



Organisational preparation guide for *Speaking Out Against Disrespect*: bystander training for the primary prevention of Family Violence

Background

Speaking out against Disrespect is a training course designed for members of organisations in Geraldton that have signed up to the Community Respect and Equality Plan (CRE). The purpose of the training is to build individuals' understanding, skills and confidence to take pro-social bystander action when they see disrespectful behaviour in their organisation. Bystander initiatives are part of a suite of measures to increase equality in the workplace and community by challenging social norms that allow disrespect to appear as 'normal' and acceptable behaviour. This bystander training is a tool in the primary prevention of family violence.

The training was developed as part of a Healthway funded WA Centre for Rural Health research project called *Conversations for Change*, which requires us to measure the effect of the training on people's behaviour. We want to know whether doing this training makes people more likely to speak up against disrespect and we will invite training participants to agree to complete a short survey at the completion of training and at 6month intervals after they complete the training for research purposes. The training can be delivered through direct individual engagement with the course on-line OR through small facilitated sessions in a group setting using a PowerPoint, discussion and interactive activities.

Why Bystander Training?

Sexism and sexual harassment often take place in front of an audience, or incidents are later described to others. These people – the 'bystanders' – have an opportunity to take action. When they do, they protect and support the person targeted, discourage the perpetrator, and contribute to perceptions that sexism, disrespect and sexual harassment are not acceptable in any setting – whether a workplace, a sporting club, university campus, or the broader community. Bystanders often say they wish they had intervened after seeing sexist or sexually harassing behaviour but in most cases, they do not take any action. No action equals saying the behaviour is OK.¹

Studies of workplace education and training to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination suggest that it influences organisational cultures over and above the impact of individual training. That is, widespread training in a workplace is associated with a greater recognition of sexual harassment and discrimination amongst all employees, regardless of whether all individuals have undertaken the training themselves.

The potential for comprehensively delivered training to both raise awareness of disrespect and sexual harassment (creating a culture of awareness) and to prevent it occurring means that organisations should ensure that education is delivered to as many employees as practicable – at all sites and across all hierarchical levels – not just to targeted groups or those who volunteer to attend.²

¹ Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Take action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours in universities Report Summary.

² Human Rights Commission (2012) Encourage. Support. Act! Bystander Approaches to Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.



Prepare the organisation for success

*Don't stop at training. Education on its own is insufficient to change behaviour. Be sure to align training with other activities and processes across the organisation. Training alone isn't the answer!*³

This training is designed to be a part of broader organisational efforts to develop respectful workplaces that support gender equality and primary prevention of family violence. The training should therefore sit within an organisational culture that is explicitly supportive of gender equality and engages employees in a range of training and other opportunities related to building a respectful and gender-equal workplace.

Change environments before trying to change people. The training should only be implemented in organisations where the management understands the concept of bystander training and is fully supportive of it, and where policies and procedures are in place to support those who choose to speak up against disrespect.

Thorough organisational preparation will prevent the situation where employees decide to take courageous actions to challenge disrespect, only to find themselves left vulnerable because of lack of support from their line manager, HR department or organisational leadership. **Research in Victoria in 2012 showed that organisational support was one of the major factors that determined whether some people were willing to act or not.**⁴

An important part of a whole-of-organisation approach is to consider the processes, structures and practices within the setting (e.g. a workplace, volunteer organisation or sports club) to determine whether they support or discourage the equal and respectful participation of people of all genders, abilities, ages, races and cultural groups.⁵

Reviewing the organisation's code of conduct and other relevant policies is very important in the context of bystander action because it helps staff recognise appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, serving as a reference point for staff wanting to take action and giving them the confidence that taking action is in line with the kind of organisation you want to be.

For your code of conduct to be effective, you should:

- Communicate the code of conduct to staff and other stakeholders at induction, and provide appropriate training
- regularly remind staff about the code of conduct during team meetings and via email or social media promotions
- monitor compliance with the code of conduct and take complaints about breaches of it seriously.

Key principles

- **Top down organisational support:** Support for tackling sexism, sexual harassment and the inclusion of women needs to be signalled from above in a way that is seen as authentic, rather than as a box-ticking exercise or a legal necessity. Leaders are significant role models for active bystanding and can also empower others to challenge disrespectful, undermining, and

³ VicHealth and Behavioural Insights Team 2019, Take Action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

⁴ VicHealth 2012. More than ready: Bystander action to prevent violence against women in the Victorian community Research highlights.

⁵ VicHealth and Behavioural Insights Team 2019, Take Action: Empowering bystanders to act on sexist and sexually harassing behaviours. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.



discriminatory behaviours. Ideally, leaders will complete the bystander training prior to widespread implementation in the organisation to enable them to lead by example and actively support employees as they call out disrespectful behaviour.

- **Clear and enforced policies on discrimination and sexual harassment, made available to employees prior to completing bystander training and given ongoing visibility:** Organisations need to clearly articulate their policies on discrimination and sexual harassment, including which behaviours are inappropriate. Clearly identify what constitutes undermining, disrespectful, harassing and discriminatory behaviours in your context. The policy also needs to be consistently reinforced and understood by staff to be effective. This is particularly relevant when addressing inappropriate behaviour of people who have a high profile, are more senior or those in authority. A policy should clearly articulate the processes through which bystanders can take action and outline any privacy protections.
- **Be explicit about the actions you want bystanders to take.** Provide employees with specific examples of what you would like them to do in different scenarios, not just 'do something'.
- **An effective reporting and resolution process:** Reporting and resolution processes are required so that all instances of discrimination, disrespect and sexual harassment are managed appropriately. These processes play a pivotal role in an organisation's response and are also key tools for bystanders to use.
- **Select your messenger carefully:** Messages to encourage bystander action need to come from an appropriate messenger. If you are trying to convey an organisation-wide position or senior level of support, choose someone very senior. If you are trying to convey a group norm, choose someone whose opinion is valued by the group, regardless of seniority.
- **Implement the bystander training after informing new employees about the policies and processes that will support them.**
- **Aim to get at least 25% of the staff** of any one organisation attending training to achieve any kind of organisational change. Ideally, all staff will complete the training.

Resources for implementing standards and training within workplaces.

1. Read about the OurWatch Workplace Equality and Respect Standards
<https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/workplace-equality-and-respect-standards>
2. Read the OurWatch Workplace Equality and Respect implementation guide
<https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/workplace-equality-and-respect-implementation-guide/>

Contact Beth Martin, Community Respect and Equality Coordinator at Desert Blue Connect on 9964 2742 if you would like to discuss your organisation's specific implementation needs.