



2-Minute Safety Talk - 3

What can you do if you see harassment?

Today's talk is aimed at those of us in the workplace who may see harassment taking place. Some people would call us “bystanders”, but in a more positive way, we can resolve to be “up-standers”, because we can stand up when we see someone being humiliated or taunted.

If you observe someone being victimized, you have a number of options for action. Generally, we would not advise confronting the harasser in the moment, because it can escalate and put you, as the bystander, in jeopardy.

But it is not hard to say something like, “That joke wasn't funny.” You may have seen the “so not cool” buttons that are floating around out there. Using this phrase would be another non-confrontational way to let a person know that they crossed a line.

Another option is to disrupt the situation, such as by loudly dropping a book or asking the victim to come away for some reason. Invent a task you need the harassment target to help you with. (There is a widely shared video on the Internet that shows a guy defusing a fight on the subway by standing between the combatants, eating chips.)

Another approach is to talk to the harasser later. You want to ask questions, not accuse. You might say, “Were you aware of how you came off in that conversation?” or “I heard what you said to her. Why did you do that?”





You can also comment on the behaviour to your co-workers: “Did you notice that? Am I the only one who sees it this way?”

If you want to be a defender, think about approaching the target of harassment. Show that person you saw what happened. As a colleague, you might say: “I noticed that happened. Are you O.K. with that?” You can make that person feel less isolated by offering to speak up as a witness if the person chooses to pursue a complaint.

Too often victims blame themselves, so a bystander saying, “This isn’t your fault, you didn’t do anything wrong,” can be really important support. Bystander intervention is not about putting on your cape and saving the day. It’s about having a conversation with a colleague about the way they talk about women or their other co-workers.

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