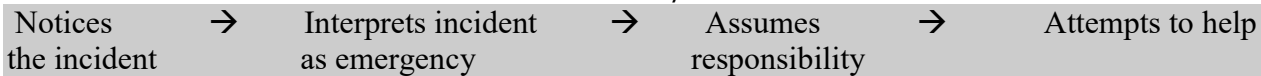


Model of Bystander Intervention

A Model of Bystander Intervention



The Bystander Intervention Model predicts that people are more likely to help others under certain conditions. As the diagram indicates, bystanders first must notice the incident taking place. Obviously, if they don't take note of the situation there is no reason to help. Bystanders also need to evaluate the situation and determine whether it is an emergency—or at least one in which someone needs assistance. Again, if people do not interpret a situation as one in which someone needs assistance, then there is no need to provide help. Another decision bystanders make is whether they should assume responsibility for giving help. One repeated finding in research studies on helping is that a bystander is less likely to help if there are other bystanders present. When other bystanders are present responsibility for helping is diffused. If a lone bystander is present he or she is more likely to assume responsibility.

Factors that Influence Helping

Many factors influence people's willingness to help, including the ambiguity of the situation, perceived cost, diffusion of responsibility, similarity, mood and gender, attributions of the causes of need, and social norms.

Situational ambiguity. In ambiguous situations, (i.e., it is unclear that there is an emergency) people are much less likely to offer assistance than in situations involving a clear-cut emergency (Shotland & Heinold, 1985). They are also less likely to help in unfamiliar environments than in familiar ones (e.g., when they are in strange cities rather than in their hometowns).

Perceived cost. The likelihood of helping increases as the perceived cost to ourselves declines (Simmons, 1991). We are more likely to lend our class notes to someone whom we believe will return them than to a person who doesn't appear trustworthy.

Diffusion of responsibility. The presence of others may diffuse the sense of individual responsibility. It follows that if you suddenly felt faint and were about to pass out on the street, you would be more likely to receive help if there are only a few passers-by present than if the street is crowded with pedestrians. With fewer people present, it becomes more difficult to point to the "other guy" as the one responsible for taking action. If everyone believes the other guy will act, then no one acts.

Similarity. People are more willing to help others whom they perceive to be similar to themselves—people who share a common background and beliefs. They are even more likely to help others who dress like they do than those in different attire (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). People also tend to be more willing to help their kin than to help non—kin (Gaulin & McBurney, 2001).

Mood. People are generally more willing to help others when they are in a good mood (Berkowitz, 1987).

Gender. Despite changes in traditional gender roles, women in need are more likely than men in need to receive assistance from strangers (Benson, Karabenick, & Lerner, 1976).

Attributions of the cause of need. People are much more likely to help others they judge to be innocent victims than those they believe have brought their problems on themselves (Batson, 1998). Thus, they may fail to lend assistance to homeless people and drug addicts whom they feel "deserve what they get."

Social norms. Social norms prescribe behaviors that are expected of people in social situations (Batson, 1998). The social norm of "doing your part" in helping a worthy cause places a demand on people to help, especially in situations where their behavior is observed by others (Gaulin & McBurney, 2001). For example, people are more likely to make a charitable donation when they are asked to do so by a co-worker in full view of others than when they receive an appeal in the mail in the privacy of their own home.