

ABOLITIONIST POCKET ZINE FOR YOUTH

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION & DE-ESCALATION

**BY INTERRUPTING
CRIMINALIZATION**

INTERVENING: THE 5 DS

Every situation is different, and no one strategy will work for all of them.

DISTRACT *Good for situations in which someone is being harassed:* approach the person being harassed but ignore the harasser. If you know the person, you can approach them in a regular, friendly manner. (“*Hey, what’s up?*”) If you don’t know the person, you can approach them and say something like “*Excuse me, do you know what time it is?*” You could “accidentally” drop something, or get in the way.

DELEGATE *Good tactic if there’s someone in a position of authority around:* at school, it could be a teacher or a counselor. In a store, it could be the manager or an employee. Approach another person, explain the situation, and ask if they can help.

DOCUMENT Stand at a safe distance away and film the interaction on your phone. DO NOT POST any video without the complete consent of the person who is being harassed. Sometimes, simply having an observer there will help defuse a situation.

DELAY Even if there's nothing you can do to intervene in the situation directly, you can still check on the person who's been harmed after the fact. Approach them and ask if they are okay and if there's anything you can do to support them. You can offer to accompany them, or just sit with them for a bit.

DIRECT This is the big one—intervening directly by confronting the person causing the problem. Ask yourself:

- Are you physically safe? Is the person being harassed physically safe?

DIRECT (continued) Ask yourself:

- Are there people you can call on around you for help?
- Does it seem likely that the situation will escalate beyond what's already happening?
- Does it seem like the person being harassed wants someone to speak up?

If you do choose to act directly, keep it as succinct as possible, and avoid getting drawn into an argument with the person who is acting aggressively. Some examples:

- “Leave them alone.”
- “Stop right now.”
- “That’s racist.”
- “They don’t want to leave with you.”
- “They said stop. I’m here to support them.”

ASSESSING BODY LANGUAGE

Carefully observing body language helps you identify situations as well as how to navigate them.

Try to avoid aggressive body language yourself—it's great to be assertive, but you don't want to go into a situation looking like you're going to start a fight.

Avoid clenched fists, yelling, making loud noises, or too much direct eye contact—some direct eye contact is good, but don't stare someone down.

Stand at an angle to the person so that they don't feel cornered, and remain as calm as possible. **Listen closely** to what the people involved are saying, and try to **avoid extremely reactive responses**.

You can always take a grounding breath or two before you speak. **Make sure to give everyone some personal space**, and know your exits if the situation escalates.

DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES

If you confront someone directly, you'll likely want them to calm down and/or disengage so that the person being harmed can get to safety. AYO! NYC uses the **GAMBLIN** mnemonic:

Get to We

Foster a sense of community by using “we” statements. (*“We just wanted to make sure everything was okay.”*)

Offer Alternatives

Instead of ordering, ask, so the person feels they have choice and agency. (*“Why don't we all step over here instead?”*)

Match and Lead

We mirror one another when we speak. If someone is yelling, approach them at a louder volume but speak calmly. Slowly get quieter as the conversation goes on.

Broken Record

Repeating your interjection over and over can be useful – people can be so wound up that they don't hear you, or process what you're saying the first few times.

Lose to Win

Pick your battles. If your goal is safety, you might have to change your plans for the day in order to, say, get someone who's being harassed off the train at the next stop.

“I” Statements

Again, instead of accusatory “you” statements, reframe the situation using “I” statements. (*“I’m feeling worried, I just want everyone to be okay here.”*)

Name The Behavior

Clearly and succinctly name what the problem is, without placing blame. (*“That’s not an okay thing to say.”*)

PERSPECTIVES AND POSITIONS

Your own history will shape the ways you respond, and that's true for everyone else as well. Always center the person who is being harmed and respect their agency—they may not have the same needs or wishes as you would. AYO! NYC uses the **BAPP** mnemonic:

Breathe

Be Aware of Your Triggers

Position Yourself For Safety

and Project Calm

Positionality

Ask Yourself:

- How do our different identities and backgrounds inform how we communicate and what our needs might be?
- How do they inform how others perceive us?