

## SECTION 4:

# Confident individuals

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“...acting on our personal responsibility to speak up and respond when seeing or hearing sexism, discrimination or sexual harassment...”

PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE  
[AN EVIDENCE REVIEW: SUMMARY REPORT]. VICHEALTH 2012

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

### INFORMATION SHEETS

# 9. Understanding individual action

## **Bystander action is speaking up against and challenging sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace.**

To take effective bystander action, it is useful to develop your skills and knowledge about this new type of workplace action.

We recommend:

- finding out about your SSA's policies, procedures and expected standards of behaviour
- talking to colleagues about the:
  - kinds of behaviours and practices that constitute sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment
  - negative impact sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment can have on them and the workplace
  - 'ground rules' about what to say and do when taking bystander action.
- reflecting on your own commitment to building a fair and respectful work environment for women.

To take on the challenge of speaking out against the behaviours or practices of colleagues and peers, you need your SSA to stand right behind you.

We recommend:

- talking to your managers and fellow team members about where they stand on taking bystander action
- looking at your policies and procedures to see whether they reference, and provide some guidance around, the use of bystander action and offer protection for staff who take bystander action.

Speaking up against sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment is everyone's responsibility, but working towards building a respectful and fair workplace starts with you!

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### INFORMATION SHEETS

# 10. Steps to taking bystander action

**Research around bystander action shows that by the time people speak up and challenge sexist language, sex discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace, they have gone through some quick thinking and decision-making.**

This thinking and decision-making is described here as four steps to bystander action.

#### STEP 1

Decide whether the behaviours or practices you are seeing or hearing are sexist, discriminatory and/or sexual harassment. What do your policies and procedures say about them? Are they outside of your agreed or expected team behaviours? If you are not sure, check with your manager or supervisor.

#### STEP 2

Decide whether you feel safe to step in. Will you be supported by your manager or supervisor if you do? Would this be something your manager or supervisor would expect you to challenge? Has your team agreed to challenge this kind of behaviour? Is there a risk of violence or escalation of the situation if you intervene?

#### STEP 3

Decide whether taking bystander action will be helpful. If you were on the receiving end, would you want someone to step in for you? Will it result in a positive outcome? Will it make a positive difference to a person's behaviour or to the workplace culture?

#### STEP 4

Weigh up the seriousness of the behaviour or practice to decide how you might step in. If your team has already agreed on how to step in, then act accordingly.

Workplaces should have a zero tolerance approach to sex discrimination and sexual harassment and be doing all they reasonably can to eliminate it.

You may be committed to stepping in and doing something when you see or hear about sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment. This decision may be based on putting yourself in the other person's shoes and thinking about the impact these behaviours may have on them. It may also be influenced by the expectations placed on you by your organisation to play a role in stopping or preventing sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment at your workplace.

These decisions can be hard to make on your own or in the moment, and it is helpful to talk with your manager and team about why and how best to take bystander action. Putting this on your team agenda will:

- prepare your whole team to take bystander action when it is needed
- help people who are on the receiving end feel they will be supported
- let people who deliberately or inadvertently behave inappropriately know to expect bystander action and how to respond when they do
- start realigning your workplace culture to one that is safe, inclusive and respectful for everyone.

# SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS

## CHECKLIST

### Self checklist

Question	Yes	No	Partly	Ref
1 Can I easily identify sexist, discriminatory and harassing behaviours at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2 Do I know the impact these behaviours could have on women?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3 Do I know what our policies and procedures say about sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4 Do I accept it is my responsibility to do something when I hear about or see sexist, discriminatory and harassing behaviours at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5 Do I feel okay about speaking up against or challenging the behaviours and practices of colleagues or peers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6 Do I know what to do or say, when I witness or hear about sexist language, sex discrimination or sexual harassment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7 Am I okay if someone gives me feedback about my behaviour at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8 Do I understand what bystander action is and where my SSA stands on it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9 Do I understand the four steps to taking bystander action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10 Do I know my team's agreed way of taking bystander action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11 Am I committed to the use of bystander action at work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12 Do I know who I could talk to if I want support to take bystander action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### ACTION OPTIONS

# 27. Understanding sex discrimination and sexual harassment

**It is important to have an understanding of sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment and the use of bystander action at work as a way to address these behaviours and practices.**

As a starting point, look at your workplace policies as well as the VicHealth 'Everyone Wins' and Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission websites.

Find out about:

- legal definitions of discrimination (including sex and gender identity discrimination, and victimisation) and sexual harassment
- your organisation's policies on sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment
- the impact of sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment on individuals and workplaces
- the use of bystander action in the workplace
- why bystander action can be an important preventive technique in a community strategy to eliminate violence against women.

# 28. Preparing to act

**Taking bystander action requires confidence about what you are going to say and do, which can come from practising the actions you will take when you witness or hear about sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment in your workplace.**

Think about the difference bystander action can make to building a fair and respectful environment for women and write a list of things you can say and do as a bystander at your workplace. **E15**

Consider scenarios like these where bystander action could be helpful:

- Your manager asks a discriminatory question in a job interview.
- You hear another staff member tell a crude joke over the phone to a mate.
- A staff member makes a comment about the weight of a female coach.
- A staff member comments on a colleague's sexuality.
- Your social club organises a 'boys only' day.
- Your manager makes a decision to cut part-time hours for female staff.
- You see staff ignoring another staff member who has complained about sexual harassment.

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### ACTION OPTIONS

## 29. Plan for responses

**Taking on bystander action for the first time may create some challenging questions and reactions from people around you.**

Being ready to answer those questions can help overcome barriers in your workplace.

Think about some questions you may be asked and draft some answers. **E16**

Here are some examples: **E17**

- Are you always going to watch what I say or do?
- Can't you take a joke anymore?
- Are you going to tell the boss about this?
- What are you – the thought police?
- What gives you the right to tell me how to behave?
- What about when we are just out as mates?
- Why aren't you saying something about jokes about men?
- What do you say when a woman makes an off joke?
- How does speaking up change what we do around here?

## 30. Showing commitment

**Successfully implementing bystander action at your workplace depends on your commitment to addressing sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment and to providing a fair and respectful environment for women.**

Take advantage of opportunities presented to you at work to voice your commitment to the use of bystander action as a strategy to address sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment. **E18**

Opportunities include:

- staff meetings
- meetings with your sporting club/s
- informal discussions with colleagues
- discussions with managers and board members
- network meetings with other organisations
- professional development forums
- consultations with stakeholders.

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### ACTION OPTIONS

# 31. Four steps to bystander action

**The four steps of bystander action describe key steps in making a decision about when and how to step in against sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment.**

To prepare yourself to act, work through the four steps with a specific example in mind. **E15**

#### STEP 1

Is the behaviour sexist, discriminatory and/or sexual harassment? What do our policies and procedures say about it? Is this outside your agreed or expected team behaviours? If you are not sure, check with your manager or supervisor.

#### STEP 2

Is it safe to step in? Would your manager or supervisor act on this? Would this be something your manager or supervisor would expect you to challenge? Has your team agreed to challenge this kind of behaviour?

#### STEP 3

Would bystander action be helpful? If you were on the receiving end, would you want someone to step in for you? Will it make a positive difference to a person's behaviour or to your workplace culture?

#### STEP 4

How serious is it and how could you respond proportionately? How as your team agreed to respond? What could you say or do?

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### EXAMPLES

# 15. Bystander action at work

**Speaking up and challenging behaviours, attitudes and practices that are sexist, discriminatory or harassing is a key strategy to provide a fair and respectful workplace environment for women.**

Bystander action can be taken:

- in the moment when you see or hear about the event, behaviour or practice
- after the moment when the event, behaviour or practice took place.

Taking bystander action at any time is important, because doing nothing supports and encourages the behaviours and attitudes.

Some action examples are:

- telling a colleague their behaviour is not appropriate in the workplace
- stepping in when a colleague is behaving inappropriately to another colleague
- speaking up when someone tells a sexist joke or shows you sexist images
- telling your manager when you hear of an incident of sexual harassment or sex discrimination
- speaking up if staff use sexist language
- noting any language or content in your policies or procedures that you think may need to be updated or changed to promote inclusiveness and discussing this with your manager
- talking to colleagues or managers about your workplace culture
- talking to your managers about workplace safety concerns for women
- supporting a colleague who is making a complaint about sex discrimination or sexual harassment
- looking for opportunities to be inclusive and actively making room for people to join in wherever appropriate.

# 16. What to say in the moment

- Is that respectful?
- I think what you are saying may be sexist/discriminatory.
- I don't think that fits in with how we have agreed to talk to each other here.
- Is anyone else uncomfortable with that joke/email/image?
- Is anyone else concerned that doing that goes against our policies about discrimination?
- I don't agree with that.
- Our policy/code of conduct says we are not to tell sexist jokes in our workplace.

## SECTION 4: CONFIDENT INDIVIDUALS



### EXAMPLES

## 17. What to say after the moment

Opening lines:

- I have thought about what happened before and I'm not sure it fits with our agreed behaviours.
- I'd like to follow up what you said before...
- I am concerned about the joke you told earlier. We have agreed that those types of jokes are not on.
- Can we please have a quick conversation about the remark you made earlier?
- That might not have been a big deal to you but...

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## 18. Individual commitment to take bystander action

It is useful for you to think about your own willingness to take action and make a commitment to yourself about what you will do.

I will endeavour to:

- speak up against the use of sexist language in my workplace
- speak up against any behaviour that discriminates against women
- speak up against any policy or practice that discriminates against women
- speak up against any behaviours that constitute sexual harassment
- support colleagues who engage in bystander action
- support colleagues who make complaints about sex discrimination and sexual harassment
- encourage others to take bystander action
- seek feedback from colleagues and supervisors about my behaviour
- graciously receive feedback about my own behaviour
- change my language and behaviour in response to feedback.