



INCLUSION

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ACTIVE BYSTANDER

Everyone has a role to play in mitigating bias and challenging microaggressions when they experience them. Whether challenging the aggressor or supporting the victim, it is important that everyone sees challenging microaggressions as their responsibility so that biased attitudes and snubs do not lead to larger displays of discrimination in the rugby community and society. This section explores what we can all do to create inclusive environments where microaggressions are challenged and mitigated.

What is an active bystander?

An active bystander is someone who intervenes to challenge behaviour that is discriminatory. A passive bystander is someone who believes in doing the right thing but does not call out those in the wrong. Being an active bystander often takes a lot of courage, but the most important part is that it always takes action.

Work on active bystanders largely originates from research carried out in universities around norms relating to sexualisation of women and the acceptance of rape culture. However, this term is being used more and more in Inclusion & Diversity practice for challenging discrimination and being an ally to underrepresented groups.

What prevents people from being an active bystander?

The bystander effect explains that people are less likely to offer help to someone in need, when there are others present. People may feel uncomfortable or unwilling to help for different reasons:

- Social influence/identity - Thinking that if no one else is doing anything, the victim is not one of us/does not belong.
- Audience inhibition - Fear of embarrassment and standing out.
- Fear of retaliation - Feeling at risk or unsafe.
- Diffusion of responsibility - Someone else will deal with it.
- Pluralistic ignorance - Incorrectly assuming others think helping is unacceptable when your own thoughts are the contrary.

When no one acts, people who behave problematically - who make up the minority – make assumptions that there is a consensus on problematic behaviour being the agreed normal discourse. So, there is a responsibility on those in the majority, with healthy, positive behaviour to call out negative actions and behaviours to stop them becoming viewed as acceptable.



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What makes an active bystander?

Active bystanders are not afraid to challenge negative behaviours and support victims. It is important that they also understand and assess the situation before knowing when and how to intervene.

Active bystanders are able to:

1. Notice the event. They witness a situation and the negative behaviours demonstrated.
2. Interpret it as a problem. They do not assume the problem has been solved or underestimate its significance.
3. Feel responsible for dealing with it. They empathise with the victim and understand that not intervening means being indirectly complicit.
4. Possess necessary skills to act. They have the courage and confidence in their ability to intervene.

Top tips for being an active bystander:

1. Assess the situation - Is it safe for me to challenge? What else can I do if it is not safe?
2. Support the victim - Privately support the victim and listen to their experience if they want to share. It might be that they want to plan how to give feedback to the aggressor.
3. Use body language/respond to show disapproval of wrong behaviour.
4. Publicly support an aggrieved person and call out the behaviour.
5. Name or acknowledge an offense - If someone is making racist remarks, call it out as racism to let the aggressor know it is unacceptable.
6. Change the focus - If it's not suitable to challenge in the moment, it may be appropriate to change the focus and follow up later.
7. Encourage dialogue - Use "I" statements, use social norms and seek empathy.
8. Intervene as a group - When suitable, in settings like a meeting, more than one person can show their disagreement.
9. Report the incident - Sometimes, doing your part means escalating and reporting the offensive behaviour. Find out how your organisation or HR team can support you.