



Centre for Research & Education  
on Violence Against Women & Children

LEARNING NETWORK

# LearningNetwork Brief 09

**Bystander Sexual Violence Education programs for high school, college and university students**

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*Facilitate. Educate. Collaborate.*

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## LEARNING NETWORK BRIEFS

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The Learning Network is an initiative of the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children, based at the Faculty of Education, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada.

## Sexual Violence and Prevention Initiatives on Campuses

Sexual violence on campus remains an issue of great concern. North American research indicates that [15 to 25% of female college and university students](#) will experience sexual assault during their academic career. Young women aged 15 to 24 years are at highest risk of sexual violence. This risk decreases with age (Sinha, 2013). It is therefore important to educate young women and men about sexual violence at this significant life stage.

A number of sexual violence prevention programs and campaigns have been implemented across campuses in Ontario. For a review of some current campaigns see [Learning Brief 10](#). In the United States, an extensive evaluation of a number of sexual violence education campaigns was conducted (Gibbons, 2013). The findings from this evaluation did not indicate a campus-wide reduction in sexual violence. This is not necessarily a negative outcome. For instance, increased knowledge and education may lead to the desirable outcome of increased reporting of sexual violence (Gibbons 2013).

Sexual violence education programs have been based on various theories, including social norms theory, feminist theory and social psychology. A number of gender-specific sexual violence programs have focused on teaching young women how to prevent sexual assaults or rape resistance. Other programs that target young men are focused on reducing risk of perpetration of sexual violence.

### Why bring in the bystander?

Sexual violence is a societal problem and we all have a role to play in preventing it. A bystander is a third party witness to an event or situation, neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but someone who could potentially get involved to make a difference (Haskell, 2011). Community norms and bystander attitudes have been identified as aspects of society that condone interpersonal violence. Bystanders can perpetuate these attitudes and community norms by doing nothing or by supporting or ignoring perpetrator behavior, or they can make the situation better by intervening in pro-social ways (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). By shifting attention to the bystander, education programs and campaigns are able to shift the focus to engaging the broader community to intervene in pro-social ways, change social norms, and be proactive and reactive to situations where sexual violence may occur.

### The Bystander Approach

The Bystander approach addresses three levels of prevention:

- Primary (prior to the assault occurring)
  - Changing social norms – e.g., victim blaming, gender inequality (Haskell, 2011);
  - Educating on rape myths;

- Identifying high-risk situations prior to an assault (e.g., use of alcohol to intoxicate and make a victim vulnerable, becoming sexually aggressive as a result of drinking); and
- Identifying low –risk behaviors such as attitudes that support sexism and violence against women.
- Secondary prevention (intervening during the actual assault or high-risk situation intervening appropriately when):
  - Intervening when an intoxicated person being assaulted
  - Intervening when a person appears to be physically or verbally coerced into sex
  - Responding to cries for help
- Tertiary (after the assault occurs)
  - Responding to a disclosure of sexual violence by a friend
  - Providing information on where to go for help

## Positioning Bystander Approaches and Explanatory Frameworks

The [Spectrum of Prevention](#) identifies six levels prevention initiatives can target. These include: strengthening individual knowledge and skills; promoting community education; educating providers, fostering coalitions and networks; changing organization practices; and influencing policy and legislation ([www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org)). The Bystander approach addresses the first four levels of intervention and, if implemented successfully, has the potential to influence the remaining two levels.

The [Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change \(TTM\)](#) (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992), also known as the Stages of Change, is useful in developing and evaluating the success of bystander interventions. This model has been successfully applied to many public health issues such as smoking cessation and batterer intervention programs (Scott & Wolfe, 2003). The TTM identifies five distinct stages of readiness for change: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action and Maintenance. The stages range from no awareness or denial of the problem to action-oriented states where individuals change behaviour. Sexual violence bystander campaigns can use the TTM to develop strategies for engaging potential bystanders who are at different stages of readiness to intervene, i.e., to be an “upstander” or active bystander:

1. Precontemplation (unaware of the problem):
  - increasing knowledge about sexual violence
  - decreasing sexual assault supportive attitudes
2. Contemplation (some awareness with an intention to act or change)
  - describing the role of a prosocial bystander
  - empathy and emotional engagement activities
3. Preparation (intention to take action)
  - brainstorming how bystanders can help to prevent sexual violence
  - identifying opportunities for safe and effective intervention
4. Action (changes are made to behaviours; implement risk-reducing behaviours)

- Use of role-playing scenarios to develop skills for new behaviours
  - Skill development (how to intervene safely and effectively before, during or after a sexual assault)
5. Maintenance (work to prevent relapse, develop confidence to continue with new behaviours)
- Use of a pledge to commit to new behaviours.

The Stages of Change model has been applied to an evaluation of the [Bringing in the Bystander](#) program developed in New Hampshire. Preliminary results indicate that evaluating individual's readiness to change at various stages of the program is significantly related to outcome measures. Participants who had higher scores on later stages of change (e.g., Action) and lower scores on earlier stages (e.g., Precontemplation) were more likely to report that they had engaged in prosocial behaviour to end sexual violence, were less likely to believe rape myth, and were more likely to see positive reasons to intervene as a bystander (Banyard, Eckstein & Moynihan, 2010).

## Effectiveness of the Bystander Approach

The Bystander approach has great appeal for high school, college and university campuses in the United States and Canada. A number of programs have been evaluated and shown some success at raising awareness of the issue of sexual violence, increasing the responsibility of and focus on the greater community, and developing skills to intervene at various points on the spectrum of intervention.

Based on program evaluations, strengths of a bystander approach include:

- Implementation in single gender or mixed gender programs
- Program benefits both male and female participants
- Increases knowledge about sexual violence and skills for intervening
- Decreases defensiveness by not implicitly labelling participants as victims or perpetrators, but as witnesses or bystanders
- Opportunities for bystander intervention range from situations of high to low/no risk to victim
- Bystander opportunities can be reactive or proactive and can include primary, secondary and tertiary prevention
- Proactive bystander interventions, particularly in low risk situations may contribute to the changing of social norms and contribute to the development of a campus community that does not condone sexual violence
- Promotes active engagement, knowledge and skill development throughout the stages of change

In summary, Bystander models show clear promise as effective violence prevention programs, albeit more evaluation is necessary (Gibbons, 2013). Moreover, Bystander programs have demonstrated a link between changes in attitude and changes in behaviour (Banyard, Eckstein & Moynihan, 2010).

## Promising Strategies

A number of promising strategies have been identified for future bystander education programs including:

- Present sexual violence as a gender-based crime
- Identify the full range of opportunities where individuals might find themselves as bystanders
- Identify types of situations where bystanders may intervene to address sexual violence
- Use the continuum of sexual violence as a model to identify situations where bystanders may intervene safely to address sexual violence
- Aspects of the program can be tailored to where people are in the stages of change model
- Address barriers to identifying bystander opportunities, including culturally relevant barriers
- Include examples of how to respond appropriately and intervene proactively
- Embed the education into the curriculum
- Implement with policy and administrative support for the program

Ongoing and long-term evaluation of bystander programs will contribute to the development of a base for evidence-informed practices.

## Promising Programs and Campaigns

### Bringing in the Bystander

The University of Windsor has adopted the “Bringing in the Bystander” program which was originally developed and evaluated at the University of New Hampshire. The model for this program focuses on increasing community members’ receptiveness to prevention messages and training and supporting pro-social bystander behaviours. The goal is to prevent assaults from occurring and support sexual assault survivors who disclose. The program promotes attitude and behavior changes in individuals contributing to individual empowerment to contribute to changes in social norms. Preliminary findings from an evaluation of the program indicate that the intervention is effective at reducing perceived barriers to intervention; increasing likeliness to intervene; and increasing actual intervention behaviours, particularly in the primary prevention opportunities such as speaking to others about sexual assault.

Unique to Canada, this is the only campus where a sexual violence prevention bystander program has been built into the education curriculum in various courses. The workshop is delivered by trained male-female pairs of students to more than 400 undergraduates annually. For lessons learned from this implementation see Dr. Charlene Senn’s article in the Winter 2013 issue of [Psynopsis](#). [Learn more](#).

### Draw the Line

[Draw the Line](#) is a provincial, bilingual, social media, sexual violence education and awareness campaign developed by the [Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres](#) (OCRCC) and [Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes](#) (AOCVF). This interactive campaign uses using facebook, twitter, website, and

print media aims to engage Ontarians in a dialogue about sexual violence. The campaign uses real and hypothetical situations to challenge common myths about sexual violence and provides bystanders with information about how to intervene safely and effectively.

### **Know Your Power™ Social Marketing campaign**

[Know Your Power](#) is a social marketing campaign that was developed as an off shoot to the original Bringing in the Bystander program. [Know Your Power](#) shows pictures of bystanders safely intervening before, during, and after the occurrence of sexual or intimate partner violence. The campaign uses scenarios, situations, and contexts that are familiar to the target audience. The content addresses the continuum of sexual violence. Know Your Power is a multimedia campaign that includes posters, postcards, bookmarks, and bus wraps.

## **Resources**

**Learning Network** is an initiative based at the [Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children](#) whose purpose is to increase the effectiveness and reach of public education and professional training materials developed to address violence against women in Ontario. The Learning Network covers the continuum of violence against women, including sexual and domestic violence, sexual harassment and stalking, and the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children. For a report on evaluation of violence against women public education campaigns [see Report on the Evaluation of Violence Against Women Public Education Campaigns: Discussion Paper](#). To learn more about the Learning Network: [www.vawlearningnetwork.ca](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca)

**Prevent Connect** is a national online project in the United States dedicated to the primary prevention of sexual assault and domestic violence. The initiative uses various forms of online media to connect people and ideas to build the capacity of local, state and national agencies to develop, implement and evaluate effective prevention initiatives. Online resources include podcasts, web conferences and e-learning modules. To learn more about Prevent Connect: [www.preventconnect.org](http://www.preventconnect.org)

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