ALL ABOUT BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

VOICES @SMU × SOSCIETY

A COLLABORATION BY
VOICES@SMU AND SOSCIETY

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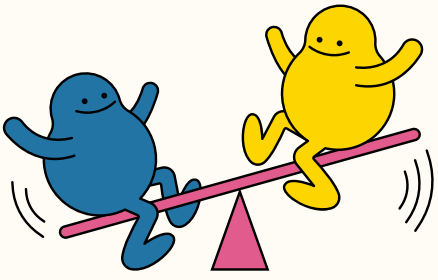
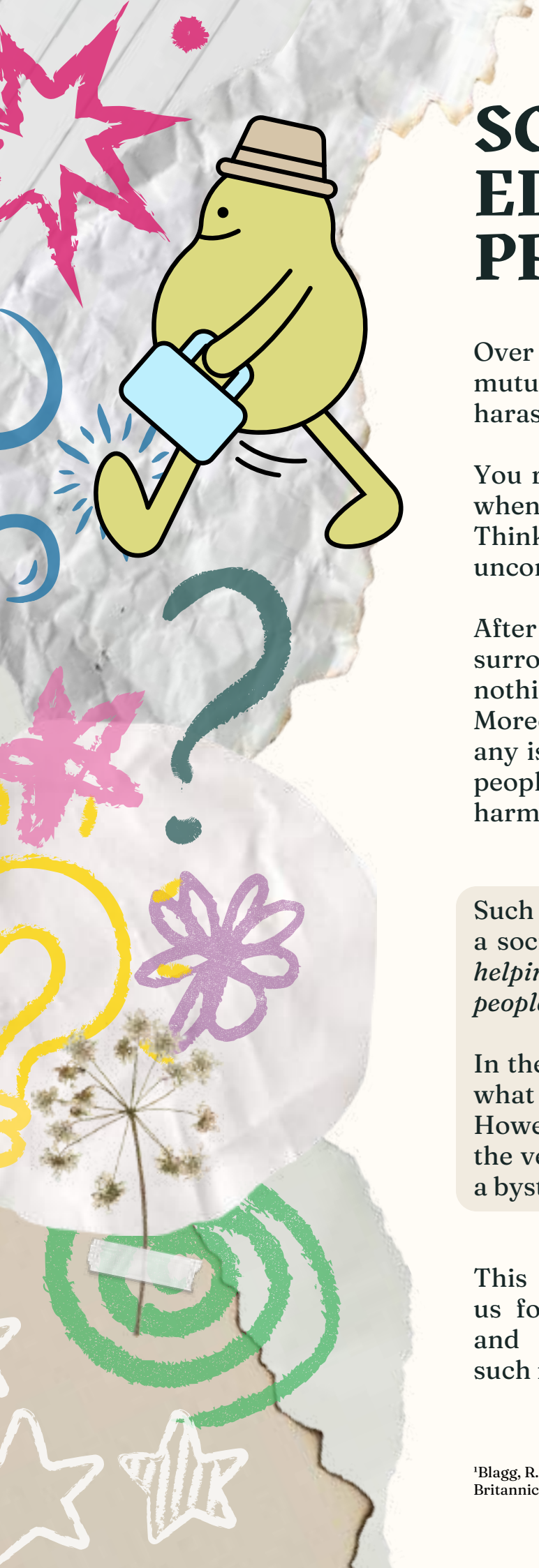




SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM...?

Over lunch, your friend mentioned that a mutual classmate was reportedly sexually harassed at a party you attended last week.

You recall seeing that classmate at the party when she was talking to another student. Thinking back, you had noticed she seemed uncomfortable, but you had dismissed it.

After all, she was well-liked and usually surrounded by friends. There was probably nothing amiss and you were overthinking it. Moreover, she seemed capable of managing any issues on her own, and there were many people around which made it difficult for any harm to go unobserved.

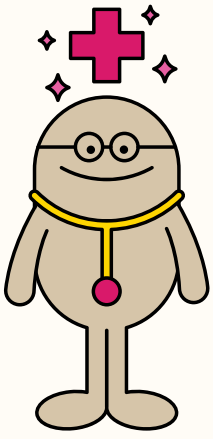
Such mindsets result in the **bystander effect**, a social phenomenon where the *likelihood of helping someone in need decreases as more people are present*[1].

In these situations, it can be tricky to discern what the right course of action should be. However, simply succumbing to this effect is the very barrier to a crucial intervention that a bystander has the power to do!

This magazine aims to explore and prepare us for these complexities, offering insights and step-by-step guidance on navigating such moments with compassion.

[1]Blagg, R. D. (2024, September 6). *Bystander effect | Causes & Consequences*. Britannica.

The PSYCHOLOGY behind the BYSTANDER EFFECT



Research has shown that, in emergencies, bystanders are less likely to help when others are present, as compared to when they are alone[2]. In fact, *the larger the crowd, the fewer people react to the situation.*

Why is this so? How can we mitigate this?

Diffusion of Responsibility

When many bystanders are present, individuals may feel less personally accountable for the outcome of a situation, and assume someone else will step in. This *reduced likelihood for individuals to take responsibility for decisions often leads to inaction.*

To counter this, clearly assign specific roles to people. For example, directly ask someone to call the police and another person to call the ambulance while you assist the person in need. Tap into the crowd as an opportunity to aid, rather than deter, helping behaviour.

Pluralistic Ignorance

Individuals in a group tend to incorrectly believe that their own concerns or feelings differ from those of others, although everyone may be experiencing similar thoughts. *If no one else appears concerned, one may wrongly assume that their own concern is unwarranted*[3].

To counter this, reflect on whether you might not be the only one worried. Consider who might be able to support you when you decide to act. You can share your sentiments with someone and ask for their thoughts.

[2]Dean, J. (2024, January 25). *Bystander Effect And The Diffusion Of Responsibility*. PsyBlog.
[3]Sissons, B. (2023, September 1). *What to know about the bystander effect*. Medical News Today.

Evaluation Apprehension

People may be reluctant to intervene *due to the fear of judgement from others.* This worry about being perceived negatively by others is amplified when in a larger group.

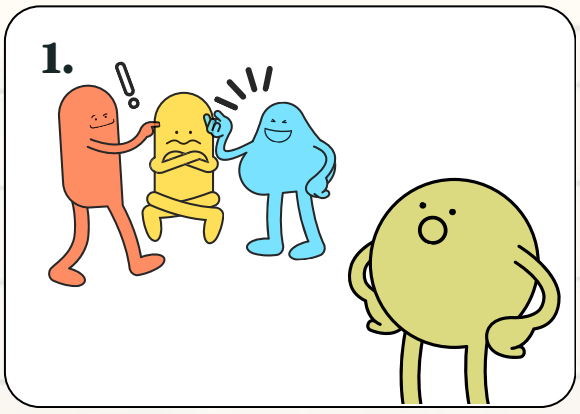
To counter this, consider the value of your effort instead of just the result.

Would it not be better to make a mistake by stopping a seemingly harmful interaction than to ignore it and allow potential harm to occur?

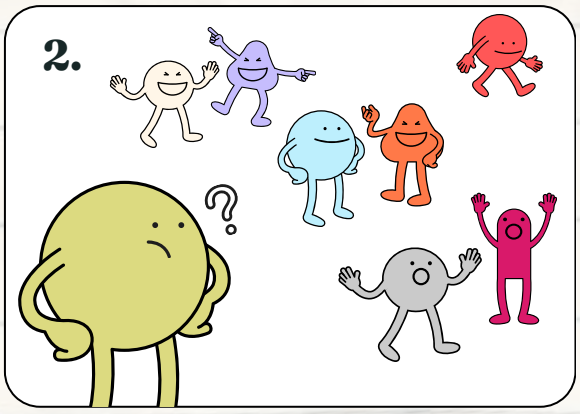
Cost-Benefit Analysis

When deciding whether to intervene in a situation, people weigh the potential costs (e.g., danger, time, effort) against the benefits (e.g., helping someone, gaining social approval). *If the costs seem too high compared to the benefits, they're less likely to act.*

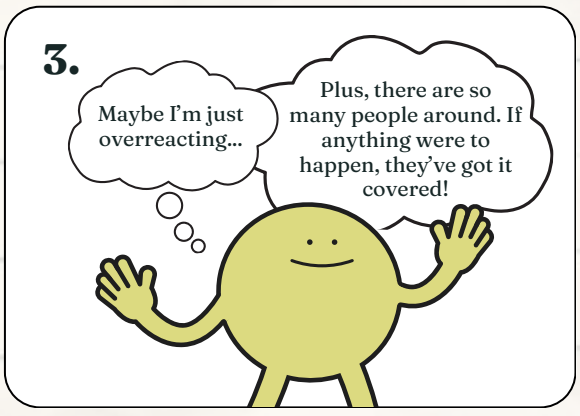
While it's important to prioritise your safety, **remember that even small actions can have a significant positive impact** and potentially save a life.



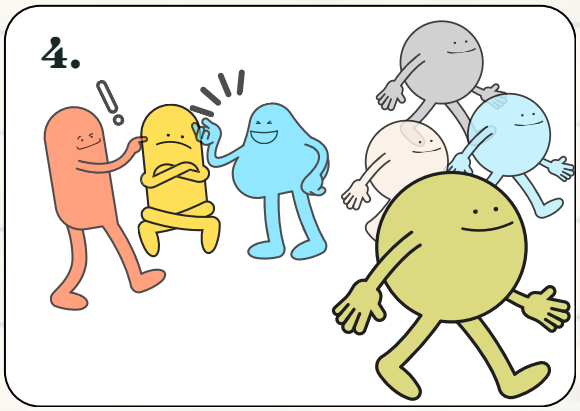
Green was walking when he saw Yellow looking uncomfortable with Orange and Blue's actions.



Green wanted to help Yellow but realised that no one else seemed bothered by the situation.



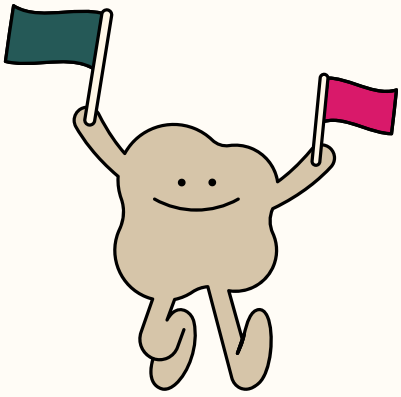
Green falls prey to the **BYSTANDER EFFECT**, relying on others to help instead.

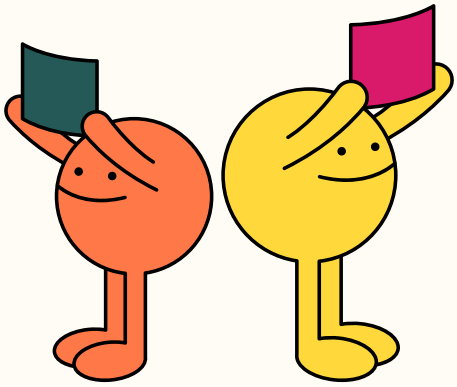


Yellow is left to deal with the uncomfortable situation alone as everyone overlooks it.

WHAT ROLE CAN I PLAY?

While some may not intervene due to various beliefs listed in the previous section, **your choice to intervene can erode harmful societal norms.**





The intervention becomes more effective when bystanders at the scene reinforce this message in solidarity.

Although intervening first in a conflict can be nerve-wracking, *your action signals to the perpetrator that their behaviour is unacceptable*.

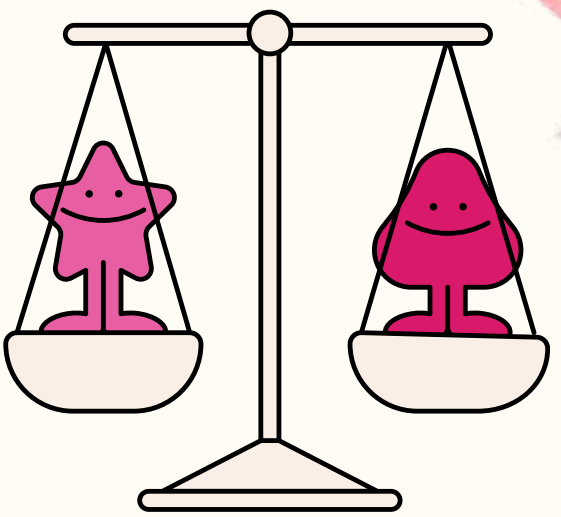
Even if you aren't the first intervener, stepping in to support spreads a powerful message to other onlookers that such misdemeanours are not condoned[4].

Respectful bystander interventions challenge the status quo and foster a culture where we are empowered to look out for each other.

Our proactivity ensures that such incidents are addressed promptly and sends an unambiguous message that these behaviours are intolerable in our society.

[4]University of Bath. (2024, January 25). *New research highlights the importance of bystander intervention when tackling anti-social behavior*. Phys.org.

SO HOW DO I INTERVENE?



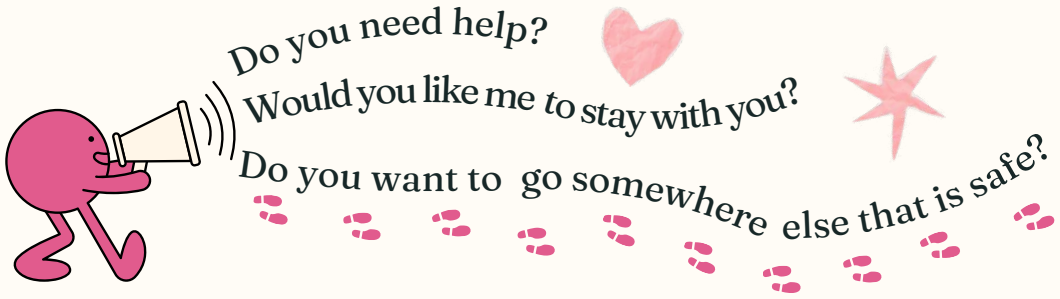
Before engaging in the situation, take note of the best exit strategies for all involved in the situation. ***During*** intervention, remain calm and focus on supporting the victim and their safety first. ***After*** experiencing such a situation, the victim may feel panic and shock and be unsure of what the next steps should be. Maintaining an empathetic and reassuring stance can make a huge difference.

With that said, how can we best intervene safely as a bystander? Introducing the **5Ds of Bystander Intervention**! Read on to find out what they mean and how to implement them.

Click **here** to view this TikTok video showing a good example of bystander intervention at play!

DIRECT

A sure way to avoid pluralistic ignorance is DIRECTLY asking if the victim needs help and assessing if action needs to be taken immediately to ensure their safety.
Some simple ones include:

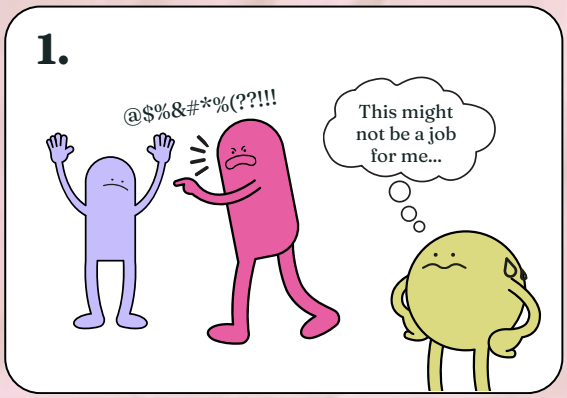


DISTRACT

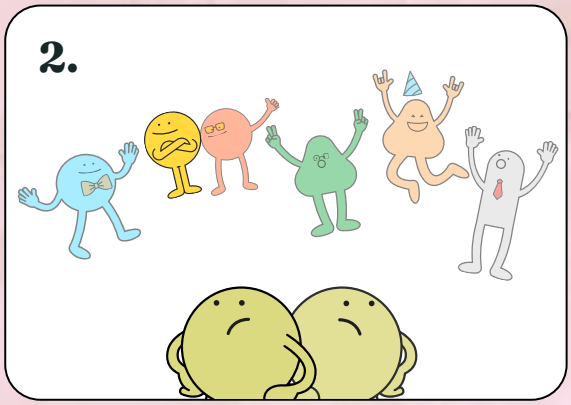
Create an opportunity for the victim to escape from potential danger via a DISTRACTION. Depending on the incident, this can materialise in various ways, such as:

- Approaching the victim or aggressor to ask for directions.
- Suggest an unrelated activity with surrounding people (e.g., a game).

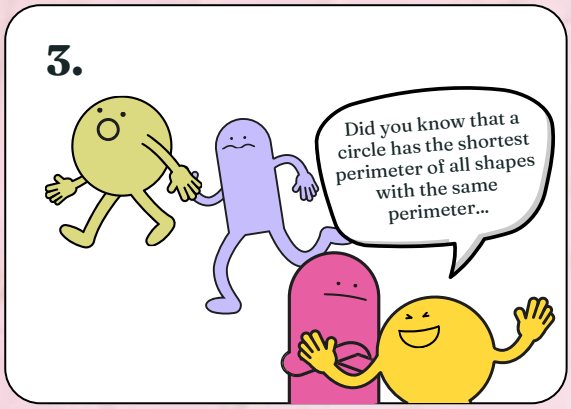
These can redirect the attention of the aggressor and victim, defusing the tension before it escalates further.



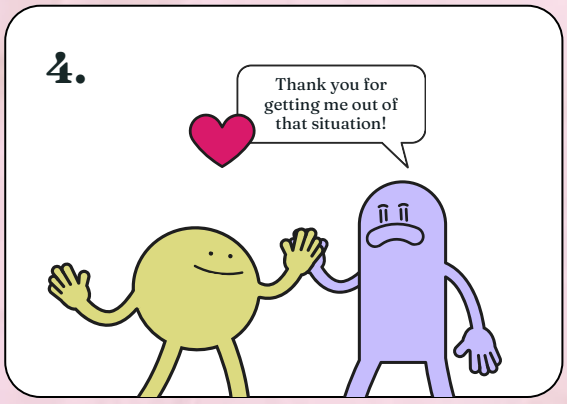
Green stumbled into a room and heard Pink insulting Purple. Green wanted to help Purple but found the situation dangerous.



Green looks around for someone he could **DELEGATE** the help to and spotted Yellow, a friend of Purple's.



With the help of Yellow, Green successfully **DISTRACTS** Pink and guides Purple away from the situation to safety.



Green lends Purple an empathetic ear before providing information on further support options (**DELAY**).

ELEGATE

(if the situation is intimidating or hard for you to intervene safely on your own)

With more people supporting the intervention, it creates a stronger message of disapproval to the perpetrator.

Assistance can be DELEGATED to a professional or safe person. This could be a *trusted person* who is familiar to you or the victim, or an *authoritative figure*, such as a security guard, who could offer additional safety away from the perpetrator.

ELAY

Some situations may happen too quickly for an immediate response. However, *this does not justify any ignorance.* You can still check in on the victim after the incident by:

- Providing affirmation to let them know that what happened was unacceptable and not their fault.
- Offering to accompany them
- Sharing SMU and community resources:
  - **Voices@SMU**: Supports students who have experienced harassment or discrimination
  - **SMU Mrs Wong Kwok Leong Student Wellness Centre**: Counselling and emotional support
  - **Samaritans of Singapore**: 24-hour Hotline & CareText (click here to learn more!)

OCUMENT

Record or take notes of the situation for evidence.

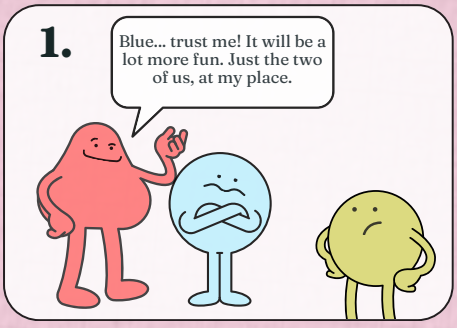
Only do this if there are others assisting the individual. Simply recording the victim being helpless can create further trauma for them.

Always consult the victim on how they want to utilise the documentation. Respect their wishes, whether it is to report to authorities or handled privately.

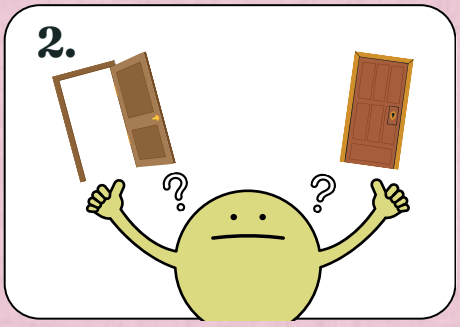
Beyond the 5Ds...

Great job on getting this far!
Thank you for keeping our community a safe space for others. Don't forget to check-in on your own mental well-being too!

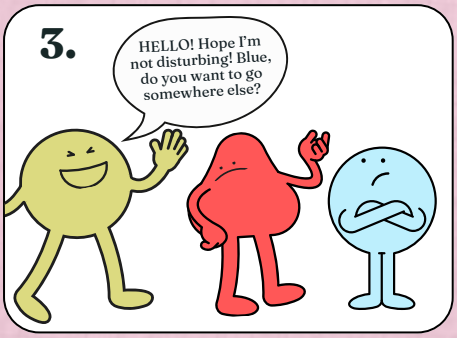
We encourage you to share your experience to alleviate the emotional and psychological impacts as an intervener. Consider seeking support from SMU or community resources (page 8), if you require it.



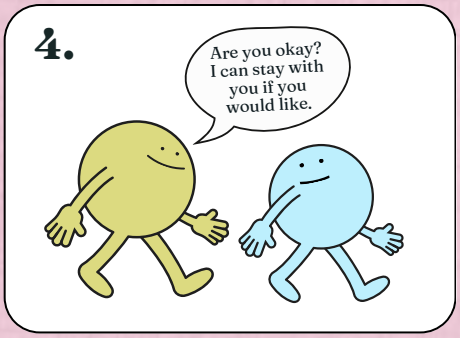
Green walked into a party and saw Blue looking uncomfortable at what Red was saying during their entire conversation.



Practising the learning points about being an active bystander, Green evaluates the best exit plan that can be taken with Blue post-intervention.

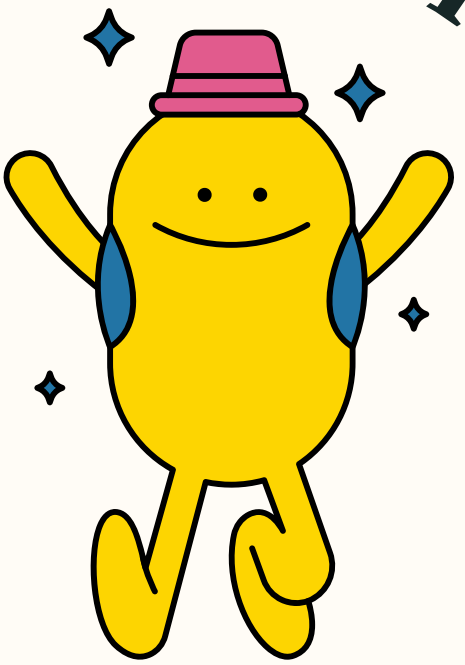


Green decides to **DIRECTLY** ask if Blue needed help, giving Blue an opportunity to be removed from the situation.



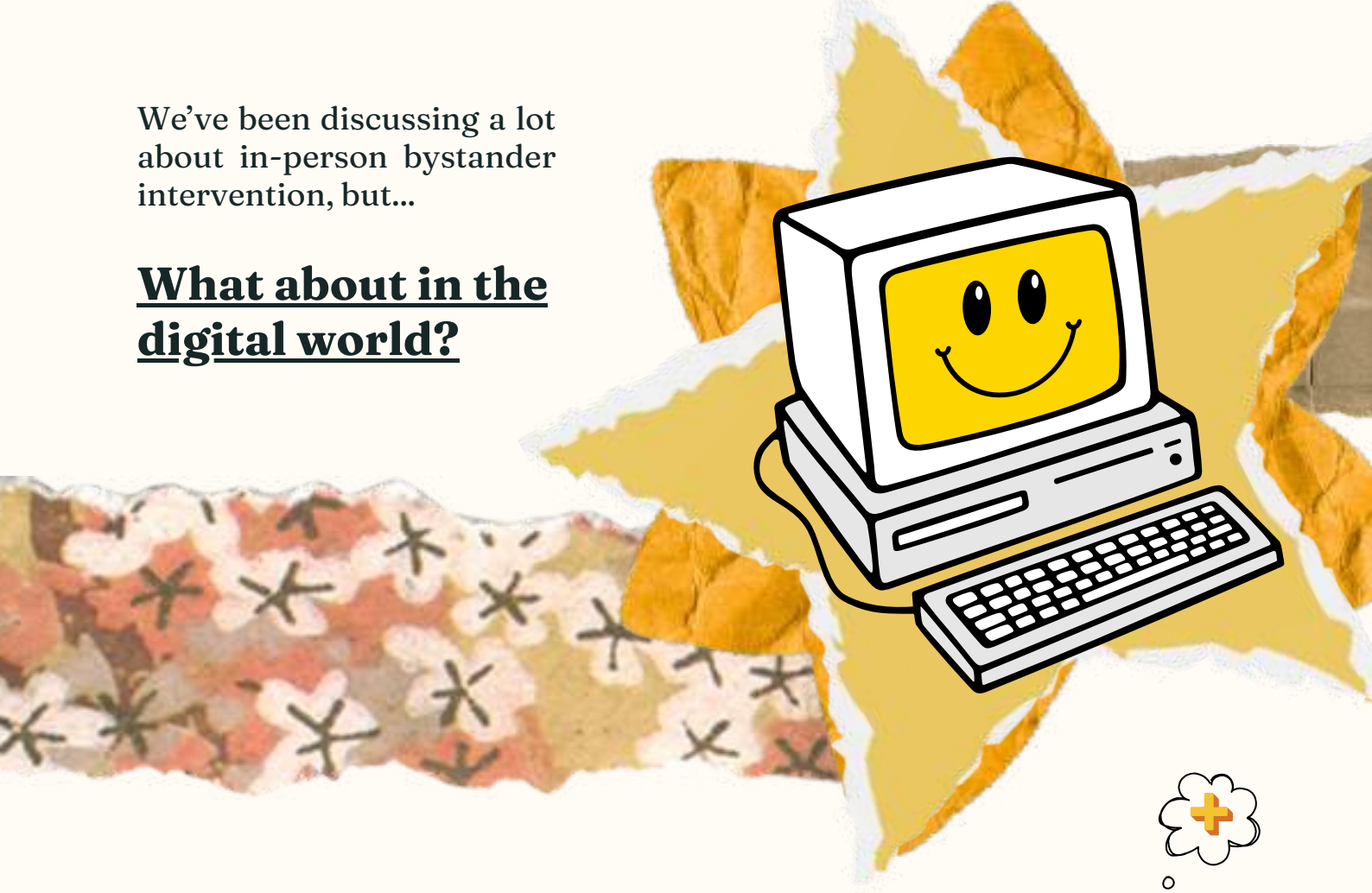
Green leads Blue to a safer environment and checks on Blue's well-being to assess if further help is required (**DELAY**).

DIVING INTO THE DIGITAL WORLD

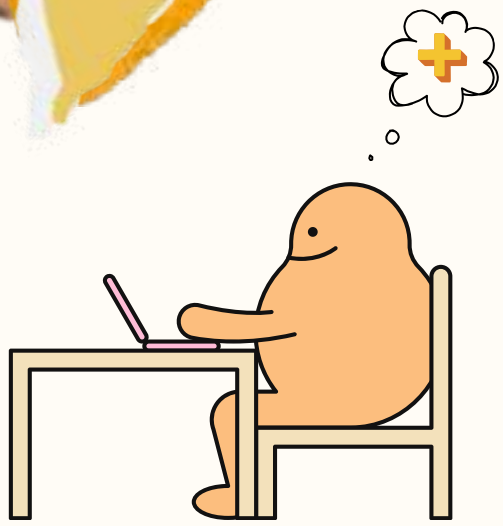


We've been discussing a lot about in-person bystander intervention, but...

What about in the digital world?



Our online interactions carry great power and responsibility. While some may spread hate anonymously, **we can use our voices to promote support and positivity.**



In recent years, online harms, such as cyberbullying, have increased. 52% of youths in Singapore reported personal experience of such incidents[5].

Many experience cyberbullying, but many more witness it. Consider how often you see hateful comments online and just scroll past. You might feel powerless, but you can apply the 5Ds of bystander intervention online too! Here are some ways how you can do this:

[5]Abdullah, Z. (2023, September 22). *Three in five have encountered online harms, or know someone who has: Survey*. The Straits Times.

IRECT

Respond thoughtfully to hurtful or offensive remarks by *setting boundaries with the harasser and showing support for the targeted person publicly*. Ensure you remain respectful and avoid escalating the situation.

ISTRACT

Interrupt negative online exchanges by *refocusing the conversation to the original content's intent*, or you can also change the subject by *sharing positive GIFs and comments* to drown the negativity.

ELEGATE

Report inappropriate content or behaviour to the platform or authorities. Seek help from trusted adults if needed, such as the SMU or community resources on page 8.

ELAY

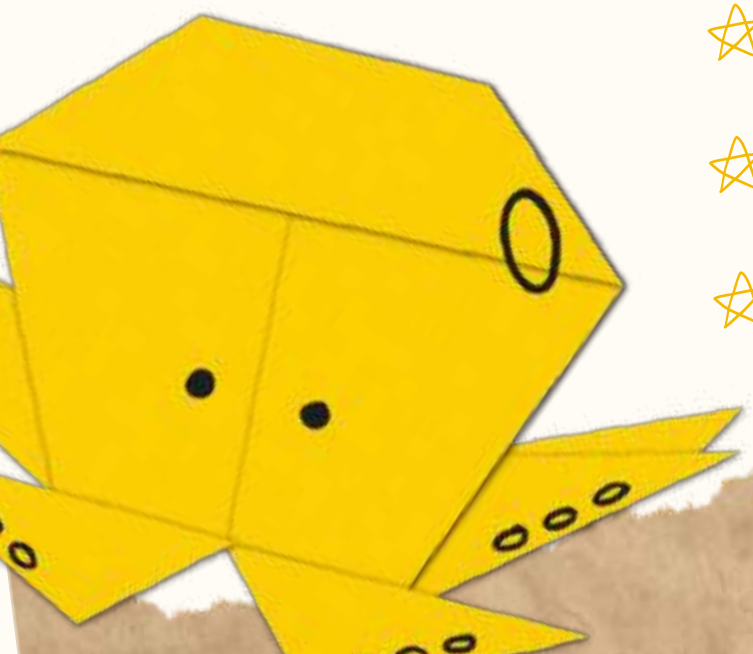
Check in with the victim privately, especially if you know them, to *offer support and reassurance* that they are not alone and that it's not their fault.

OCUMENT

Save screenshots of the misconduct to ensure there's a record, especially since online messages can be deleted or removed after a report has been made to the social media platform. Share these with the victim in secure ways and include a supportive message!

In short, important actions to take include:

- Sending supportive messages and comments to the victim.
- Fact-checking and exposing false claims or impersonations.
- Publicly defining acceptable behaviour to establish positive online norms.



SO, WHAT NEXT?

Through this magazine, we hope you have learnt that:

Bystander intervention is essential for creating safer spaces in communities.

Factors like diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance often lead to passivity, as explained in '*The Psychology Behind the Bystander Effect*'.

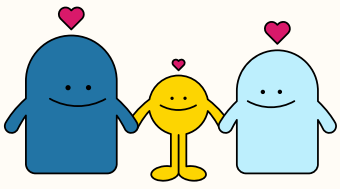
However, as highlighted in '*What Role Do I Play?*', overcoming these barriers and becoming an active bystander is crucial.

To help, *'So How Do I Intervene'* introduces the 5Ds: Direct, Distract, Delegate, Delay and Document.

These steps apply to both physical and online situations, as covered in *'Diving into the Digital World.'*

All in all, we hope you understand the importance of respectful and responsible bystander intervention.

Your actions, no matter how small, can positively impact someone's life!



FIN.

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X, S. (2024, January 25). New research highlights the importance of bystander intervention when tackling anti-social behavior. Phys.org.

LINKS

(page 7)
TikTok video:
https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS2Uu2GHG

(page 8)
Samaritans of Singapore Website:
https://www.sos.org.sg/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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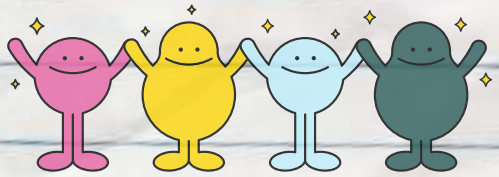
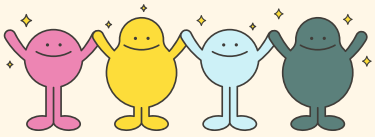
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