

SAFER STREETS

Tackling Violence Against Women
and Girls in South West London



Bystander Intervention Guide

A partnership between



IN THE UK, A MAN KILLS A WOMAN EVERY THREE DAYS

We must work together to change this – now.

From the government and local authorities, to the police, and individuals in the local community – we all have a role to play to help keep women and girls safe.

Nearly half of women asked in South West London said they didn't feel safe on public transport, and the majority said they felt unsafe after dark. Our streets should be safe for everyone.

In the UK workforce, the 2022 Randstad Gender Equality report revealed that 72% of women have experienced inappropriate behaviour from male colleagues and 32% believe sexual harassment in the workplace has had a negative impact on their careers. We want women and girls in South West London to feel confident and welcome to enjoy the places where they live and work.

You can step up and help end violence before it starts by having open and honest conversations and educating yourself and those around you on what's not okay and how to step in if needed.

What is Violence Against Women and Girls?

The first step in tackling the issue is educating ourselves on what violence against women and girls is. Abuse can happen to anyone but we know it disproportionately affects woman and girls.

It's not just physical - it's any behaviour that threatens, intimidates or violates. It could be unwanted advances, verbal or online abuse, stalking, or even just making someone feel unsafe or uncomfortable. It can happen on the streets, at school, work, or even at home.

Problematic behaviour includes disrespectful and harmful attitudes or actions that can condone and normalise abuse against women. Whilst we may not think that words have a direct impact on violence against women and girls, sexist jokes and 'banter' can contribute towards a culture of abuse against women and girls, and can often legitimise the behaviour of others who may end up committing serious acts of violence.

Abuse is wider than harassment and rape, and can include other actions that contribute towards this culture of abuse. This can include behaviour such as catcalling or hassling women, and inappropriate touching.

Some forms of violence against women and girls are more obvious than others, but if we all educate ourselves on what it is, signs to look out for, and what we can do about it, then together we can help put a stop to it by supporting women and girls who are being targeted and reporting those doing the harm.

The abuser can be a partner, ex-partner, someone at work, family member, community leader or member, a friend, or a stranger. The abuse could take place in person, or through technology or online. And the abuse can be emotional, physical, sexual or financial.

Some examples of abuse at work include:

- ▶ Inappropriate comments (including ones of a sexual nature)
- ▶ Inappropriate gestures or touching
- ▶ Repeated unwanted pressure to go on a date
- ▶ Asking for sexual activity in return for a promotion or pay rise
- ▶ Stalking

TAKING ACTION

By standing against all forms of abuse, and holding perpetrators accountable, we can create a society where women and girls are safe.

We know it doesn't always feel easy to challenge unacceptable language or behaviour among colleagues, friends, family or event strangers - and you should never put yourself at risk when doing so. But there are four signs to spot which can help you make a decision about when to intervene:

- ▶ Does the person look uncomfortable or upset?
- ▶ Are they trying to escape or move away?
- ▶ Do they seem frightened?
- ▶ When you make eye contact, do they respond in a way that makes you think they want help?

If the answer is yes, to one or more of these signs then you may want to take action. Scan the situation to assess risk and determine how to best intervene.

The most important thing is to remain calm and keep yourself safe. In an emergency, if you think someone is in immediate danger, always dial 999.

Depending on the situation, you can use one or more of the following steps. By stepping up against all forms of verbal or physical abuse, and holding people accountable, we can make our streets safer for women and girls. If you feel safe to do so, here are four simple ways you can safely step up:

1. Speak Up.

Call out disrespectful language or attitudes with colleagues, friends or family and tell them to stop and explain why it's not on.

We need to recognise violence against women and girls when we see it, and call it out. If we see something happening, we need to let people, including our friends and teammates, know that it's not alright - even if it's awkward.

Sometimes we see or hear things we know are wrong but we don't think it's our place to act. You can take action and show you disapprove for example, by not laughing and saying, 'I don't think that's funny'. You could also try asking questions such as 'why did you say that?' or 'what did you mean by that?'.

Or you could be more direct, if you feel it's safe to do so, by saying it's unacceptable and tell them to stop. Get used to saying 'that's not okay' when you hear sexist jokes from friends, family and colleagues.



IF YOU ARE IN THE WORKPLACE, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS REPORT DISRESPECTFUL LANGUAGE OR ATTITUDES TO HUMAN RESOURCES (HR).

2. Steal focus. Provide a distraction.

If you see someone in a difficult situation; interrupt, ask a question or change the subject so they can move away. If you feel you can't step in, ask friends or staff to help.

Sometimes what's best in the moment is creating a distraction, giving the person being targeted a chance to move away or giving others the opportunity to get help. You could strike up conversation with the victim, e.g. ask for directions, or where the next stop is on the bus, or pretend you know them.

If you're at work, you could make up an excuse to speak to them about an unrelated task. You could also try dropping something nearby or creating some other minor commotion.



3. Tell Someone. You do not have to step up alone.

You should tell someone in charge if you spot violence against women and girls.

- ▶ You could tell a member of the public or a passer-by and see if they are willing to help – working together can be a safe, effective way to step in.
- ▶ If you are at work, speak to Human Resources (HR).
- ▶ If you're in a bar or venue, get the manager.
- ▶ If you're on a train or bus, speak to the driver.

It's also important to check with the victim who they want to tell, or if they want to report to HR or elsewhere, or to the police.

4. Offer Support.

Check in with the person – a simple 'can I help you?' is a good place to start. Let the person know that you understand what happened was wrong and you are there to support them. You could capture what's happening on your phone and ask if they want the footage to report the incident, and you could offer to help report it. Always check with the victim what they want you to do with the footage that's been captured.

When there are others around, suggest that someone support the person experiencing harm (e.g., assist in leaving the situation), while you try to de-escalate the situation and person causing harm.

If it's someone you know, check in with them when they are alone and offer to help or support them to report it if they want.

WHITE RIBBON AMBASSADOR QUOTES

“Throughout my life I have abhorred all types of bullying and abuse. Witnessing people in my life experience violence has pushed me to advocate for a safer society, especially for women and girls. I learnt a lot about domestic violence (DV) from a colleague who works in that area and I’ve also had to step in to support friends who experienced DV. I hope that by being a White Ribbon ambassador I can contribute to creating a community where women and girls can be safe, where issues of violence are spoken about openly and more people understand how to safely intervene.”

- Howard Greenoff

“I urge everyone to consider the type of society they want to live and work in, and what they want for others. There are many victims of abuse and the traumas created have a massive impact – this is a collective problem as a society and should be dealt with a collective effort. I urge anyone who wants to be a part of change to find the right avenue for them to make a difference.”

- Paul Harper

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE AND REPORT ABUSE?

At work, you should always report any incident or disrespectful language to HR.

Visit [Safer Streets at Merton Council](#) or [The Metropolitan Police](#) for advice on reporting violence against women and girls.

Be part of the campaign to end violence against women and girls: make the White Ribbon promise to never use, excuse or remain silent about it. Visit WhiteRibbon.org.uk to learn more.

Remember, in an emergency always dial 999 or go to the [Metropolitan Police website](#).

Let’s make our streets safer for women and girls.
Step Up South West London.

#StepUpSWLondon

