

# **Men Speak Up: A toolkit for action in men's daily lives**

**A report by Dr. Michael Flood  
White Ribbon Policy Research Series No.4**

**Abridged Version**

**White Ribbon**



The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest global male-led movement to stop men's violence against women. It engages and enables men and boys to lead this social change. In Australia, White Ribbon is an organisation that works to prevent violence by changing attitudes and behaviours. The prevention work is driven through social marketing, Ambassadors and initiatives with communities, schools, universities, sporting codes and workplaces.

The White Ribbon Policy Research Series is intended to:

- Present Contemporary evidence on violence against women and its prevention;
- Investigate and report on new developments in prevention locally, nationally and internationally; and
- Identify policy and programming issues and provide options for improved prevention strategies and services.

The White Ribbon Policy Research Series is directed by an expert reference group comprising academic, policy and service experts. At least two reports will be published each year and available from the White Ribbon website at [www.whiteribbon.org.au](http://www.whiteribbon.org.au)

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## Introduction

**Men's violence against women can be reduced and prevented. Individuals can act to lessen violence in their own lives and the lives of those around them, organisations and communities can work to build gender-equal relations between women and men, and governments can take action to shift the structural and cultural underpinnings of men's violence against women.**

**There are everyday ways in which men can make a difference. This report explores how individual men can act to prevent and reduce violence in their everyday lives. It provides a toolkit for men of the strategies they can use. This document is a summary of a lengthier report available from the White Ribbon website.**

### 1. Action makes a difference

When individual men take action in their daily lives to challenge men's violence against women, this makes a difference. There is research evidence that a wide variety of actions can create change in violence against women or the factors which feed it.

- When a man who has used violence against a woman chooses to cease doing so, by definition this reduces violence against women.
- When a man supports a woman who is being subjected to violence by a partner or ex-partner, he increases the chance that she will seek help, report the violence, escape the violence, and recover from the abuse.
- When a man intervenes in a violent incident in progress by offering support or assistance to the woman being attacked, he may lessen the harm she suffers during that incident, and she may hear the message that she is not to blame for and does not deserve the violence inflicted on her.
- When a man intervenes in a violent incident in progress by challenging the man who is using violence against a woman, he increases the chance that the perpetrator will at least slow down or limit the violence he's inflicting. The perpetrator may be put on notice that he won't get away with violence, and he may be more likely to take responsibility for his actions.
- When a man questions a mate's joke about rape or a colleague's violence-supportive comment, he takes away the mate's false assumption that everyone else agrees with him, he makes it more likely that their opinions and attitudes will shift, and he increases others' willingness to speak up as well. His actions break down peer support for violence against women.
- When a father behaves in non-violent and respectful ways in his family, he increases the likelihood that his children will grow up with non-violent and respectful attitudes and relations.
- When men who are senior leaders of organisations use their influence to become advocates for violence prevention, they also make it more likely that other members of the organisation will support these efforts too.

## 2. What men can do

What can individual men do to help prevent or reduce men's violence against women? There are three broad forms of action:

- (a) behaving non-violently ourselves;
- (b) taking action among other men and women; and
- (c) taking wider collective action.

Given its focus on what individual men can do, this report focuses on the first two.

### ***(a) Start with yourself***

Men must start by 'putting their own house in order'. Take responsibility for violent behaviour and attitudes and strive to build non-violent and respectful relations with the women and girls (and other men and boys) in your life.

**Don't use violence.** Look honestly at your own behaviour. Reflect on and change any abusive and controlling behaviours of your own. Look critically at your own social and sexual relations with women, rather than assuming that violence is a problem simply of 'other men'.

**Build respectful and non-violent relations with women.** More broadly, build egalitarian relations with the women in your life. Understand how your own attitudes and actions might perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them. Be respectful, negotiate and behave fairly, seek mutually satisfying resolutions to conflicts, be willing to compromise, share responsibilities for household work and make decisions together, be honest and accountable, offer trust and support, and respect her right to her own feelings, friends, activities and opinions.

**Boycott and resist sexist and violence-supportive culture.** Address your involvements in the wider sexist and violence-supportive cultures which underpin men's violence against women. Use inclusive, non-sexist language. Don't consume or fund media which is sexist or which endorses and normalises men's violence against women. Question the sexist and homophobic (anti-gay) norms which limit men's lives.

**Inform yourself.** Build a solid working knowledge of the realities of men's violence against women. Educate yourself (and others) about gender inequalities. Talk with and listen to women, and read women's and feminist writing. Learn from, and advocate for, feminism.

### ***(b) Take action among the people around you***

**Intervene in violent incidents.** Men can intervene in other men's violence against women, that is, in incidents or situations of violence as they take place. When you encounter a violent incident, direct physical confrontation is rarely appropriate. Instead:

- Call the police.
- Be a witness. Stand far enough away to be safe but close enough for the violent person to see you and be aware that they are being watched.
- Ask others who are nearby to help.
- Verbally intervene. Tell the violent person clearly that his actions are not okay, they are a crime, and you are calling the police. Ask the victim if she needs help.

- Create a distraction – ask for directions or the time – such that the abused person has time to get away or the perpetrator slows down or ceases his violence.

There are other strategies which you may use either during or after the incident.

- Talk to a friend who is verbally or physically abusive to his partner. Tell him that what you witnessed was not okay, and he needs to get some help.
- Talk to a group of the perpetrator's or victim's friends and, together, decide on a course of action.

Men's violence against female partners often takes place behind closed doors. Often it involves a range of other controlling and coercive tactics: controlling her movements and her daily life, putting her down, and demolishing her self-esteem. This means that interventions into men's violence against women are at least as likely to involve interventions into behaviour which is private and carefully hidden. Still, many of the strategies identified above and below are relevant.

If you're with a group and your male friends are sexually harassing a passing woman:

- Distract your friends by saying something like "chill out, guys".
- Try to convince your peers to stop.
- Walk away.

**Challenge perpetrators and potential perpetrators.** Challenge behaviours and attitudes among men which are oppressive towards women in other ways, because they are controlling, dominating or humiliating. And challenge the behaviours which can feed into violence, such as expressions of sexual entitlement, power and control, and hostility and anger towards women.

**Support victims and survivors.** When a woman tells you that she has been assaulted or raped or is experiencing control and abuse,

- *Listen:* To what she has to say and let her take her time.
- *Believe:* Women rarely lie about rape or abuse, yet our culture includes the widespread myth that they lie. It is important to believe what they are saying.
- *Respect:* Both her feelings and decisions.

To play a positive role, also:

- Remember that it is not her fault. The responsibility lies with the abuser.
- Say some simple things that are effective: I'm glad you told me. I'm sorry this happened to you. You did not deserve this. You are not to blame.
- Refrain from asking questions. Let her share what she feels most comfortable talking about.
- Accept her reactions. Most victims just need you to "hear" them.
- Support her choices.

**Be an egalitarian influence.** Fathers, uncles, older brothers, coaches, teachers, and mentors can teach boys and young men that there is no place for violence in a relationship and foster non-violence and gender equality.

- Talk to and teach boys and young men and girls and young women about healthy and respectful relationships. Lead by example.
- Encourage your children and their friends to have egalitarian dating relationships.

**Challenge the social norms and inequalities which sustain men's violence against women.** Act to shift the attitudes, practices, and inequalities which contribute to men's violence against women.

**Challenge violence-supportive or sexist comments and jokes:**

- *Make your concern plain.* Say "That's sexist and I don't think it's funny" or "I think those words are really hurtful," or refrain from laughing.
- *Personalise the violence or injustice. Bring it home.* Make the harms associated with violence more real by personalising them. "What if that was your sister / daughter / mother?" Describe the experiences of people you know or people you've read about and could know.
- *Provide information.* Highlight the facts and debunk the myths.
- *Question the assumption.* Challenge the logic of the statement. No one deserves to be raped, beaten or stalked. No one asks for it. No one likes it.
- *Convey your feelings and principles.* Show emotion and passion. Show that you're deeply affected by what was said or done: sad, angry, etc. Tell them that these types of statements make you uncomfortable and ask them not to say these things around you.
- *Use humour,* e.g. to playfully question sexist and derogatory remarks.
- *Ask for an explanation.* Ask, "What are you saying?", to invite critical reflection and change.
- *Remind him of his 'best self'.* Say, "Come on, you are better than that".
- *Invite group pressure.* Say in front of others, "I don't feel good about this. Does anyone else feel uncomfortable too?"

**Also be proactive:**

- *Talk to other men* about men's violence against women. Start by mentioning something you read, a news story, a conversation you had, a woman or man you know, or something you've been thinking about.

Gender inequalities are the key foundation for men's violence against women, and building gender equality makes a vital contribution to ending men's violence against women. Men can strive for gender equality in their identities, interactions, and relations:

- Develop new forms of identity or masculinity, which do not depend on dominance or entitlement over others.
- Strive to ensure that your relations with women – in the kitchen, bedroom, the office, on the shopfloor and on the street – are egalitarian and just.
- Find circles of friends who share your vision of gender justice.
- Enjoy forms of media and culture which affirm gender equality and non-violence.
- Support local domestic violence and sexual assault services and projects.
- Make your vote count. Support political candidates who are committed to gender equality.

## **Personal strategies for strength, support, and inspiration**

### **How can men nurture their own strength and their commitment to this work?**

**Be bold.** Develop a passionate ethic that you can and will contribute to social change. Get used to being political – to speaking up and making a fuss.

**Learn a language for speaking about violence against women.** Be able to describe the seriousness of men's violence against women, its typical dynamics and impacts, and its causes and contexts. Know how violence against women is a men's issue. Speak from the heart.

**Get comfortable with the F-word and the G-word.** Voice your support for feminist ideals – for the principle of equality between men and women, for the simple idea that women are people too, for women's right to live free of violence. Question the homophobic assumptions which guide some people's "Are you gay?" reaction. Rather than defensively reasserting your manly credentials, challenge the narrow norms which limit men's lives.

**Find and build communities of support** – through friends, groups, and networks.

### **Hold yourself and others to standards which are higher, but not impossible.**

Take responsibility for your own sexist and violent behaviour and attitudes. Strive to reach a higher standard. But don't assume that you must be perfect before you act.

**Acknowledge your mistakes.** Make amends where you can, and take responsibility for harmful behaviour.

### **Celebrate your successes.**

**Remind yourself of what you are for, not just what you are against.** Find inspiring visions of gender equality and respect, and learn how you and other men (and women) will benefit from non-violence and gender justice.

**Make use of resources.** Do your homework, and draw on the wide range of resources for men's anti-violence work.

This report focuses on the steps individual men can take in their everyday lives to prevent and reduce men's violence against women. But to create the widespread social change necessary to end the systemic gender inequalities which underpin men's violence against women, we will also need concerted action by social movements and networks, community organisations and workplaces, other institutions, and governments.

## **Can we build it? Yes we can.**

Men can play vital roles in helping to reduce and prevent men's violence against women. This report has shown how men can make a difference. In their everyday lives, men can act in ways which will help undermine violence against women and the social and cultural dynamics which sustain it.

Men who care for women, men who care for justice and equality, and men who care for the wellbeing of our communities and society must act to end violence against women in their own lives and the lives of those around them. There is much to do, and we have only just begun.

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