Crime Prevention in Changing Times

Crime Prevention Week - November 1st to 7th, 2017

Crime Prevention is Everyone's Responsibility

Bystander Intervention

Step In ~ Step Up ~ Speak Out

In the course of one's daily life, the chances are that at some point one has heard or seen someone act in a way that was derogatory, degrading, abusive or violent towards a fellow member of the community. Be it in the form of a joke, cat call, comment, put down, or physical or sexual assault, this is all violence and unacceptable behaviour. As citizens, we all have the potential to actively play a role in preventing violence against vulnerable members of society.

The Bystander

Every citizen plays a role as a bystander when witnessing conflicts, unacceptable behaviour or unsafe situations, and does not intervene or expects others to do something to help. Often, most people do not know how to respond, are afraid of retaliation, or may we may fear a loss of relationships with those involved with the incident.

From Bystander to Active Bystander

An active bystander, when observing a conflict, unacceptable behaviour, or unsafe situation takes steps that can make a difference. It is important to realize that everyone has a part to play in making social changes and establishing what is acceptable in our communities. All citizens are affected by issues of violence, discrimination, or inequality that affect their communities. Each of us has the power to help others in need, to influence fellow witnesses when action is needed, to become active bystanders.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander Intervention is a philosophy and strategy for prevention of various types of violence, including bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. Bystander intervention involves developing the awareness, skills, and courage needed to intervene in a situation when help is needed by another citizen. Bystander intervention allows citizens to send powerful messages about what is acceptable and expected behavior in our community.

Bystander intervention is based on the fact that people make decisions and continue behaviors based on the reactions they get from others. This approach is different from previous violence prevention approaches as it:

- Discourages victim blaming. With bystanders as active participants, the sense of responsibility shifts away from victims and toward the family, friends and the whole community.
- Offers the chance to change social norms. Society's collective response sends a message of acceptable behaviour.
- Shifts responsibility to all members of society. Traditional prevention programs focused on specific target audiences. Bystander intervention engages all members of society to be agents of change.

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How to Become an Active Bystander

Prevention is everyone's responsibility. Physically intervening may not always be the safe way of preventing an altercation from happening. Other actions can include:

- Educate yourself about interpersonal violence, gender inequality, racism. Understand how personal attitudes or actions may perpetuate sexism, violence and racism. Redirect conversations away from violence and stereotyping messages.
- When seeing someone in danger or in distress, involve others for assistance, i.e. store clerk, bar tender, teacher, someone near you, or emergency personnel.
- Directly respond to the behaviour by naming what is happening or confronting the perpetrator. Do not engage in dialogue, debate, or an argument, but rather identify to the perpetrator that their actions are inappropriate, not okay, or disrespectful etc.
- Be an active witness. Look out for friends and others who may be in vulnerable situations. Intervene where a person is taking advantage of someone who is incapacitated. Distract the perpetrator by trying to engage directly with the individual being targeted, do not refer to the offending behaviour, but rather something unrelated.
- If you were not able to intervene in the moment, you can make a difference for the person who has been victimized by checking in on them after the fact. Ask them if they are okay and if there is any way you can support them. Offer to accompany them to their destination or sit with them for awhile. If you documented the incident, ask them if they want you to send it to them.

Teaching Children and Youth to be Active Bystanders

- Teach the difference between tattling and reporting. Tattling is when someone is deliberately trying to get someone else in trouble when they are not hurting themselves or another person. Reporting is when someone is trying to prevent someone from getting into trouble or hurt.
- Teach children what bullying looks and sounds like. Bullying can take on different forms, including: physical, verbal, emotional, cyber, and sexual.
- Teach children skills to safely intervene
  - Befriend the victim. If you notice someone being isolated from others, invite them to join you.
  - Create a distraction to draw the bully or abuser away from the victim.
  - Identify others that they trust to ask for help.
  - Speak up and take a stand when they see someone being bullied. Name the activity "that's bullying." Label the activity, "that's mean." State disapproval, "that is not cool," "don't do that!" or "cut it out!"
  - Refuse to join in when someone is being bullied or harassed. Research has shown bullies get their power from audiences. Bystanders can drain a bully's power by reducing the group size a few ways. Encourage others to leave the audience or walk away.

The Goals of Active Intervention

- Stopping harmful behavior in the moment
- Not generating more anger toward the target
- Changing the behaviour of the harmdoer
- Changing the harmdoer/target relationship
- Creating a community culture where harmdoing is not acceptable

Additional Resources

Ending Violence Association of BC - Be More Than a Bystander Campaign: Campaign to raise awareness of violence against women and respectful relationships. www.endingviolence.org

Hollaback: Provides resources and information to support communities develop innovative strategies to ensure equal access to public spaces and reduce street harassment. www.ihollaback.org

PREVNet: Provides information and links to evidence based resources for the prevention of bullying. www.prevnet.ca

TeachSafeSchools.org: Provides research based information and links to resources related to school based initiatives for creating safer and healthy schools (note American site) www.teachsafeschools.org

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www.bccpa.org

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