



# Golden Talk Series

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***The Bystander Effect***

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## Context 1: Pedestrian collapses.



During a bustling city festival, amidst the laughter and loud music, a pedestrian suddenly collapses on a crowded sidewalk. People nearby pause, their attention caught, but many assume someone else will step forward to help. The assumption spreads through the crowd like a silent wave, with individuals reasoning that the presence of so many others means someone more qualified will **intervene**. Meanwhile, the person on the ground remains unattended to as precious minutes tick away. The phenomenon **at play** here is the bystander effect, where the greater the number of **onlookers**, the less likely any one person is to offer help, often due to a **diffusion of responsibility** and social influence.

### Discussion questions:

1. *What would you have done in this situation?*
2. *Do you have a similar experience?*

3. *Why are people less likely to help in crowded settings despite being physically closer to someone in need?*
4. *How can awareness of the bystander effect influence individuals to act differently in emergencies?*
5. *What role does social influence play in the decision-making process of potential helpers in public scenarios?*
6. *Can you suggest strategies or interventions that could reduce the bystander effect in public emergencies?*

## Context 2: Coffee shop emergency

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At a local coffee shop, a customer starts coughing violently, struggling to breathe due to a piece of food stuck in their throat. The shop is moderately busy, with customers **engrossed in** conversations or their laptops. As the coughing **intensifies**, people **glance over with concern** but **hesitate to act**, looking around to see if anyone else will **step up**. This hesitation continues as everyone assumes someone else, perhaps someone with medical training, will intervene. This delay in action exemplifies the bystander effect, where the presence of others discourages an individual from taking action due to a diffusion of responsibility among the witnesses.

### Discussion questions:

1. *How would you have reacted in this situation?*
2. *What factors might influence an individual's decision to intervene in a situation like this?*
3. *How does the setting (e.g., a familiar local shop vs. a foreign environment) affect the likelihood of bystander intervention?*
4. *Discuss the impact of assuming someone else **in the vicinity** has more expertise to handle the situation. How does this assumption contribute to the bystander effect?*
5. *What measures can establishments like coffee shops implement to encourage prompt assistance from bystanders in emergencies?*

# Part 3: What is the diffusion of responsibility?

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Diffusion of responsibility is a social psychological phenomenon where individuals are less likely to take action or feel a sense of responsibility in the presence of a large group of people. This concept is crucial to understanding the bystander effect, as it explains why people are more likely to pass by someone in need when other witnesses are around. The belief that someone else will intervene reduces the personal responsibility any single bystander feels, leading to **inaction**.

## **Discussion questions:**

1. *Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't take action due to the diffusion of responsibility?*



2. *Can the diffusion of responsibility affect online environments, such as social media platforms, in similar ways to physical settings?*



## **Part 4: How is empathy relevant?**

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Empathy is the capacity to understand and feel what another person is experiencing, essentially putting oneself in someone else's shoes. In the context of the bystander effect, empathy is highly significant as it can drive individuals to overcome barriers to helping behavior, such as fear of embarrassment or misinterpreting the situation. An empathetic person might be more **inclined to** intervene in an emergency, feeling a strong emotional response to the victim's **distress**. This emotional connection can motivate action, even in situations where the diffusion of responsibility might otherwise lead to inaction among a group of bystanders, highlighting empathy's potential to counteract the bystander effect by fostering a personal connection to the victim's pain.



### **Discussion questions:**

- 1. Do you consider yourself an empathetic person?*
- 2. How does an individual's level of empathy affect their response to someone in need in the presence of others?*

3. *Can empathy be taught or enhanced to reduce the bystander effect in society?*
4. *How do different types of empathy (cognitive vs. emotional) influence the likelihood of intervening in an emergency?*
5. *What role does social media play in diluting and fostering empathy and how does this impact bystander behavior online and offline?*

## Language focus

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1. **Diffusion of responsibility:** People feel less obliged to act when others are present.  
*During the accident, diffusion of responsibility meant that nobody called for help.*
2. **Fear of embarrassment:** Hesitating to act due to worry about doing something embarrassing.  
*Her fear of embarrassment stopped her from asking if the fallen man needed help.*
3. **Bystander apathy:** Indifference shown by individuals towards someone in need when others are around.  
*Bystander apathy was evident when people ignored the injured cyclist.*
4. **Call to action:** A prompt that encourages people to take action.  
*The lifeguard's call to action spurred others to help save the drowning swimmer.*
5. **Peer influence:** The effect of others' actions on an individual's behavior.  
*Peer influence kept him from stepping forward to offer help.*
6. **Group inertia:** The tendency for groups to remain passive in an emergency.  
*Group inertia meant that no one did anything to help.*
7. **Good Samaritan:** Someone who helps a stranger in need.  
*A good Samaritan stepped forward to give first aid to the injured pedestrian.*
8. **Intervene:** Take action to solve a problem or stop something from happening

9. *The teacher had to intervene when the students started arguing.*

Word family: Intervention (noun)

10. **Onlookers:** People who watch an event or situation without participating.

*A crowd of curious onlookers gathered around the accident scene.*

11. **In the vicinity:** In the nearby area or surrounding area.

*The park has a cafe in the vicinity where visitors can get refreshments.*

