



# COVID-19 BYSTANDER INTERVENTION GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION

The United States has had a slow and mixed response to COVID-19 relative to other developed countries. At the time of writing this introduction, over 200,000 people have died from the novel coronavirus and predictions about a vaccine and when life, school, and work will return to normal are still unclear.

Despite the intense political climate and inconsistent response, we know enough about the virus to understand that each individual has a role to play in whether they personally contribute to prolonging the impacts of the virus, or if they will take the necessary precautions to slow and prevent further spread.

Particularly among colleges students that have returned to school, the idea of social distancing runs counter to the vibrant social interactions students have come to expect. Adjusting to these new norms of campus life can be stressful, confusing, and isolating for students. Campuses are doing their best to meet student needs with virtual and social-distanced programs and services in hopes routines will adapt and a sense of normalcy will set in.

This certainly is the goal of every university in session. And to get there, we will need the students themselves to be ambassadors for role modeling safe behavior and establishing and reinforcing new social norms among their peer groups. Empowering opinion leaders on campus is a tried and true strategy for prevention and this guide was created to help inform that process.

Use this guide to help students realize their personal power in influencing, supporting, and holding their peers accountable. This moment in our history requires each of us as individuals to muster the courage to do the right thing and prioritize our collective safety.





# COMMUNICATION FRAME

Communications intended to shift human attitudes and behaviors require tested approaches and framing that resonate with the target audience. Below are evidence-based framing methods for effective COVID-19 and public health-related communications. *Adapted from the FrameWorks Institute.*

## **Focus on the Common Good\***

- Emphasize how our behavior benefits everyone
- Focus on shared values and moral imperatives
- Focus on togetherness and shared resolve
- Avoid sharing polarizing stories of what NOT to do

\*Evoking shared ideals and collective action are powerful motivators for behavior change.

## **Explain How Things Work\***

- Use cause/effect messages to connect what/why
- Highlight what we're doing and how it's working
- Expand understanding of public health work
- Reinforce with metaphors and visual examples

\*Clear understanding of how things work builds trust and support for solutions.

## **Foster a Preventative Mindset\***

- Connect today's actions to what is avoided later
- Promote prevention as shared responsibility
- Focus on what can be done to reduce harm
- Inspire urgent action with farsighted thinking

\*Students need help to think preventatively as our natural tendency is to focus on here & now.



# INTERVENTION MODEL

Students need clear expectations for what we want them to do. Messaging informed by the communication frames in the previous section should establish these behavioral expectations. Engaging peers when they are out of compliance with safety guidelines should be among them.

Below is a bystander intervention model students can use to compassionately motivate their fellow students to act in the best interest of the community.

## COVID-19 Bystander Intervention Model

### *Before Intervention*

#### ASSESS

1. **Clarify the Problem:** What's the violation? Are others at risk?
2. **Assess Personal Safety:** Is it safe for you to intervene?
3. **Enlist Help:** Could a friend or someone with more authority help?

### *Initiate Conversation*

#### INQUIRE

1. **Ask Questions:** Ask why they are not complying with the guidelines
2. **Actively Listen:** Seek to understand their perspective and motives

### *Inspire Change*

#### MOTIVATE


1. **Affirm:** Validate their feelings & empathize with their perspective
2. **Values:** Invite them to consider shared community values & goals
3. **Explain:** Explain how their specific actions have potential for harm
4. **Solution:** Offer explicit examples of what they should do instead

### *Take Further Action*

#### RESPOND

1. **Respond:** If they heed your request, respond with gratitude
2. **Report:** If they don't, remove yourself and report behavior





# COVID-19 BYSTANDER SCENARIOS

Utilizing the Bystander Intervention Model noted above, this section will provide examples of how to apply **Step 3: Motivate** to respond to bystander scenarios that warrant intervention to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## After assessing the situation and initiating conversation...

Inspire Change

### MOTIVATE

1. **Affirm:** Validate their feelings & empathize with their perspective
2. **Values:** Invite them to consider shared community values & goals
3. **Explain:** Explain how their specific actions have potential for harm
4. **Solution:** Offer explicit examples of what they should do instead

#### Scenario 1: My roommate isn't wearing a mask when they leave the house

*"I know wearing a mask all of the time can be frustrating, but we've got to do our part to keep our campus and community open and safe. Wearing our masks keeps us from spreading or contracting the virus. It's the best way we know of to keep ourselves and our housemates safe. I was thinking we could start hanging our masks by the door to help us remember to put them on before we leave."*

#### Scenario 2: My roommate brings home unexpected guests.

*"I recognize the guidelines have felt restrictive and isolating, but I think we should limit our exposure as much as possible and respect each other's boundaries regarding who comes into our house. The virus spreads rapidly in households due to the close proximity and shared items, so limiting who is in our living space will reduce our risk of exposure and having to quarantine. Let's set up a house meeting to decide if we will allow non-roommates over, and if so, what measures we can agree, like only using the backyard and keeping physical distance, to limit our risk."*

## COVID-19 Bystander Scenarios (continued)

### Scenario 3: My roommate tested positive & isn't taking isolation serious

*"I can imagine it must be really frustrating having to isolate, but it's important we honor the medical recommendations provided to help your recovery and contain further spread. Isolation is intended to stop the spread with you by having you not be around others until you are no longer contagious. Let's designate a room for you to stay in for the next 10 days and ensure you don't leave, come into contact with anyone, or share any items like drinking glasses or towels. Our roommates will get tested and quarantine as well."*

### Scenario 4: My roommate is planning to host a house party

*"If circumstances were different, I would be all for you having a party, but doing this during the pandemic feels wrong and violates the guidelines that were established to keep us safe. A house party with even one guest that has the virus could result in a massive outbreak, and we would be responsible. I think we should decide as a house to not have parties at all until it is safe to do so. With all the public places that are open, we could easily get some friends together outside of the house."*

### Scenario 5: My roommate traveled to a high exposure area & hasn't gotten tested

*"I understand that you don't think you need to be tested because you aren't showing symptoms, but it's the right thing to do when you've traveled to a high exposure area. You could unknowingly be an asymptomatic carrier and be putting us at risk. Now that you are back from traveling, let's designate a separate room for you to quarantine in while you get a test and wait for the results."*

### Scenario 6: My friends are ignoring my requests to wear a mask & distance

*"I know these precautions can feel inconvenient at times, but I feel personally disrespected when you ignore my requests to wear your masks and keep your distance. The virus can spread through droplets in the air and staying 6 feet apart is how we prevent that. I only see two options moving forward: either you start taking this seriously and honor the safety guidelines and we can make the best out of this situation, or you don't and I'll be forced to not hang out with you all anymore."*



## COVID-19 Bystander Scenarios (continued)

### Scenario 7: My friend is posting pictures of them at large house parties

*"I know you want to go out like everything is normal, I honestly want that too, but these are not normal times. Most students are selflessly doing their part to take care of our community by following the guidelines and not attending parties. Big parties in close spaces like that creates significant risk to you and everyone else there. Campuses have closed and suspended students for parties that led to massive spread of the virus. Students are being instructed to report high-risk gatherings, so please take the photos down and let's commit to being positive roles moving forward."*

### Scenario 8: My friends invited me to a house party

*"That does sound really fun, but going to a house party is the exact opposite of what we've been asked to do. Showing up really sends the wrong message and encourages more people to be out at parties, too, increasing the odds of an outbreak in our community. Not to mention even as guests we could get in trouble with the city or the school. Let's go out to dinner downtown tonight instead and we can encourage some other friends going to that party to join us."*

### Scenario 9: My friends are using the term "Chinese Virus"

*"I know this phrase has been in the media lately, but it's an incredibly inappropriate and hurtful thing to say. Please consider the intended target of your comments and wrong it is to promote hostility toward them. This phrase is rooted in racism and has led to fear, violence, prejudice, and hate crimes toward Asian Americans. Let's not normalize or minimize this serious issue by saying that again - even as a joke."*

### Scenario 10: My friend jokes they have COVID & touches common areas

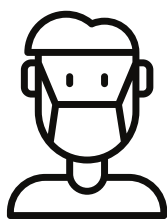
*"I recognize you're joking around, but this really isn't something we should take lightly. People have died from this and many are worried about spreading it to their loved ones. Touching everything not only poses a risk to you if that area hasn't been cleaned, but you could also be unknowingly spreading it to those areas yourself. Please don't joke around like that. Let's take this serious so others around us will take it seriously, too."*



# DESIRED STUDENT BEHAVIORS

Students are more likely to adopt desired behaviors when behavioral expectations are communicated in clear and specific terms. Here are 8 specific examples of what we need students to do to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

## Do the Right Thing: Follow COVID-19 Safety Guidelines



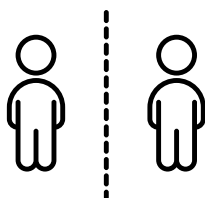
### **Wear Face Covering**

Use a mask to keep your nose & mouth covered when around others to contain travel of respiratory droplets.



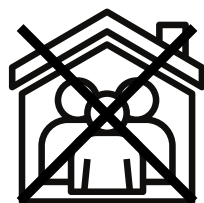
### **Isolation/Quarantine**

Honor the 10 day isolation period after a positive test, and a 14 day quarantine if you've been exposed.



### **Physical Distancing**

Stay at least 6 feet apart from others to avoid contact with droplets from talking/coughing/sneezing.



### **No House Parties**

Do not host or attend parties with people outside your household. Close proximity events can lead to outbreaks.



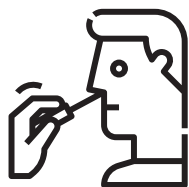
### **Wash/Sanitize**

Soap and water kills the virus if you wash for at least 20 seconds. Use sanitizer if soap is not available.



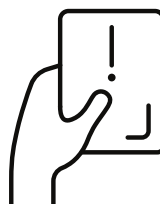
### **Confront Racism**

Intervene to educate community members about the serious harm of labeling COVID as the 'China Virus'.



### **Get Tested**

Get tested if you have symptoms, have been exposed to the virus, or traveled to a hot spot.



### **Report**

Intervene when peers do not follow the guidelines. If you can't motivate a change, report the behavior.





# ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR BYSTANDERS

Bystander intervention can be hard for students. There are many social and situational barriers that can impede the act of helping. Being aware of these barriers increases the odds that you'll make the conscious effort to overcome them and prioritize doing the right thing to help prevent harm.

## **Bystander Barriers to Peer Accountability**

### **Inadequate Knowledge**

- *Unclear Expectations*: Students may misdiagnose the situation if they are unable to identify behaviors that warrant intervention (eg. when masks should be worn)
- *Unaware of Consequences*: Students may not understand the negative outcomes of their inaction, impeding motivation to act (eg. an outbreak could close campus).

### **Diffusion of Responsibility**

- *Assume Others Will Help*: With multiple bystanders present, students may assume others will help so they can shirk responsibility (eg. not my job to say anything).

### **Pluralistic Ignorance**

- *Relying on External Cues*: Students may rely on cues from others to decide if what they're witnessing is a problem (eg. no one else seems to mind, why should I?).

### **Audience Inhibition**

- *Conforming to Group Norms*: Students may succumb to peer pressure to let the problem behavior go unaddressed (eg. we do this all the time, it's not a big deal)

### **Cost/Risks of Taking Action**

- *Fear of Social Loss*: Students may neglect to act out of fear of being ostracized from their friend groups (eg. if I try to stop them from hosting a party, they'll shun me)



# RECOMMENDED APPLICATIONS

Apply the recommendations in this guide to existing education and communication efforts. To help shift student attitudes and behaviors, it's important to create educational interventions that target all segments of the social ecological model (SEM).

## Promoting Behavior Change

### **Individual (personal knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, experiences, skills)**

- Address knowledge gaps with training programs and clear and consistent communications that promote personal relevance and appeal to shared values

### **Peer Group (group associations, norms, influencers)**

- Establish targeted training and communications among subpopulations that focus on group-specific expectations and consequences
- Recruit popular opinion leaders, trusted messengers among subgroups, to facilitate peer-led programs and communications

### **Campus Community (relationship to campus systems and services)**

- Create inclusive and accessible information hubs that reiterate community expectations, provide guidance for reporting, and offer alternative social activities
- Promote community level social norm campaigns through social media, print, and other student-centered touch points like campus portals or school email

### **Broader Society (policy, political climate, safety guidance)**

- Minimize influences from outside the immediate community by focusing on normalizing desired behaviors here at home in the context of your community, highlighting stories of compassion where students put others first, and following through on enforcement, but not dwelling too much on stories of rule-breaking as they shift focus to undesired behaviors.





# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

## **FrameWorks Institute**

1. Deploying a common good frame
2. The power of how during the pandemic
3. Talking about what comes next
4. The importance of prevention
5. How to foster solidarity while others fuel division

## **Bystander Health Communications**

1. Appeal to Bystander Interventions: A Normative Approach to Health and Risk Messaging
2. Assessment of COVID-19 Knowledge Among University Students: Implications for Future Risk Communication Strategies
3. Critical Reflections on COVID-19 Communication Efforts Targeting Adolescents and Young Adults

## **Strategies for Behavior Change**

1. Encouraging Adoption of Protective Behaviors to Mitigate the Spread of COVID-19: Strategies for Behavior Change (2020).
2. Relationships Between Initial COVID-19 Risk Perceptions and Protective Health Behaviors: A National Survey.