

Active Bystander information for students in the School of Medicine

Every day events unfold around us and we are all bystanders. At times events around us might make us feel uncomfortable, we might witness **discrimination, harassment or bullying**. When this happens, we can choose to say or do something, be an **active bystander**, or to simply let it go and remain a passive bystander.

Some of our students have told us they have experienced or witnessed discrimination, bullying or harassment on campus, on placement, at work and in social settings and would like to learn how to be an active bystander. Unfortunately, in busy, high pressure work settings, these events are more likely to occur but **that does not make them acceptable**.

This information is to help you know what to do if these things happen and when to support fellow students and colleagues safely and appropriately.



When we intervene, we signal to the perpetrator and any observers that their actions are unacceptable, and if such messages are constantly reinforced within our communities, we can shift the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behaviour.

Intervention might be as simple as choosing not to laugh at a 'joke' that is racist or sexist or undermines someone, challenging a Facebook post or offering support to friends after an incident you witness.

The Golden Rule is only intervene when it's safe to do so

What are discrimination, harassment and bullying?

Discrimination is illegal under the Equality Act (2010). It is defined as treating someone with a protected characteristic such as race, gender, disability, sexuality or age, less favourably than others, or putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage.

Harassment is unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of either violating another person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. Harassment does not need to be deliberate; someone may harass another person without intending to. Harassment linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them is illegal.

Victimisation, or treating someone unfairly because they've complained about discrimination or harassment, is also illegal.



In addition, the University has clear policies around **dignity and respect**, and we do not tolerate bullying of staff or students. **Bullying** can be defined as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which intentionally or unintentionally undermines, humiliates, denigrates or injures the recipient.

When to be an active bystander: what are unacceptable behaviours?

- Inappropriate or aggressive language and actions, raising voices, swearing in a professional environment
- Disrespectful or derogatory remarks, spreading rumours – in person or online
- Joining in online harassment of a fellow student or other person
- Rude, mean, inconsiderate behaviour
- Violation of ethical standards
- Singling out or overlooking individuals
- Sighing, rolling eyes, or disrespectful body language

Unacceptable behaviour may be overt and direct, subtle and more hidden, can be individual incidents or ongoing behaviour. It may be related to a protected characteristic such as age, disability, race, sex, gender status or sexual orientation. Multiple incidents of seemingly minor 'micro-aggressions' can have a significant impact on an individual's confidence and ability to work or study productively.

Some reasons people do not intervene

- Thinking 'No-one else is doing anything so I shouldn't either'
- Assuming that 'someone else' will intervene.
- Thinking 'I don't know the person it's happening to – don't get involved'

- Being concerned about other people negatively appraising their intervention.
- Fear of retaliation: e.g. physical harm, or others’ reactions, at the time or afterward.
- Incorrectly believing their views are in a minority ‘nobody else thinks this behaviour is wrong, they aren’t saying anything’.

To be an active bystander therefore needs a person to challenge these thoughts and concerns and make a decision to intervene in some way. This is not always easy, especially in situations where there is a hierarchy as there is in health services. However, be clear about what are bad behaviours - don’t make excuses for the person or otherwise enable them.

Here is some information to help you be an active bystander in a safe way.

How to be an Active Bystander: There are four main stages to the process of being an active bystander

Stage 1: Notice the event/behaviour.	This is about being informed about what is inappropriate and noting the behaviour to oneself.
Stage 2: Interpret it as a problem.	Don’t presume that the problem has been solved/underestimate its importance even if the person who is the target doesn’t say anything.
Stage 3: Feel empowered to take responsibility for dealing with it	Realising that it’s your responsibility to be active in some way. Not presuming, that because you are not causing the problem, it is not your responsibility to be part of the solution.
Stage 4: Possess the necessary skills to act	This can involve having had training or information on how to intervene. This is what the rest of this document is about.

Deciding to Intervene; now or later?

There is a choice: during the incident and/or after the incident, in direct or indirect ways¹.

	Direct	Indirect
At the time	Call out negative behaviour: tell the person to stop, say ‘that’s not OK’ or ‘I don’t like that’ Distract: interrupt the person, change the subject, start a conversation, create a diversion. Applies in a situation you think might become problematic	Ask the target of the behaviour if they are OK or if they need help
After the incident	Ask someone else to step in, inform a manager or senior colleague or report through the appropriate School channels afterwards Create bystander allies if others witnessed the incident, reflect and consider a joint plan for a) now, or b) in the future.	Check in with the person being harassed/bullied afterwards. Even if they say they are fine, recognise the situation wasn’t OK and offer support if they want it.

¹ Berkowitz, AD. (2009). Response-Ability: A complete guide to bystander intervention Chicago: Beck and Company. www.lulu.com
² Step Up! Program, <http://stepupprogram.org/facilitators/strategies-effective-helping/>

Strategies for intervening: There are a number of recognised strategies that can help²:

Strategy	Example
Use 'I' Statements	Change the focus to yourself: 1) State your feelings, 2) Name the behaviour, 3) State how you want the person to respond. This avoids criticising the other person, for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I don't like racist jokes. Please don't make them anymore." • "I didn't like what you said about those women. Don't say that anymore." • "I don't want you to make personal comments about my body – I am here to look after your health"
Silent stare/ body language	You don't have to speak to communicate. Sometimes a disapproving look or not smiling at a 'joke' can be far more powerful than words.
Use social norms	Identify that this is not usual or accepted behaviour, for example "Most students I know don't think it's ok to..." "People just don't say that kind of thing anymore..."
Group intervention	There is safety and power in numbers. Best used with someone who has a clear pattern of inappropriate behaviour where many examples can be presented as evidence of their problem, either to them or a senior colleague/staff member.
Bring it home	Engage empathy with the person behaving inappropriately e.g. "I hope no one ever talks about you like that" or "How would you feel if someone did that to you/your sister/your daughter?" or "I wonder if you realise how that comes across?"
Call on friendship	Reframes the intervention as caring, for example "Alex, as your friend, I've got to tell you that lots of people don't like your jokes about XYZ; it annoys them" or "I know that you would not want to offend someone but using that word is not great"
Distract	Snaps someone out of their "comfort zone." For example, ask a man harassing a woman on the street for directions or the time.

The Golden Rule is only intervene if it is safe to do so

- Know your limits as an active bystander and engage others as necessary of if you do not feel confident about doing it alone.
- Conduct conversations in a safe environment for you/the person you are speaking to.
- Know in advance how to report concerns - and who to report to (see below).

Reporting concerns or incidents

We want to reassure students that if concerns are reported to us, we will listen, take them seriously and act appropriately. The University has a well-established mechanism where students on MBChB, PA or one of the Classified Undergraduate Programmes can report concerns or issues. The reporting tool can be found here: <https://www.medicine.leeds.ac.uk/cpr/>

Further details about the reporting process are here:

https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000043/school_of_medicine_placements/1224/whistleblowing

If the person behaving inappropriately works for an NHS Trust, you can report this incident to the Trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Part of their role is to challenge bullying and harassment. To find the Guardian go to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Directory here

<https://www.nationalguardian.org.uk/publications/>

For further online Active Bystander training go to <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/resources-for-student-safety-and-wellbeing/coventry-university/>. You will need to create an account but this is instant and the training is free.

Further resources

The LUU Help and Support page can provide support to students who wish to discuss an issue or concern and can support with escalating an issue and signpost wellbeing support.

<https://www.luu.org.uk/student-help-support/>

The BMA are providing counselling and peer support for doctors and medical students

<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-wellbeing/wellbeing-support-services/counselling-and-peer-support-for-doctors-and-medical-students>

Counselling and peer support for doctors and medical students

Confidential 24/7 counselling and peer support services open to all doctors and medical students on 0330 123 1245. There is always someone you can talk to.



The organisation 'Breathworks' have set up a virtual 'quiet place' for stressed healthcare workers, where they provide practices to cope with the impact of Covid-19

https://www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk/the-quiet-place?utm_campaign=310320&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter

We hope you find this helpful.

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