1. The bystander effect in action

**Group size**



Small groups



**Suggested timing**

25 minutes

**Method**



Discussion, film and article

**What you need**

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[Film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSsPfbup0ac)

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[Newspaper article](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57527492)

Learning objectives

* Explain what the bystander effect is
* Evaluate how people respond in a first aid situation
* Present some solutions to barriers to helping

## Overview

Watch a film and read a newspaper article that show the bystander effect in action. Discuss the impact of the bystander effect and what learners can do to overcome it.

## Preparation

Be able to play the film, and share the newspaper articles, either on screen or by printing them out.

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. Begin by asking learners to share the definition of a ‘bystander’ – they should have covered this in the previous learn activity.
2. Watch [the film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSsPfbup0ac) with learners.

*The film shows actors posing as injured or collapsed members of the public, with a commentary on people that do and don’t intervene to help. The footage discusses the bystander effect in more detail; you can use the suggested prompt questions below to discuss the film with learners.*

Use all or some of these prompt questions:

* What is happening in the film? How do people react? Does anything change their actions?
* What might the people be thinking as they walk past the man or woman on the steps?
* What might be stopping people from helping? (Ask learners what thoughts people passing by might have and what they might observe about the person needing help, e.g. it’s not for me to intervene, I think they are drunk, I should leave them alone, etc.)
* What internal conflicts or factors might stop them from intervening, in the film? (e.g. I’m late for work, there’s lots of other people who will help, I don’t know what to do, I’m too busy, etc.)
* Watch the video again, from 0:00–0:34 and then from 1:15–1:38, and identify two key reasons why the passers-by may not have stepped in to help.
* What happens when someone starts to behave differently from the rest of the group?
* What might have motivated them to help?
* Why does the man’s outfit make such a difference to whether people helped? (E.g. by dressing smartly the male actor became part of the social group of ‘smart City workers’ who previously walked past).

1. 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 see any evidence of this behaviour or thinking in the video. Think about the previous bystander effect learn activity. Were these some of the barriers discussed in relation to the young person?

Explain that when people started to step into help, they established that it was now socially acceptable to help – often, all it takes is one person to step in to help, and many more will follow because they now think it is expected or acceptable to do so. Give learners space to discuss this and share their reflections. Does this surprise them?

1. Print out or display this newspaper case study <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57527492>

*This article discusses a man who was vomiting early one morning on a bench. Many people walked by assuming he was drunk or hungover from the night before. One woman stopped because she recognised the signs of a stroke.*

1. Ask learners to read the newspaper article. working in pairs ask learners to summarise the article and the key points back to the whole group.
2. Use the suggested prompt questions below to support discussion around the article. Prompt questions:

* What is happening in the article? How do people react?
* What influenced the woman to step forward to help?
* What might the people be thinking as they walk past the man in the article? Do you think his wife is correct when she says “Many probably assumed he was drunk or hungover”? Why might they have thought that?
* Are there any other reasons that they might not have intervened? Think about the time, early morning, could they have been rushing to work? Think about the coronavirus pandemic, is safety a concern?
* Think about the location, Mayfair. Do you think things would be different in a different place?
* Think about this article and the previous video. What similarities and differences are there in the stories?

## Stretch and challenge activities:

1. Have learners create a poster to describe what the bystander effect is and how we can overcome it – this could be things like, learn first aid skills to feel more able to help, don’t assume the person is sleeping or drunk, call 999 if it’s not safe to step in or step in to help and others will probably follow.

## Summing up

Invite learners to discuss the bystander effect, what have they learned?

Move on to [Choosing to help skill page](https://firstaidchampions.redcross.org.uk/secondary/helping-others/choosing-to-help/) to continue exploring the bystander effect and ways to help others.