



Thousand Waves
Martial Arts & Self-Defense Center, NFP

1220 W. Belmont, Chicago, IL 60657
tel 773.472.7663 fax 773.472.7698
info@thousandwaves.org
www.thousandwaves.org

Assertive Communication: Intervention Using our skills for others

What is intervention?

Thousand Waves' Definition:

- Being an ally; getting involved
- A self-defender's speech and actions in situations where they are not the target

Examples of intervening in violence and conflict:

- Confronting implied complicity in violence
- Taking action to prevent violence before it occurs
- Speaking out against hurtful or violent speech
- Defending a person being assaulted or battered
- Stopping two or more people from fighting

The Thousand Waves Approach:

- **Challenge the prevailing culture** of not getting involved
- **Decide to be an ally to others** who are in conflict and who aren't able to handle it themselves
- **Consider "community" broadly**, extending it to family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even those we don't know. Consider those with whom we share public space – such as on an elevator, waiting room, or train – part of our community.
- **Remember the spectrum of violence**: from irritating/annoying to harmful to life threatening, and know that interveners are needed for all forms.
- **Remember that most forms of violence start small**, and interrupting violence when it's not yet dangerous (e.g., verbal violence) may be our best strategy.
- **Believe we can have an impact** even if we don't see the effects of our actions immediately. We may have prevented the situation from escalating, or given the participants something to think about next time, or shown other witnesses how they can step in.
- **Know we can change strategies** if it isn't working, or if we become the target. We can get others involved, call 911, or reach out to help lines for support/resources.
- **Practice your skills!** Start small. Notice the everyday situations you witness where you can practice speaking up for justice, against violence. This will tone your self-defense muscles, which will get stronger with practice.

Power, Privilege, and Being an Ally

Being an ally is an important part of intervention at Thousand Waves, especially when you find yourself sharing an aspect of your identity with an aggressor, and that identity gives you more social power than the person being targeted. For example, if you are a white person and you overhear another white person make a racist comment, or if you are heterosexual and witness anti-gay behavior or speech. There are many ways of being an ally. One self-defense instructor we know (who lives in the south, where institutional racism is deeply entrenched) films interactions she notices between the police and people of color, just in case.

Intervention Strategies

Internal

- **Trust your instincts** about whether it is safe to intervene. Consider how close you want to be to the situation if you do intervene. If you sense that you are becoming the target, it may be time to leave.
- **Set realistic goals:** to stop unhealthy conflict that moment, keep violence from escalating, or restore harmony... It doesn't mean that the participants won't ever have conflict again.
- **Stay open:** let go of assumptions about who is perpetrator/victim; try not to choose 'sides'
- **Take a breath** to garner courage
- **Self-talk:** Tell yourself you can do it; you may be afraid but can be an actor; remember that it's worth it to try something; tell yourself you can seek support afterwards.
- **Commit to asserting yourself**, to being an ally
- **Know you can change strategies** if it isn't working, or if you feel that you are in danger

External

- **Be aware of the distance** (how close you want to be to the people), know where escape routes are, consider if there may be other allies nearby
- **Communicate with your body:** don't show whose side you're on with your positioning, show concern in your face and eyes, show confidence in your body

Verbal

- **Interrupt comments and jokes that are based in bias.** "That joke isn't funny. I don't allow that language in my home."
- **Educate a harasser.** "You'll get a better reception if you just say hello." "Women don't like to be called that."
- **Take a stand** when you hear hate-based or harassing speech: "my friend can dress how she likes:" "I don't agree with what he said about being gay."
- **Distract them:** "The police/principal are just around the corner." "Let's go for a walk"
- **Avoid polarizing the situation** more with your words. Especially when witnessing conflict between friends/partners, try an approach that reaches out to both: "What's going on here? Can I help you solve this a different way?"
- **Take charge of the situation:** "Looks like you two need help...why don't you take 10 minutes away from each other & discuss this later" "Step away from each other! Fighting isn't going to solve anything" "Take a deep breath and find another way to handle this"
- **Give them an out:** "Fighting's going to get you in trouble, it's not worth it"
- **Offer help:** "Can I hold your groceries while you take care of your crying baby?"
- **Seek additional help:** "I'm going to get a supervisor/teacher/parent to help you handle this." "I'm calling 911!" Ask other witnesses: "Can you help me with this?"
- **Follow up later** if possible

On Taking Sides

Sometimes, it's clear who the aggressor is in a given situation. This is especially true when the person who is being targeted isn't even present, or an entire identity is being targeted, as with some of the verbal examples on this page. If you're attempting to interrupt an altercation, though, it's usually a good idea not to take sides even if the aggressor seems very clear – because even though it may be clear to you, it won't be clear to them. Remember, everyone is the hero of their own story, so whatever is happening, it's almost certainly justified in the aggressor's mind. Instead of taking sides, frame your intervention as an attempt to help all parties resolve their conflict without violence.