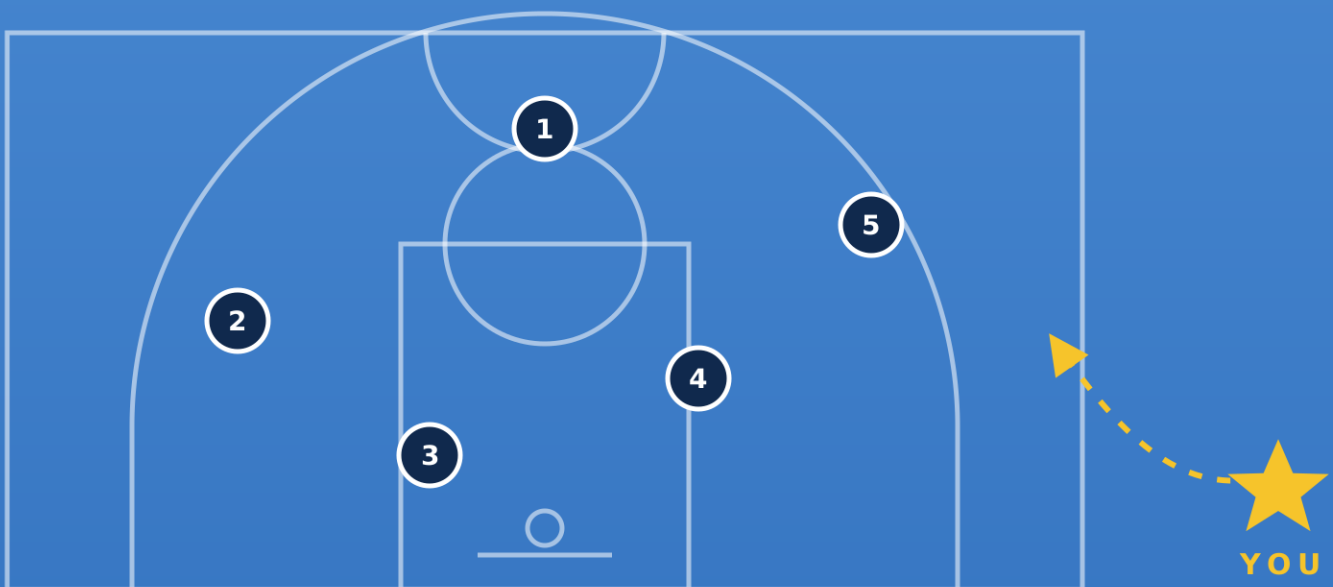


PERIL EDITION



BE THE SIXTH PLAYER

A Bystander Intervention Playbook for Fans, Families & Community



FIVE PLAYS INSIDE

THE FUNDAMENTALS · IN THE COMMENTS · COURTSIDE · OFF THE COURT · COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

Don't stay benched. Be the Sixth Player.

Polarization & Extremism Research & Innovation Lab · American University School of Public Affairs · perilresearch.com



Be the Sixth Player

A Bystander Intervention Playbook for Fans, Families & Community

Violence, harassment, and related harms can be prevented by creating a healthier community. When bystanders step in, hate and harassment become less acceptable before they escalate. This series is a playbook for everyday moments — in the stands, online, in conversation, and with the next generation. **The goal isn't to be a hero or win an argument; it's to make respect the norm.**

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Don't stay benched. Be the Sixth Player.

A five-part "Be the Sixth Player" series — find all five handouts at perilresearch.com



POLARIZATION & EXTREMISM
RESEARCH & INNOVATION LAB
SCHOOL of PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Be the Sixth Player

THE FUNDAMENTALS

1

An Introduction to Bystander Interventions

WHAT IS A BYSTANDER INTERVENTION?

Violence, harassment, and related harms can be prevented by creating a healthier community. When bystanders intervene when they see something wrong, it can make hate and harassment less acceptable before it escalates to physical violence. This guide is for fans, families, and community members; it is not a substitute for arena staff, security, emergency response, or 911 in case of emergency. But when we see a small harm that, if unchecked, could escalate into a greater harm or make our community feel like a harmful one – we each have the power to point our communities in a safer direction.

Sometimes, teammates off the court need help to get back on the right path. Other times, others are trying to knock you and your teammates down with hate and harassment. Bystander intervention is the ultimate play for keeping you and your team on the path to sportsmanship and success. The goal is not to be a hero or win an argument; it is to make respect the norm and choose a safe action that helps the person impacted.

Bystanders first need to take care of themselves. When encountering harassment, always assess the situation. Ask yourself: what are you noticing? How will you protect your own safety and the safety of others? Evaluate if intervening in the moment will just escalate, putting the bystander in harm's way.

Bystanders recognize potentially harmful situations and take action to make a positive difference. While those committing the personal fouls are responsible for the harm they cause, bystanders can intervene to protect others, themselves, and their community, making sure that those hurt by hate and harassment are seen and protected.

Be the Sixth Player

THE FUNDAMENTALS · THE 5 D'S

1

The 5 D's of Bystander Intervention

Just as basketball players know how to play defense on the court, the best teammates know the 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention:

D

Distract: Derail hate and harassment by distracting from it, either by engaging directly with the person being harassed (not the person causing harm) or talking about something completely unrelated. Force a turnover!

D

Delegate: Asking for a third party to jump in and mediate a bad situation. Look for a delegate who is ready to jump in and tell them clearly as possible the harassment you are experiencing. A parent, a friend, a coach can all act as a referee.

D

Document: For particularly harmful harassment or hate you may need to “review the play.” Take notes or record the harassment. Make sure the person being harassed is receiving help. Always ask the target of the harassment what they want to do with the documentation, and about available resources: then give them the agency to determine next steps.

D

Delay: Even if you can't get into the situation in the moment, check in on someone after harassment or hate—it can make a difference. Some harassment can happen very quickly. Checking in after the fact can help your teammates feel seen and safe. If you weren't sure how to respond in the moment, you can always follow up and make sure that the person who experienced harm knows you support them and that what happened to them wasn't okay.

D

Direct: Sometimes, the best approach is to respond directly to hate or harassment by calling the foul and confronting the person doing the harm. This can be risky, so use it with caution. Be careful not to escalate the situation. At a public event, indirect options like Distract, Delegate, and Delay are usually safest. Direct should be brief, calm, and used only when it will not put you, the targeted person, or others at risk.

Be the Sixth Player

IN THE COMMENTS

2

Responding to Online Harassment

HATE ONLINE

We've all seen it before – a storm of hateful posts online. Whether it's hurtful slurs, harassment campaigns, or targeted hate against your favorite female athlete, digital words can hurt just as much as anything said offline. When you witness an instance of hate or harassment, it's like you've been passed the ball right before the buzzer: you have the opportunity to take a game-winning shot, or you can let the clock run out and do nothing.

Hate and harassment online isn't always easy to spot. Sometimes harassment looks like "harmless" locker room talk or gets passed off as "just a joke." Other times, the intent to hurt someone is obvious. So, what can you do to help the team?

KNOWING HOW TO HANDLE A FOUL

For example, say you see dozens of posts or comments like, "women's sports aren't real sports," "they need to get back to the kitchen," or "she doesn't belong in the league!" Don't click back - don't amplify online hate. While it might be tempting to share your own outrage, firing back comments feeds the algorithm fans the flames and spreads the post. Instead, report the harmful posts. Reach out to those affected to say you see them, and you stand with them.

Maybe it's closer to home: an online account piles on a local high school sports coach after a tough loss, picking apart her looks instead of her qualifications. Maybe a player gets mocked online with hateful slurs after a missed point. Local moments of hate don't always make headlines, but your response matters just as much. Calling out hate doesn't have to be loud; respond to local rumors or slurs with facts, leave a supportive comment, or send a private message of encouragement.

Being a good teammate online doesn't require a perfect response every time, just a willingness to show up, recognize when something's wrong, and speak up if you feel safe to do so. Don't stand on the sidelines. Be the Sixth Player.

Be the Sixth **Player**

IN THE COMMENTS · THE GAME PLAN

2

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't amplify online hate or feed the algorithm by firing back in the comments of hateful viral posts
- ✗ Don't stand on the sidelines
- ✗ Don't worry about giving a perfect response

DO

- ✓ Do evaluate your own personal safety and well-being before engaging
- ✓ Do report hateful posts
- ✓ Do reach out to those affected and say you see them and stand with them

RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS

Want to know more about calling foul on hate and harassment? Click on the resources below to learn more:

- ▶ [PERIL. Not Just a Joke: Understanding & Preventing Gender- & Sexuality-based Bigotry \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [PERIL. Building Resilience & Confronting Risk: A Parents & Caregivers Guide to Online Radicalization \[Report\].](#)
- ▶ [University of Illinois. Bystander Intervention Strategies.](#)
- ▶ [Right to Be Bystander Training. The 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention.](#)

Be the Sixth Player

COURTSIDE

3

Responding to In-Game Harassment

COURTSIDE HARASSMENT

Any sports fan that loves being at the game has been there—you're watching the Sky battle it out in the fourth quarter when, out of nowhere, someone in the stands takes their trash talk from fair play to another level. The comments might sound something like, "My son would beat you 1 on 1," "She's not good enough to be here," "She's too pretty to be playing ball," or "Women shouldn't be refs." It might sound like a joke, but the harassment and pain are real.

Moments like these provide fans with a choice. They can stay benched while hateful comments are hurled at the players and officials. Or, they can speak up and be a sixth teammate to the players and all the fans.

HOW TO BE A GOOD COURTSIDE TEAMMATE

You hear comments that women are too pretty to play basketball or don't make good refs. You know the comments are wrong, but you aren't sure how to box out those insults.

First, redirect the conversation by shouting support for the player/official being heckled. Second, don't engage directly with the person causing harm. They want an "adoring" audience—don't give them that satisfaction.

If the situation is escalating from a personal foul to a flagrant foul, get a staff member. Fans are expected to be respectful toward players, officials, and other fans. Staff members can help settle the situation. Do not necessarily try to engage the person causing harm directly, if you think it might escalate toward a physical altercation.

Be the Sixth Player

COURTSIDE · THE GAME PLAN

3

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't engage directly with the person causing harm
- ✗ Don't give the person causing harm an audience
- ✗ Don't escalate toward a physical altercation

DO

- ✓ Do redirect the conversation by focusing on the game being played
- ✓ Do mention to someone next to you that those comments "aren't cool"
- ✓ Do shout support to the targeted player(s) or official(s)
- ✓ Do talk to an usher or staff if things are getting out of hand

If you need an easy playbook to remember in the heat of the moment, use the [5 Ds of Bystander Intervention](#): Direct, Distract, Delay, Delegate, and Document.

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Be the Sixth Player

OFF THE COURT

4

Responding to Hate in Casual Conversations

HATEFUL COMMENTS IN DAILY LIFE

You know the situation—you're hanging out with friends, chatting with coworkers, or catching up with family when a comment drops that completely derails the vibe. Casual hate and biased remarks often slip right into everyday conversations. Sometimes it gets passed off as "just a joke," but words have power, and letting them slide sets a dangerous standard that this kind of speech is acceptable.

Hurtful language isn't always easy to spot; it often wears a mask of casual commentary. It can sound like:

- ▶ *"Women are just too emotional to handle high-pressure situations."*
- ▶ *"She probably only got that position to fill a quota."*
- ▶ *"Girls just aren't as naturally cut out for hard science or competition—it's just biology."*

When you hear these things, you're the teammate on the spot. You can stand on the sidelines as the clock runs out, or—because you know the person and they are likely to listen to what you have to say—you can step in and change the direction of play. What do you do?

KNOWING WHEN TO BLOW THE WHISTLE

Imagine someone on your team at school or at work says a girl or woman shouldn't do something because "guys are just better suited for it." If you say nothing, your silence is taken as team approval. Calling out harm doesn't have to be aggressive; it can be setting a boundary right then and there, as simple as, "That's no way to talk."

Or, the comment might happen closer to home, like a family member making a derogatory remark about someone at Sunday dinner. Instead of attacking their character, focus strictly on the matter at hand: address the specific words used and why they cause harm. For example, if someone talks about women being unfit for a high-pressure position, you could respond with, "I am confident a woman could do it." Or, if someone makes a joke about women being bad at sports, you could ask, "I don't get it. Can you explain why it is funny?" It's also possible that you won't know how to respond in the moment or there might be a power dynamic that makes you uncomfortable. Following up after is another option to address the harm, such as, "I was thinking about what you said, and it made me a bit uncomfortable because my aunt is really good at her job leading a company, and I want to make sure that people at our workplace feel women can also be in these kinds of roles." Your job as a good teammate isn't to fix everything in one go, but to ensure that harmful behavior doesn't get a free pass in your presence.

Being a great "Sixth Player" means showing up, recognizing when a line has been crossed, and stepping in to protect the integrity of the room.

Be the Sixth **Player**

OFF THE COURT · THE GAME PLAN

4

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't laugh along
- ✗ Don't ignore it
- ✗ Don't get into a screaming match or physical altercation

DO

- ✓ Do say something simple, like "I don't agree with that."
- ✓ Do address it by saying something like, "I don't think that's true."
- ✓ Do focus on the comment, not the person
- ✓ Do check in later

If you need an easy playbook to remember in the heat of the moment, use the [5 Ds of Bystander Intervention](#) Direct, Distract, Delay, Delegate, and Document.

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Be the Sixth **Player**

COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

5

When Young People Say Something Harmful

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF YOUNG PLAYERS AND SPECTATORS

Children are innocent, as the saying goes. But what happens when we overhear a young person using harmful stereotypes and demeaning language toward girls and women athletes and teams? A young boy stating that women are not “strong enough” to play sports or adolescent girls making derogatory comments about a female teammate show that hurtful language has no minimum age requirement.

When you overhear a child or adolescent making hateful remarks or engaging in harassment, these incidents should not be dismissed as youthful mistakes. Without timely intervention, young people may repeat such behavior and, over time, become less inclined to consider the negative impact of their statements on others.

Children may be unaware of the full range of harms that their hateful comments can cause. They may not even understand what they are saying, merely repeating what they heard from an admired adult or peer. So, what can you do?

COACHING FROM THE OUTSIDE

If you hear children making derogatory comments, whether on purpose or not, coach them to understand the impact of their words and give them a better alternative. You may also be concerned that the child’s parents may not appreciate interventions with adult strangers or those that are not family members. But early intervention matters from trusted adults in children’s lives. Your words and actions can help a child learn more respectful and inclusive behavior. For example, you can say to a child respectfully and firmly, “Where did you hear that? How would someone feel receiving that message?” After talking about the impact of the statement, focus on empathy. Then, you can emphasize, “It’s not okay to use language that disrespects others. What is a more respectful way to express yourself?” Be the Sixth Player.



Be the Sixth Player

COACHING THE NEXT GENERATION · THE GAME PLAN

5

The Game Plan

DON'T

- ✗ Don't dismiss a child's hateful statements as "youthful mistakes"
- ✗ Don't assume children or teens understand the full consequences or meaning of their words
- ✗ Don't belittle or yell at a child or teen engaging in harassment, which can backfire

DO

- ✓ Do set a respectful, firm boundary and let them know their words are not respectful
- ✓ Do ask questions to help them understand the impact of their words on others
- ✓ Do keep interactions and explanations short and succinct
- ✓ Do check in on bystanders who appear to be upset by what they overheard
- ✓ Do follow up with an explanation, if the young person is in your care; if they are not, then do keep any response brief and respectful, or ask a caregiver, coach, teacher, usher, or event staff member to step in.

If you need an easy playbook to remember in the heat of the moment, use the [5 Ds of Bystander Intervention](#): Direct, Distract, Delay, Delegate, and Document.

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Don't stay benched. Be the Sixth Player.

THE 5 DS OF BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

Distract · Delegate · Document · Delay · Direct

A FIVE-PART PLAYBOOK

1. The Fundamentals
2. In the comment section
3. Courtside
4. Off the Court
5. Coaching the Next Generation



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