



Active Bystander Training Handout

Prepared for LWV Active Bystander Training (10-29-20)

Nonviolence Principles

Bystander Intervention is based on nonviolence principles, like those used by Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Dr. King laid out six principles:

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.
4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform. (*Note that this one is more applicable to Dr. King's nonviolent direct actions*)
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.
6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

Nonviolence is the most courageous way to respond -- it's easy to lash out, but it isn't easy to hold your emotions and act from a principled place. You may not yet be in a place where you feel you can do this, but this training will help.

Bystander Intervention Training assumes that:

1. We have an ethical, social, and political obligation to help each other when we are in a position (situationally and psychologically) to do so.
2. Stepping up to act in solidarity with others can help to reduce the impact of a problematic situation.
3. The best way of responding **as a bystander** is through de-escalation.
4. As a bystander, you are there to support what **the targeted person** wants.
5. Practicing how to respond helps us to get past our hesitations so we can step up when necessary.

How to Be Ready to Be a Bystander Who Intervenes

We want you to develop a new identity in public -- as someone who will step in when something bad develops or happens. To do this, we need to:

- Be aware of what's happening around you when you're in public
- If you see something happening, really pay attention: take off your headphones, pause your conversation, position yourself to get a better view.
- Don't assume someone else will do something (that's called the "bystander effect," or more scientifically, "responsibility diffusion").
- Point out the situation to the people around you. Tell them you're going to support the targeted person and ask if they'd like to help.
- When you first approach the targeted person, introduce yourself, and quietly explain that you saw what was happening and wanted to offer support. If the person says they are fine and don't want support, respect their wishes, and move back, but monitor the situation.

How to Deal with the Attacker's Anger (in the hassle line or in real life)

Here are some ways of dealing with an attacker's anger while you are being supportive to the targeted person:

- Don't make eye contact. Look beyond the attacker as if you were supporting the targeted person. (You can even turn your back.)
- Don't engage with their words. You want to monitor what they're saying, but imagine you are busy saying supportive things to the targeted person.
- Resist the urge to engage with the drama. Keep reminding yourself you are there to de-escalate on behalf of the targeted person, not to get drawn into the attacker's scenario.

If you don't feel safe, do not stay and do not try to stand your ground politically -- just get out of there, and ask if the targeted person wants to come with you.

Principles of Bystander Intervention

We recognize that we are dealing with an unfamiliar situation with people we don't know. This means that direct confrontation of an attacker by us as **bystanders** is not the best way to respond.



We want to show moral courage:

- by acting from a centered place despite our fears
- by choosing principles over emotion (anxiety, anger, self-righteousness)

We want to engage in de-escalation:

- by limiting the ability of a situation to become more intense
- by reducing the drama in the situation

We want to shift the attention in the situation:

- by interacting as much as we can only with the targeted person
- by ignoring the attacker (freeze them out, even if they escalate verbally)
- by creating a safer space for the targeted person
- by bringing in other people for additional support and varied responses

We want to reach out to the targeted person:

- by being present as an ally and an equal
- by not taking away the ability of the targeted person to respond
- by asking if they want our help
- by asking before we touch them
- by asking how we can best help them
- by offering possible solutions (that the targeted person may reject)
- by offering emotional support and empathy (befriending/connect)

Each of these principles will be used in our training in response to a variety of scenarios.

REMEMBER: you are there in solidarity, not as a savior!

Don't worry that you won't remember exactly the right thing to do -- think of this as improv around the principles we laid out. That way, you will be adaptable to a situation no matter how it changes.

But it would help if you thought about whether you are ready to step into a dynamic situation that involves strong emotions where things can change quickly. We hope this training will prepare you for some scenarios, but it can't prepare you for everything you might encounter.

For more information and future trainings, please contact the League of Women Voters Organizing Team at organizing@lwv.org or visit the [LWV Organizing Resources](#) page.

For non-profit groups and not-for-personal-profit use only June 2017 -- protected under Creative Commons license *Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition (Maryland)*
<https://mccivilrights.wordpress.com>