



## Choosing to be an ethical bystander

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A bystander is someone who witnesses events which may constitute an emergency, a criminal activity or may cause harm to another person.

As a bystander, you may choose to take no action, or to contribute to the situation in either a positive or negative way.

An ethical bystander is someone who chooses to attempt to influence the situation in a positive manner, while taking into consideration their own safety and wellbeing, and the consequences of their actions upon others.

### *An example;*

In relation to witnessing a crime, the ethical bystander would take action in an attempt to assist the victim.

Acting on behalf of the victim is what separates the ethical bystander from the passive bystander.

The passive bystander does nothing.

*Being an ethical bystander requires the bystander to use “safe bystander skills”, which include considering the following self-questions:*

- Is this person in need of help?
- Am I part of the solution?
- How can I keep myself safe and what are my available options?
- Are there others who can assist me and what resources do I have to help me take action eg phone;
- What are the pros and cons of taking action?

# Choosing to be an ethical bystander (continued)

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Consider the following scenarios:

1. You're at a party held by one of your friends. Most people have been drinking. You notice two people drinking together, laughing and flirting. You do not know either of them well but know they did not arrive together. One of the two goes to the bathroom and you notice the other person putting vodka into the other person's drink.

What are the ethical issues here and how could you intervene in a way that both ensures your safety and could change the situation for the better?

2. You are at a party and see one of your good friends being led upstairs by another person you know but not well. Your friend has had a fair bit to drink and is staggering.

What may happen if they continue up the stairs? What are the risks to your friend and what can you do? How will you feel if you do something or nothing? Is it safe to do/say something?

Some things that might prevent a person taking action:

- Age – (the age of the ethical bystander is important, for instance children are unable to take action)
- Fear – (fear for safety, repercussions at school or at work etc.)
- Practicality – you can't do anything if it's practically impossible (you might not be able to help due to distance or money)

If you are a woman, one in four of you will experience sexual assault sometime in your life. If you are a man it's one in five. These estimates are low because many of you don't tell anyone.

It's happening around you and to people you know. YOU have the power to decide how you would respond. It's not about being a hero – it's about doing something small to help prevent possible harm to someone else.

Keep an eye on your mates and others when you're out – you look after them, they look after you. It's all about having fun and making it home safely.

**Remember:**

**Being an ethical bystander isn't always easy. Where there is violence or the potential for violence to occur, personal safety should always be taken into account.**

**If you would like to talk to someone about the issues in this Fact Sheet, call SASS.**

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## Sexual Assault Support Service

Ingomar House, 34 Patrick Street, Hobart  
03 6231 1811 (9am–5pm, Mon–Fri)  
admin@sass.org.au | www.sass.org.au

24 hour sexual assault response and  
counselling service: **1800 MYSUPPORT**  
1800 697 877

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) Inc. receives funding from the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Australian Department of Social Services (DSS).

SASS holds Quality Improvement Council (QIC) accreditation.