

Key Takeaways - Addressing Racism Within the Settlement Sector: Bystander Intervention Training with ICA

Based on feedback from AMSSA's anti-racism working groups about the need for more training on how to intervene during racist incidents, AMSSA collaborated with the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) to deliver their bystander intervention training. This summary shares key discussions that emerged, but we encourage connecting with ICA for more info on their trainings.

5D Intervention Tools

The Bystander Effect is a social psychological theory that states that individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim when there are other people present because responsibility is diffused. The 5Ds, which are adapted from [Right to Be](#), are strategies that can be used combat the bystander effect and intervene to support those impacted by racism. They do not have to be followed in order but rather are a set of tools to draw from to provide support.

DIRECT

Direct behaviors involve directly addressing the perpetrator's negative behavior. Confirm your own safety before engaging directly.

DISTRACT

Distraction involves shifting the perpetrator's attention from their racist words/actions to create more safety. (Often paired with delay)

DOCUMENT

Documentation can be used to record a violent or aggressive incident, if it is safe to do so. Never share without permission impacted persons.

DELEGATE

Delegation can be useful if you feel unable to intervene alone. It can involve encouraging group support and action for the targeted person.

DELAY

Delayed strategies involve talking to the perpetrator after the incident has taken place and discussing the harm caused.

Key Discussions

Training participants shared several insightful questions that reflected on the nuances of how to respond to specific incidents of racism.

Q: At what point is it appropriate to escalate incidents (e.g., Human Rights report)?

A: A good strategy is to collaborate with the targeted person as this allows them to have agency. Sharing options with them can help empower people to make the best decision for their situation and validate their experiences.

Q: Racism exists on different levels. How can we choose responses/tools that are appropriate to the severity of each situation?

A: The 5Ds are meant to be flexible to allow for different responses. As bystander intervention is an individual response, a useful first barometer is how your body feels (e.g., do you feel equipped)? Because even if an incident is severe, if you don't feel prepared to support, maybe the best option is to delegate rather than directly intervene.

Q: If someone offers feedback about how your behavior has harmed them, how can you approach asking for more information without placing the burden on them to explain?

A: Understand the types of work that it can create for people who are harmed to explain the situation. If you genuinely want to learn more about the issue, you can seek answers from a third party and identify your knowledge keepers.

Scenarios & Responses

During the training, participants worked through different scenarios and shared information on how they would intervene. The following summarizes some intervention strategies shared.

You are at a government office or a community hub. A staff member is speaking loudly and impatiently to a newcomer client whose first language is not English. The staff member says, "If you can't understand the form, I can't help you. You need to bring someone who actually speaks English next time."

DIRECT – Can advocate for and support the person who needs help. One participant who had experienced a similar situation spoke the same language as the person who needed help and helped to informally translate.

You're at a small dinner with coworkers and friends. Someone mentions how much funding has recently gone to "diversity initiatives." Another person laughs and says, "Yeah, apparently that's the fastest way to get a grant now." The tone is casual — no one seems outwardly offended, but the air shifts.

DISTRACT – Can make a joke asking for tips on how to get all of the funding for diversity initiatives. As someone who works in this space who knows it is underfunded, making a joke can point out the reality and help them question their statements.

A long-time volunteer at a settlement agency is helping a newcomer from a formerly colonized country. You overhear the volunteer saying, "You should be grateful for the opportunities here; in your country, people don't have these rights because of how they run things there."

DIRECT – Can intervene and tell the volunteer that what they said is not appropriate and we can't make assumptions about people's contexts or experiences, especially if you've never lived in another country. Volunteers often come in with good intentions, but they should still be held to the same standards for treating newcomers with respect.

In a community hub, a newcomer from one ethnic group makes a derogatory comment about another immigrant group, using language they've picked up from aggressive online narratives (e.g., "They are the ones driving up the housing prices").

DIRECT – Can remind people that unless you're Indigenous, we're all immigrants and settlers to this land and no one is more deserving or at fault than anyone else.

For more information about ICA's bystander intervention training, contact Parker Johnson at pjohnson@icavictoria.org.