1. Exploring bystanders

**Group size**



Small groups

**Suggested timing**

20-25 minutes

**Method**



Discussion

Learning objectives

* Understand and explain what the bystander effect is
* Identify why some people might hesitate to act and what inspires others to help
* Explain how to overcome barriers to helping others

## Overview

## Learn about the impact of the bystander effect by discussing what it means and then thinking through a range of scenarios to understand how we overcome barriers to helping.

## Preparation

Familiarise learners with the ground rules for the session or establish ground rules. Assure learners are given opportunities to ask questions and have a way to ask anonymous questions if they wish to. For guidance on how to do these things, see the [Creating a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment guidance.](https://firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/secondary/guidance-and-support/)

## Delivering the activity

1. Ask learners to get into pairs and discuss the term ‘bystander’. What do they think the word means? If they break down the word does it give them a clue? e.g. standing by. Invite groups to share their ideas. After a short discussion explain that:

*\*The bystander effect describes a situation where many people see someone in need of help but no-one steps forward to help. We know that once people understand the bystander effect and barriers to action they are more likely to help someone in need of first aid.*

Ask learners to discuss why they think this phenomenon might happen? What stops people helping when lots of people are around?

1. Ask learners, what might this mean in terms of giving first aid – how might someone be a bystander in this situation?
2. You could share more information with learners about the ‘bystander effect’. The two key factors psychologists say lead to the bystander effect are:
* Diffusion of responsibility – people think someone else will help.
* The need to behave in a socially acceptable way – people don’t want to behave differently to the rest of the group.

Ask learners if they think there are any other reasons people in crowds might not help?

1. Now ask learners to imagine a scenario. A young person is walking down the street when someone collapses in front of them.
2. Ask them to discuss – in small groups – what might influence the person to help? Present them with the following situations and ask, how might they act now? Why might they help or not help? Either give each group of young people a different situation to discuss and then feedback their ideas to the whole group, or have every group compare some or all of the following situations:
* They are the only person around
* They are with their family
* They are with their friends
* They are in a very busy public space surrounded by many people
* They are walking down the street on their way to meet someone
* They knew the person who had collapsed
1. Get learners to discuss the different contexts and identify the factors which might encourage or deter people from helping.
2. Ask learners what could the young person in each scenario do to go from bystander to helper – how could they reasonably and safely do something to help in every situation?

## Stretch and challenge activities:

1. If this has not already been raised by learners original discussions, ask how they think the young persons’ responses might change if the person who collapsed was:
* Someone they knew personally?
* An older man in scruffy clothing?
* A young woman in a suit?
* A teenage boy in a tracksuit and hoodie?
1. Learners can discuss the scenarios in their small groups. When they have had time to do this, bring the discussion together as a whole group. Use some or all of these prompt questions:
* What assumptions are they making about the people? Do they think those assumptions are justified?
* Could the young person accurately understand the situation just from looking at the person who has collapsed?
* How else could they get more information in order to make their decision to help or not?
* How can we balance helping and taking care of our own safety?
* Who else could the young person call for help?
* Is there ever a situation when they think the young person wouldn’t help at all – how would they justify that choice?

Some of these questions may prompt discussions about moral decision making. For guidance about discussing principles around helping people, see [the walking debate activity on the first aid for secondary learners homepage.](https://firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/secondary/first-aid-skills/)

## Summing up

Discuss what learners have found out about the bystander effect – did anything surprise them?

Now follow this activity with the Bystander effect in action – practise activity on the [Exploring bystanders web page](http://firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/secondary/helping-others/exploring-bystanders).