouble-maker.

The trouble is already happening: you're trying to stop it getting worse. Queen Mary's leadership, Values and [policy](#) are on your side.