

**Who, if not You?**

**How you can intervene when witnessing racist assaults**

## WHO, IF NOT YOU?

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A classmate makes a racist joke.

*Do you step in?*

A Muslim woman is insulted in a shop.

*Should you bother?*

A homosexual couple is bullied on the street.

*Do you intervene?*

Racist insults and violence are very common all over Europe. Many people are afraid or do not know how to react when witnessing a racist incident. In such situations, civil courage is needed. Speaking up to support someone in need while others are silent is not easy. But civil courage is possible and can be trained.

This leaflet provides some suggestions for courageous action and shows that some small steps can change a lot.

## SHOWING COURAGE DOES NOT REQUIRE YOU TO BE A HERO

Racist assaults occur everywhere in Europe: people are insulted and attacked because of the color of their skin, because they believe in a different God or just because they have a different lifestyle than most of us. Many people witnessing a racist attack quickly turn away as if nothing happened. Often they are afraid or do not know how to react. But ignorance actually fuels the climate of violence. In such situations, civil courage is needed. We can help! We can overcome our fears and intervene when others are in danger.

Often civil courage is associated with bravery, valour and heroism. But acting courageously often begins in everyday situations. Civil courage is not about playing the hero. It means listening to your inner voice telling you that something has happened which is not right and that you should do something against it.

### Civil courage means...

- > not to look away, but to step in.
- > to express our own opinion, not only in private, but also publicly.
- > to defend principles of justice, fairness and morality.
- > to speak up in situations marked by injustice and racist discrimination instead of relying on others to do the job for you.

This leaflet is about the need to “do something”. It shows why civil courage is needed and how it can be trained.

First, it outlines possible ways to react when someone is threatened or attacked because of his or her (perceived) origin, language, religion or sexual orientation. Second, it gives you some examples how to train and practice civil courage to get prepared for real-life situations. Third, it provides a checklist of the most important steps to keep in mind when you witness a racist incident.

## CIVIL COURAGE IN ACTION

There are many different ways to support a person who is threatened or attacked because of his or her skin colour, origin, religion or sexual orientation. There is no standard reaction as the situations can differ depending on place, time and people involved. Still there are some general suggestions.

### > Be prepared.

Imagine a situation in which a person is threatened or attacked. How would you feel in his or her place? What would you like bystanders to do?

### > Take action by all means.

It is important to take action by all means. Who can step in if not you? Do not rely on others instead of you, as they are likely to think the same.

### > Never use violence.

Never use physical force or weapons. There are other ways to attract attention like using your voice or a whistle, which may divert or stop the perpetrator for an instance.

### > Do not put yourself in danger.

Nobody expects you to risk your own health. Think about which risk you are willing and able to take if necessary.

The following examples illustrate specific situations in which civil courage is needed. You will see what you can do and why it is important to intervene.

## EXAMPLE 1

### RACIST ATTACK IN THE TRAM

*You are on the tram to the city centre. Suddenly you see how two young men start insulting and then pushing around a black woman. When the woman asks them to stop, none of the passengers react.*

### > What you can do

In this situation, a prompt and decisive reaction is needed. Someone is in danger, the woman needs help. There are some simple things you can do even if you are afraid or feel helpless.

- Ask the tram driver to call the police. If you have a mobile phone, call the police yourself. If you cannot reach the driver, ask a passenger who sits closer to the front to do so.
- Ask the perpetrators to stop harassing the woman – non-aggressive but decidedly. If one person reacts, others are likely to follow. Once people intervene, the perpetrators understand that their action sparks protest instead of indifference or even silent support.
- Keep eye contact with the woman and assure her that you will help her.
- Approach other passengers and ask them to come to the woman’s aid. It is important to address third persons directly and individually, thus it is more probable that they will help (“You there, in the blue coat...”).
- Do not address the perpetrators informally. This could increase their anger and aggression. Moreover, other passengers might think you know each other and that you have a personal conflict.
- Do not provoke the perpetrators and do not allow them to provoke you. Avoid staring at the perpetrators. This can make them aggressive and escalate the situation.
- You can ask the driver to block the doors until the police arrive.
- If the perpetrators run away, the police will need details in order to start their investigation. Give a description of the perpetrators’ appearance, sex, age and any other noticeable features to the authorities. Also try to keep track of their escape route.

Many similar situations are imaginable. It is crucial to take action by all means. Your active intervention will show the perpetrators that their assault does not remain unnoticed, but that there are people who intervene and hold them accountable.

Ignorance will be interpreted as acceptance, by the perpetrators, the public and the victims. A single step can change the situation and make a big difference for the victim.

## EXAMPLE 2

### HATE SPEECH IN THE PUB

*You are in a local pub. A group at the next table talks disrespectfully about homosexuals. When they start saying gays wouldn’t be “real men” but “sexual perverts spreading HIV everywhere”, an uncomfortable silence spreads through the pub.*

### > What you can do

The aim of your intervention is to stop and object to the hate speech. Doing this, you should keep in mind the following:



- Clearly articulate that such statements are discriminatory and unbearable. Make clear that you are not willing to tolerate people who publicly stir up hatred against others.
- Do not get involved in an extensive verbal exchange with the group but address other people in the pub stating that you have a different position on this subject.
- Think about how to phrase your statement. Don’t be afraid if you feel that you might lack arguments. Your statement is more

about sending a personal signal rather than providing a substantial basis for argumentation. As an example, you could say: "I find these comments unbearable. I believe that all people are equal in dignity and rights, and that those who promote prejudice and racism divide our society." Such a reaction is authentic. It breaks the silence and makes the other people in the pub reflect and support you as they might feel equally uncomfortable about the situation.

- Hate speech is a term for speech intended to degrade or incite prejudice against people based on their origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Hate speech is criminally liable and counts as incitement of the people. If this is true for



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the statement you witnessed you should call the police and explain what has happened. Ask other guests to support you as witnesses. Your statement gains more weight in court if it is confirmed by others.

- You can ask the owner of the pub to send those who engaged in discriminatory statements out of the place. Pub owners are obliged to prevent criminal offences in their bar.

Bear in mind that intervening in such a critical situation is not about changing the perpetrator's attitudes. Rather you are addressing the "silent majority", that is the other guests in the pub. A clear personal statement is meant to counter discriminatory comments by clearly articulating your own opinion and stressing the value of human rights and dignity. Moreover, you protect people in the pub who might feel affected and threatened by the perpetrator's statements.

## CIVIL COURAGE CAN BE TRAINED

Civil courage is not an innate behaviour. It can be learned and trained by everyone. The following exercises will help you to practically train civil courage in a protected and supportive setting. Ask your friends or colleagues to engage in these exercises with you. They work for smaller and bigger groups alike.

### EXERCISE 1 SPEAK UP! VOICE TRAINING

**Objective:** attract attention through a distinct use of your voice

**Time:** approx. 15 min.

**Roles:** group of people, moderator

In this exercise you learn how to attract the attention of bystanders just with the help of your voice. Often people are unaware of the actual power their voice can have. Addressing people around you in a clearly audible and distinct way will give you the confidence to demand attention when getting caught up in a difficult situation.

#### 1. Preparation:

Think about a situation in which it is important to gain the attention of others. Here are some examples: You notice a fire; you note somebody stealing a woman's handbag; you see somebody being harassed. Think about what you could say or do to point to the problem and how you can make yourself heard.

#### 2. Scene:

Now all participants of the exercise stroll around the room and start speaking all at once. At some point the moderator randomly taps a person on the shoulder. He/she then tries to draw everybody's attention to the imagined problem just by means of his/her voice.

#### 3. Analysis:

Did you manage to attract attention? If yes, what do you think was the reason? If not, what was the problem? How did your intervention affect the others? Did they understand the message you were trying to get across? Discuss your opinions and observations with other members of the group. Repeat the exercise until everybody has given it a try.

This easy exercise strengthens your confidence and ability to point to an emergency situation loudly and distinctly.

## EXERCISE 2

### SHOWTIME! FORUM THEATRE

**Objective:** train concrete options for action in the case of a racist incident on a bus

**Time:** approx. 60 min.

**Roles:** passengers, bus driver, perpetrator, affected person, moderator

This interactive role game is a tool to analyse and explore different options for dealing with a problem. It allows you to train different ways of exercising civil courage when you are confronted with a racist incident.

#### 1. Preparation:

Imagine you are sitting on a bus and a racist incident happens. Before you start playing the scene, discuss possible intervention strategies. What could be possible acts of civil courage in this situation? How would you react? (It may be helpful to read the tips in this leaflet to think about possible options for action and consider what you would do in this instance.)

#### 2. Role allocation:

To give the scene a concrete frame, you recreate the interior of a bus with chairs. This is your stage. Now you allocate the roles which are needed for the exercise. There is a moderator who guides the group through the scene and observes what happens, a perpetrator who makes racist comments and someone who is addressed by them. Further roles to be allocated are those of a bus driver and some passengers.

#### 3. Scene and options for action:

As soon as you have agreed on what is to happen in the scene and which option(s) for action you want to include, the moderator gives the start signal.

All people with a specific role enter the stage, all others observe what happens...

Now imagine you are inside the bus. Once the perpetrator engages in a racist assault, the others step in as agreed beforehand. Concentrate on intervening as quickly and concretely as possible.

#### 4. Analysis and further options for action:

Upon completion of the exercise share your impressions with other in the group. How did you feel? Have you felt encouraged and supported by other bystanders? If not, what was missing? Do you think your reaction would also work in real life? Discuss the results with the whole group and share experiences and ideas. Play the scene again several times and try further intervention options. This allows you to test different alternatives and find out what feels most suitable for you. Always analyse and communicate your impressions to the group.

The forum theatre enhances your self-confidence and shows how effective and helpful joint action can be. The feedback you get from the other group members is a further asset of this method. Even though the training is no real-life situation, it allows you to engage with real people who show authentic reactions. The exercise also gives you an impression of how your reactions can affect a situation in practice.



## 10 TIPS FOR CIVIL COURAGE

What can you do when you witness a racist attack?

This checklist summarises the most important steps for courageous intervention:

### 1. Be prepared.

Think about a situation in which a person is threatened or attacked. Imagine how you would feel and what you could do to help.

### 2. Keep calm.

Concentrate on what you imagined in step 1. Don't let fear or anger distract you.

### 3. Act immediately.

React quickly and don't wait until other people help. The longer you hesitate, the more difficult it becomes to intervene.

### 4. Bring help.

Use your mobile phone to call the police (make sure you have necessary numbers in your list of contacts). On the bus: Inform the driver. On the street: Shout loudly. If you are uncertain about the choice of adequate words: "FIRE!" definitely calls for immediate attention.

### 5. Attract attention.

Approach passengers and observers directly and individually: "You there, in the blue jacket, please inform the driver!" Speak loudly! Your voice will make you confident and encourage others to intervene as well.

### 6. Support the victim.

Keep eye contact with the victim to assure that you are there to help.

### 7. Irritate the perpetrator.

Scream loudly. This also works in case your voice fails.

### 8. Never use violence.

Don't use weapons. Don't touch the perpetrator. This can increase his or her aggression and escalate the situation.

### 9. Don't provoke the perpetrator.

Do not directly address him or her, as people could think you know each other. Don't stare at the perpetrator; this could make him or her more aggressive.

### 10. Call the police.

Do not just stare but carefully observe the scene and try to remember the perpetrator's face, clothes and escape route. Report the case to the police and serve as witness.

## CHECKLIST

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- **Learning Civil Courage. Analyses, Models, Teaching Aids**  
Institute for Peace Education Tuebingen (Germany, 2004)  
The handbook includes research results on civil courage and a number of materials for seminars and training.  
Download content (English): <http://uni-tuebingen.de/uni/spi/meyciv2.pdf>  
Download handbook (German):  
[http://frieden-fragen.net/themen/zc\\_lernen/zc\\_in.htm](http://frieden-fragen.net/themen/zc_lernen/zc_in.htm)
- **Ten Ways To Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide**  
Southern Poverty Law Center (USA, 2010)  
The guide sets out ten principles for fighting hate along with a collection of inspiring stories of people who acted, often alone at first, to push hate out of their communities.  
Download guide (English):  
[www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Ten\\_Ways\\_2010.pdf](http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/Ten_Ways_2010.pdf)
- **Forum Theatre**  
Forum Theatre is a method to train civil courage. It is part of a theatre concept called "Theatre of the Oppressed" which the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal elaborated in the early 1970s, initially in Brazil and later in Europe. The website introduces this interactive theatre concept which explores different options for dealing with a problem.  
[www.theatreoftheoppressed.org](http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org)

### The Network for Democracy and Courage

The *Netzwerk für Demokratie und Courage* - NDC is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation in Germany. The organisation's main field of activity are one-day seminars carried out at schools and vocational training centers. Issues addressed in these seminars include a critical interaction with problems like prejudices, racism and intolerance. The seminars entitled "Show courage for democracy" encourage young people to democratically engage in their communities and speak up when encountering racist ideologies and other forms of discrimination. Based on the approach "youth for youth", the seminars are carried out by young, specially trained volunteers. Within the past 10 years, the NDC has spread successfully to different areas of Germany. Per year an average of 1.000 seminars are carried out at schools based on the active engagement of more than 500 active volunteers. The organisation closely cooperates with partners in France and Belgium.



[info@netzwerk-courage.de](mailto:info@netzwerk-courage.de) • [www.netzwerk-courage.de](http://www.netzwerk-courage.de)

Written by Maria Grjasnow, *Netzwerk für Demokratie und Courage* (Germany)

### UNITED for intercultural action

UNITED for Intercultural Action is the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees. More than 560 organisations from a wide variety of backgrounds, from all European countries, work together in common activities, such as European-wide campaigns. Like-minded organisations have the opportunity to meet each other at conferences

and elaborate specific projects. UNITED is and will remain independent from all political parties, organisations and states, but seeks an active co-operation with other anti-racist initiatives in Europe. Information is received from more than 2000 organisations and mailings go out to about 2200 groups in Europe. Let us know if you want to get involved! And add UNITED to your mailing list!



**UNITED IS SUPPORTED BY:** more than 550 organisations from 48 European countries, many prominent individuals, private supporters and long-term volunteers from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste, the European Voluntary Service- and Leonardo Programme and Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service.

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UNITED for Intercultural Action

Postbus 413 • NL-1000 AK Amsterdam • Netherlands

phone +31-20-6834778 • fax +31-20-6834582 • [info@unitedagainstracism.org](mailto:info@unitedagainstracism.org) • [www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org)