

Toolkit for Conference Upstanders

This emerged from an Academic Bystander Intervention Training created by and attended by NYU GSAS Music faculty and graduate students and facilitated NYU's Metro Center. The co-creators offer it in support of those facing harassment in academic spaces by offering a selection of peer-sourced strategies for the person facing harassment as well as allies and facilitators witnessing or hearing about the harassment event. We offer these tools in hopes of making a more equitable and fair space for people of all intersections of difference to present and discuss their ideas free from bias, discrimination, aggression, and/or bigotry.

This is a living document - to contribute possible advice or resources for future editions, please follow this link to add your thoughts: goo.gl/DYbcRb

If a presenter experiences harassment during the Q&A following a paper...

beforehand

- If the Presenter reads the room before (and/or before they've even arrived at the event) the panel and senses something bad might happen, they can create a text chain of supportive folks to see if any of them are free to attend.

during

Presenter

- Remember to breathe while this is happening
- You have a microphone and therefore some power
- Make eye contact to find allies in the room
- The Questioner may be in your field for a long time, so diplomacy and collegiality may be important; assess the sense of decorum and the risk of breaching it
- If the Questioner is long-winded, ask the chair "what is the time limit rule for questions?" or "how many questions do we hope to hear in 10 minutes?" to indicate need for intervention
- You can be humorous and effective by saying "Reclaiming my time" à la [Maxine Waters](#)
- You can use remaining time to obliterate the Questioner
- You can confront the Questioner's -isms by saying "So because I'm x person I can't study y group?"
- You can defuse the situation by holding up a finger and saying "it sounds like you have a lot of thoughts on this. I can talk with you later but would like to get more questions."
- Remember: you do not have to answer or engage with any questions if it doesn't feel right to you.
- Play dumb and put the pressure on the questioner and say "I am not understanding the connection between my paper and your question. Can you explain your main point and why it's pertinent to this specific discussion?"
- Restate the focus of the paper as a disruption tactic by saying, "That's an interesting question however my focus is on.."
- *Make sure you aren't alone afterwards!*

Allies

- Say "that was a great paper" or "that was not a great paper but I support you" and ignore Questioner's comments; do not recognize the negativity
- Pull plug on the microphone, disrupt!
- Clamor with your neighbors to ask questions
- Make visibly aghast faces, quiet but growing side conversation

Chair

- Practice saying your panelists' names beforehand. Humbly ask if you're unclear on pronunciation!
- Say before questions, "please keep your questions short;" hold audience members to a time limit
- Have audience members submit short questions so you can screen them beforehand

afterwards

Speaker

- Remember that this is why you give papers! Graduate students and junior faculty are there to change the conversation. It feels like the whole world but it isn't.
- Write down what happened and find another venue for the work
- Consider writing them a letter to engage them in a controlled setting away from the live panel

Mentors and Allies

- Go to the Speaker immediately afterward and ask if they want support and, if so, in what form
- Ask if the person would like to be accompanied out, and if they wish to speak with other people
- Confront the Questioner about what they said
- Take the Speaker out for a coffee and make space for them to process their emotions
- Mentors can help sort out what about the Questioner's response is ego threat and what's valid

Sexual harassment or assault during the conference

Immediate aftermath

Remember, it's not about you as an Ally, it's about what the assaulted person needs. Those needs can include space, silent companionship, or other things that you may or may not think are obvious responses. If it seems appropriate, remind your colleague they were wronged, it is not their fault, you believe they are telling the truth, their work is valid, and that they are welcome in the field—these things often get ignored.

Hold space for them to process.

If they decide to seek charges, support them through the process of reporting to police. If they do not give you express permission to do so, *do NOT call the police*. Understand and respect that there are many reasons they may not want to involve the police.

Offer to form a physical protection circle around the person or buddy system for the rest of the conference (and in future conferences if they wish)

Ongoing care

Organize a group of supportive individuals to form a protection circle at future spaces of possible interaction with harasser or assailant.

Offer help and support over the long term, with professional development, cover letters, etc., supporting them in every aspect of their professional activities, because they may be dealing with profound, ongoing stresses.

Possible longer-term actions to consider

Warn others, e.g. if your friend is picking an advisor, if the aggressor's name appears on a search committee.

Circulate a petition about the aggressor that won't be published unless it receives X number of signatures. Social media can also provide a safe space to see if a pattern emerges, even without a name attached. Listen and recognize patterns in whisper networks.

Do some ground-level organizing among society members to put pressure on the Board to make an enforceable policy against harassment and assault or to enforce an existing one.

Ask the person if they are comfortable with you contacting the perpetrator and let them know that their behavior is known, and that it must stop. Alternatively, ask if the person wants to establish restorative justice mechanisms outside the context of the police or the society's governing structures.

Contributions welcome at: goo.gl/DYbcRb

Other useful resources

Icarus Project's emotional first aid webinar is useful for supporting those experiencing difficult moments:

[English webinar recording](#)

[Presentation slides and resources](#)

[Spanish interpretation](#)

[English transcription](#)