

HER IMPACT INITIATIVE

Resource Guides for Women & Allies

Guides to inform, empower, and activate.

Inspired by a conversation with Parul Kamra, Communications Lead at Bala.

Street Harassment & Safety — What It Is and What to Do

Public spaces should be safe for everyone. For many women and girls, they aren't — and strategies for navigating harassment begin disturbingly young.

What Street Harassment Looks Like

Street harassment includes unwanted comments, gestures, sounds, or actions directed at someone in a public space based on their perceived gender, sexuality, or appearance. It includes:

- Catcalling, whistling, or making sexual comments
- Following or trailing someone
- Unwanted touching on public transport
- Blocking someone's path
- Exposing oneself
- Threatening behavior when attention is not returned

“Some of my friends used to carry safety pins in their hands. They knew they would be exposed to some form of harassment, so that safety pin was just their attempt at jabbing back.”

Reality check: When girls grow up preparing strategies to defend themselves in public spaces, that is not a personal problem. It is a systemic one.

Why Is It Underreported?

- Many people normalize it as "just how it is"
- Fear of not being believed or being blamed
- Concern that the response will make the situation worse
- Lack of clear reporting mechanisms in public spaces

What You Can Do as a Bystander

- **Distract:** Start a conversation with the person being harassed, ignoring the harasser entirely
- **Check in:** After an incident, ask "Are you okay? I saw what happened."
- **Document:** With the affected person's permission, document the incident
- **Report:** Many transit systems have apps or numbers for reporting harassment
- **Don't escalate:** Confronting an aggressor directly can increase danger — indirect intervention is often safer

If It Happens to You

- You are not obligated to respond, smile, or engage
- Moving toward other people or into a public business can increase safety
- Trust your instincts — if something feels wrong, act on that feeling
- Report it if you feel safe doing so

Resources

- Right To Be (righttobe.org) — free bystander intervention training including for street harassment
- Hollaback! (ihollaback.org) — global movement to end harassment with training resources
- StopStreetHarassment.org — research, reporting, and advocacy
- RAINN (rainn.org) — support for sexual harassment and assault survivors

This resource guide was developed by the Her Impact Initiative. For more information or to share your story, contact us.