Bystander Skills
to Interrupt and Prevent
Sexual Harassment & Abuse
What is a bystander?

- A person who is not the aggressor or the target of an act of abuse or harassment
- AND who is in a position to prevent or interrupt it.
Bystander Behavior

Figure 1 Latané & Darley’s (1970) five-stage model

1. Noticing the situation
2. Interpreting the event as requiring intervention
3. Assuming responsibility
4. Deciding how to help
5. Confidence in capacity to help

Impact
Some questions to ask ourselves…

- Why am I moved to intervene?
- What level of personal risk am I willing to take?
- What skills can I bring to the situation?
- How do I know my intervention will help?
INTERPRETING A SITUATION
Boundary Violations on a continuum

- Missed Social Cues
- Inappropriate Behaviors
- Abusive Behaviors
When We Observe Boundary-Violating Behavior

- Try to understand the behavior
- Communicate a concern
- Communicate a message about shared values
- Identify next steps based on
  - Reaction in the moment
  - What changes after the fact

Addressing the behavior can help us determine where it falls on the continuum
Staying Away from the Extremes

Ignoring the problem

Assuming the worst
What is a challenging conversation?

- Asking questions that are uncomfortable for you or the other person
- Communicating a concern or problem you see with someone else’s actions
- Questioning a common practice or widely held belief
- Bringing attention to actions you see as inappropriate
Why We May Avoid Challenging Conversations

- It’s hard to question people we like or respect
- Fear of repercussions
- They are uncomfortable for us
- We may second guess ourselves
  - Am I overreacting? Is it really a problem?
But when we say nothing...

- A person who is not using good judgment doesn’t get an opportunity to learn

- A person who is at risk to perpetrate sees boundary violations going unchallenged.

- We don’t get information that helps us tell the difference.
Strategic Choices

- Speaking directly to the person or reporting to another person
- Interrupting an interaction in the moment or talking to the person later
- Having a casual or serious tone

Your choices may be based on your personality, your experience, or your relationship
Awareness of Biases

- Cultural biases
- People who are well-respected & established vs. those who are new or unknown
- Differences in power or authority in an organization
Today we will focus on skills

- Managing adrenaline/stress response
- Defining the behavior and the concern
- Communicating the concern
  - Body language
  - Tone
- Addressing challenging reactions
Step 1

MANAGING ADRENALINE/STRESS RESPONSE
What is Adrenaline?

Adrenaline is a stress hormone produced in the body when there is a perceived threat or danger.
Fight, Flight, Freeze Response

- Blood rushes to major muscles
- Heart – may feel heart racing
- Lungs – may experience shorter, faster breath
- Limbs – may be shaky, or feel cold or hot

These are physical sensations that we interpret as fear, anger, stress. We will address them physically.
Effects of Adrenaline on Brain Function

- Prefrontal Cortex (controls language and high-order) thinking is most vulnerable to stress hormones
- Decline in prefrontal cortex activities
  
  (Arnsten 2009)

- Brain scans of humans under stress show diminished activity in the prefrontal cortex
- Humans under stress default to habitual behaviors
  - Activation of habitual/automatic responses
  - De-activation of complex thinking and decision making

  (Yu 2016)
FIRST:
ADVOCATE FOR OURSELVES
WORKPLACE SCENARIO
NEXT:
ADVOCATE FOR OTHERS
Challenging Conversation Steps

- Breathe
- Clearly identify the problem
- Say what you want or what the group expects
- Assess the response
- Agree on a next step
I saw (or I heard)____________________

It concerns me because____________________

I/we believe/value____________________

So I hope you will____________________
Tone & Body Language

Tone
- Respectful
- Firm

Communicating with our Bodies
- Shoulders back
- Maintaining physical distance
- Not communicating aggression or nervousness
STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING RESPONSES
Minimizing

DISMISSING THE PROBLEM OR TRYING TO CONVINCE YOU THAT YOU ARE OVERREACTING
Strategies for Minimizing

- Maintain Conviction
- Communicate Clearly about why the issue is important
- Respond to minimizing
Shifting Focus
BRINGING UP OTHER PROBLEMS OR ISSUES AS AN EXPLANATION
Strategies for Shifting Focus

- Bring focus back to the issue you raised
- Acknowledge any truth to the issues they raise
- Agree to discuss other issues at a later time but stay on track
Defensiveness

EXPRESSING ANGER OR DISRESPECT IN RESPONSE TO THE CONCERN
Strategies for Defensiveness

- Stay calm
- Avoid apologizing or minimizing your concern
- Maintain focus on the issue
- End the conversation if it is no longer productive
SCENARIO:
INTERVENING IN THE MOMENT