

# RESPECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS


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Talking with our young people



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
**LET'S STOP IT**  
**AT THE START**



A man with a mustache, wearing a dark t-shirt, is shown in profile, looking towards the left. The image has a warm, orange-toned background. Overlaid on the left side of the image is a quote in white, bold, uppercase letters.

**“ADULTS HAVE THE GREATEST  
POTENTIAL INFLUENCE TO SHAPE  
POSITIVE ATTITUDES AMONG  
YOUNG PEOPLE. ”**

# INTRODUCTION

## THE ISSUE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is wrong.

We know that:

- › Indigenous women and girls are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women and girls. <sup>1</sup>
- › Indigenous women in remote and regional areas experience rates of family violence up to 45 times higher than other women. <sup>2</sup>

## THIS CYCLE OF VIOLENCE STARTS WITH DISRESPECT

Not all disrespect towards women ends in violence. But all violence against women starts with disrespectful behaviour.

Disrespect starts with what we see, the stories we hear and what we learn from adults when we are young.

Without realising it, we can sometimes say and do things that make young people think disrespectful and aggressive behaviours are ok.

Over time, our young people start to believe that disrespect is normal.

## TOGETHER WE CAN HELP STOP THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As parents, family members, teachers, coaches, employers, Elders and role models, we can have a positive influence on young people, we can teach them about acceptable behaviours and respect for women and girls, right from the start.

We can be more aware of the excuses we make, and how they can impact on our young people.

We can start talking about respect with boys and girls.

We can 'stop it at the start' and help prevent violence against women and girls.



### References:

- 1 KPMG 2009, *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, Safety Taskforce, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government.
- 2 Lievore, D 2003, *Non-reporting and hidden recording of sexual assault: an international literature review*, Australian Institute of Criminology for the Commonwealth Office on the Status of Women, Canberra.



# OUR YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN FROM US, WHAT ARE WE TEACHING THEM?

**We all want the best for our young people. We want them to be the best they can be, to be proud of who they are, and have healthy relationships with others. We want our young males to respect women and girls, and to respect themselves.**

Sometimes, without knowing it, we can make excuses that cause our young people to think that disrespect and aggression are normal.

To stop violence towards women and girls we must understand how it is linked to disrespect and the view that women/girls are not equal to men/boys.

## WHAT IS DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOUR?

Examples are:

- › putting pressure on someone to do something they are not comfortable with
- › using power to control, abuse or bully someone
- › treating someone as though they are not as important as you
- › treating someone differently because they are different from you in some way
- › dismissing what someone believes, or how they feel about something.

We can help reduce disrespect against women and girls in our community.

To do this, we need to be more aware of the excuses we make and recognise how our own behaviour and attitudes can make disrespect for women and girls seem as though it is normal in our communities.

Then, we can start talking with our young people about respect.

Some talks are easy to have, and some are a bit harder, and sometimes we don't even know where to start.

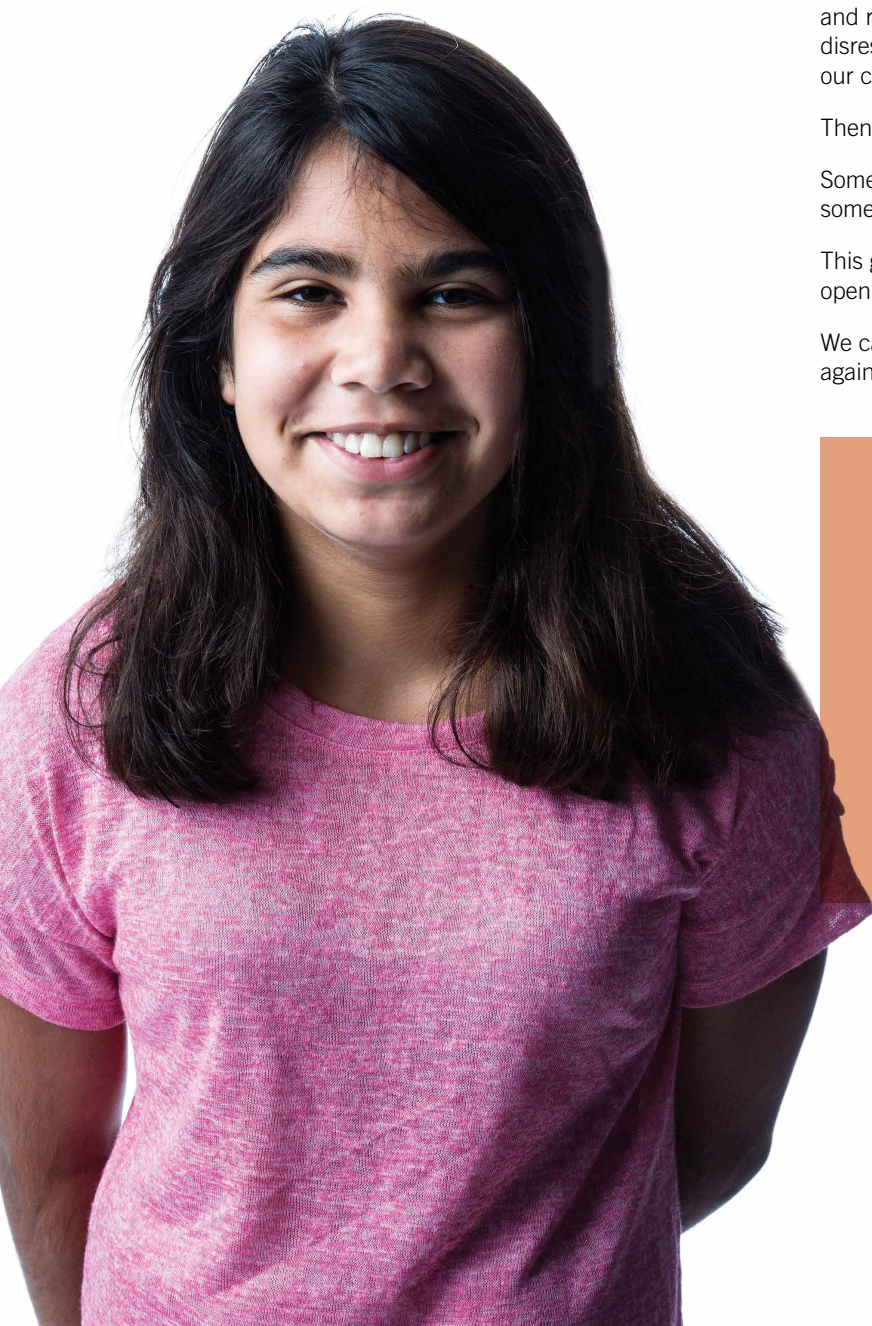
This guide is a practical tool to help you talk confidently and openly with young people about respectful relationships.

We can all be part of the solution to help prevent violence against women in our communities. Let's stop it at the start.

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*It's our responsibility to show and teach our young people that disrespect is not normal.*”

**Author, mother and survivor of domestic violence,  
Lani Brennan**



# WHAT HAS DISRESPECT GOT TO DO WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

**Violence against women and girls starts with disrespect. The excuses we make as adults allow disrespect to grow.**

Even though we strongly believe that violence against women and girls is wrong, we don't always know how or when to change things. We aren't always aware of how we allow boys to develop disrespectful attitudes towards women. We raise young girls to think disrespect is normal when we play down disrespectful behaviour.

These attitudes then become a normal part of growing up.

We can be part of the solution to make sure our young men respect women and girls. Teaching young men about respect will help make our communities stronger.

**1 IN 4**

**young people don't think it's serious when guys insult or verbally harass girls in the street**

**1 IN 5**

**young people believe there are times when women bear some responsibility for sexual assault**

**1 IN 4**

**young people don't think it's serious if a guy who's normally gentle sometimes slaps his girlfriend when he's drunk and they're arguing**

**OVER  
1 IN 4**

**young men believe that girls like guys who are in charge of the relationship**

Statistics:

TNS, Reducing violence against women and their children campaign research, 2015

Our Watch, The Line campaign research, 2015

VicHealth, National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey, 2013

# LET'S STOP THINKING DISRESPECT IS OK

**When we talk to our young people about disrespect it's important to be clear about what is ok and what's not.**

It can be hard to question our own behaviours and attitudes towards women and girls. But if we don't challenge our thoughts and actions, we might be excusing disrespect, aggression and potentially violence without knowing it.

Our young people can misunderstand what we say and see it as an excuse or permission to be disrespectful. Are we making excuses for disrespectful and aggressive behaviour?

These include:

- › not taking the behaviour seriously
- › accepting aggression as just part of being a boy
- › blaming girls.





# HOW TO RECOGNISE OUR MOST COMMON EXCUSES

## 1. NOT TAKING THE BEHAVIOUR SERIOUSLY

This is when we don't take disrespectful or aggressive actions seriously.

### HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...

"Just ignore it, it wasn't that bad"

"He just did it because he likes you"

Responding in this way teaches our kids and young people that this behaviour is ok and even normal, and that boys are just having a 'bit of fun' with girls.

## 2. ACCEPTING AGGRESSION AS JUST PART OF BEING A BOY

When we take the boy's side, it can send the wrong message that boys and men find it harder to control themselves or they must have had a reason for their behaviour.

### HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...

"He was having a bad day; it's tough being a boy"

"Boys will be boys"

Responding in this way teaches our kids and young people that disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is ok among boys.

## 3. BLAMING GIRLS

Sometimes we shift the blame when a male is disrespectful or aggressive towards a female. This can send the wrong message that she must have done something to cause the behaviour and the situation.

### HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...

"Did you say something he didn't like?"

"It takes two to have a fight"

Responding in this way teaches our young boys that it is not always their fault if they are disrespectful or aggressive, and teaches our young girls to question if they are to blame.



# THINKING ABOUT THE CONVERSATION

**The opportunity to have important talks with your kids or other young people may happen at any time, so it's good to be ready for it.**

By thinking through what you believe, what you might say and how you can have positive conversations with your son or daughter, you will feel more confident to make the most of each opportunity.

## BE READY TO TALK

In the car, playing footy in the backyard, fishing, shopping or watching television – be prepared to talk when you see or hear something you're not comfortable with, when your child asks a question or when they just want to have a yarn with you. For example, think about how your daughter might respond to a boy's insult or teasing, or what your son could do if one of his friends showed him a photo of a girl without her permission. Take a look at the **Respect Checklist** for more topic ideas.

## THINK OF EXAMPLES

Using examples based on things you have seen, heard, or experienced yourself is a good way to help young people understand the issue. For example, if you hear a comment in a news story that a woman who was hurt by a man shouldn't have been out on her own, you could use this to talk about opinions that women are to blame. If you come across a useful example, try to remember it so that you can bring it up later when the opportunity arises to have a talk. As before, the **Respect Checklist** has some other topics that could help you get started.

## BE HONEST

Let your kids know you haven't got all the answers but that you do know it's important to treat others with respect and that others respect us. Explain that we shouldn't excuse behaviour that is hurtful or harmful.

## ASK QUESTIONS

Ask your kids how they feel and what they think, then you can discuss their answers. Take the opportunity to teach them about respectful relationships and tell them what you think. For example, you can talk to your daughters about what might happen if a boy was verbally aggressive towards her. Ask her how she might feel, what she might be thinking, what she would do, and how she would feel about taking action.

## SEE IT THEIR WAY

Keep in mind the influences your kids and young people already have – such as their friends and other people in the community – these influences can sometimes make it hard or confusing for them to know how to react in different situations. You can help guide them by talking regularly and supporting them to feel confident in the actions they take. For example, if you have a son you might talk to him about showing respect to girls even

if his friends aren't. If you have a daughter, you can encourage her not to keep things to herself or feel that it's her fault when a boy teases her or puts her down.

## LISTEN TO THEM

It's important to listen to young people, as much as it is to talk with them. Listening will tell you about the attitudes they are growing up with and give you the opportunity to talk to them about any issues or challenges they are facing.

## TEACH BY EXAMPLE

Young people learn from their parents and other adults. That's why it's important to think about how you show respect to others, and how you can be a positive role model. What you say and do influences their attitudes and behaviours. No one expects you to be perfect. The important thing is to be aware of your own behaviour, be honest and consistent, so you can provide your kids with positive examples.

## WHEN TO GET INVOLVED

Talk through how your kids and young people might handle such situations themselves. If you feel you need to step in, explain this to them and do whatever you think is necessary. Even if they say they don't want you to get involved, young people who are at risk of harm need adults to step in.

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*It's about reflecting on our own behaviour and recognising what is best for our children, because prevention is always easier than intervention.*”

Author, mother and survivor of domestic violence,  
Lani Brennan



# STARTING THE TALK

## Sometimes it's hard to start talking with young people about disrespectful and aggressive behaviour.

You might be concerned about raising issues that will worry or scare them.

You might not want to make a situation worse, or say something that could lead them to have problems with others.

You might not want to say anything that could harm your relationship with them, or you might not want to feel embarrassed.

Being confident is important but can sometimes be hard. The suggested topics below might help you begin the conversation. And remember, you don't need to have all the answers, but thinking about the topics you want to talk about and practising your answers beforehand will help you when it's time to talk.

## SUGGESTED TOPIC AREAS

### EXPLAINING RESPECT

- › What respect means and why it's important
- › Respect in the family and community
- › Self-respect
- › Respect between friends
- › Respectful relationships between boys and girls.

### RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

- › Treating people how you would like to be treated
- › Not tolerating disrespect and aggressive behaviour
- › Apps like iMatter
- › Services like Kids Helpline and 1800RESPECT. Visit [respect.gov.au](https://www.respect.gov.au) for more information and support.

### RECOGNISING DISRESPECT AND AGGRESSION

- › How to know if someone is being disrespectful
- › Laughing at others or putting them down
- › Bullying, teasing and calling them names
- › Fighting in the playground or rough behaviour on the sports field
- › Intimidation and public harassment
- › Physical violence.

### GENDER EQUALITY

- › How boys and girls are both good at lots of different things
- › Gender stereotypes (when we expect women to behave in a certain way and men to behave in a certain way)
- › Males and females in the media
- › Why you are both equally 'in charge' of and 'responsible for' a relationship.

### RESPECTING OTHER PEOPLE'S PRIVACY

- › Taking photos, being photographed and sharing photos
- › Giving out personal information online
- › Texting or emailing rude or offensive language on your phone. Respecting people and setting boundaries when you are using a phone or are online is important. Visit [esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au) for more detail.

**SUGGESTED WAYS YOU CAN START TALKING TO YOUR KIDS**

**Remember, you don't have to have all the answers, but it can help to be prepared to begin to talk about respect together. Here are some suggestions:**

Do you notice any differences between how boys and girls are treated at school?

Do you notice any differences between how boys and girls behave at school?

Have you heard something a boy said to a girl did that you didn't agree with?

Have you ever found it hard to talk to boys/girls? What are the main reasons?

What do you think of the way the women/men behaved and were treated in that movie? Other examples might be a TV show or games your kids enjoy.

Can you think of a time you may have treated someone with disrespect?

If one of your friends was being disrespectful to you, how would you feel? What would you do?

If one of your male friends was being disrespectful to someone else, how would you feel? What would you do?

If one of your female friends was being treated with disrespect by a boy, how would you feel? What would you do?

If you ever felt unsafe around a boy/girl? Where would you go for help?



# DURING THE TALK

**If you are a mum, you may wish to talk to your daughter. If you're a dad, you may wish to talk to your son or if you are on your own you may wish to have relatives (Uncles or Aunties for example) talk to your daughter or son.**

## **Listen and be ready to respond.**

Sometimes when you're talking with young people, you hear things you didn't know about them. For example, a boy may have picked on them, or a friend may have pressured a girl into doing something she didn't want to. If this happens, stay calm and keep listening so they don't stop the talk and shut you out.

## **TALKING TO KIDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING DISRESPECT OR AGGRESSION**

Sometimes kids and young people try to play down a situation, to make out it's not serious or blame themselves or others for their behaviour. They may also take someone's side who is being disrespectful or aggressive.

Let them know:

- › these attitudes are not ok
- › everyone deserves to be treated with respect
- › they are not to blame for other people's behaviour
- › they should be treated with respect.

Even if they don't agree with what you're saying, let them know it's important to continue to talk about these issues.

## **TALKING TO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO DON'T WANT TO LISTEN OR DISAGREE WITH WHAT YOU'VE SAID**

Some young people don't want to talk about difficult issues with adults. If this happens, there are a few things you can do to talk more openly next time.

- › Stay calm and set out the issues as you see them and encourage them to think about these issues.
- › Always be open to talking about these issues and let them know you appreciate them speaking to you.
- › Discuss the difficult issues they face and let them know it can be challenging to work out what is right.
- › Talk about successes as well as hard times. Recall a time that they showed respect and reacted to a situation in a positive way.
- › Let them know if they ever want to talk or if they feel unsure they can come to you.





### **TALKING TO YOUR DAUGHTER/ GRANDCHILD/NIECE**

If you are talking to your daughter/grandchild/niece about a situation where a boy has treated her with disrespect, or has been aggressive towards her it is important to let her know this is not ok:

acknowledge how she feels

explain that she is not to blame

acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to know what to do

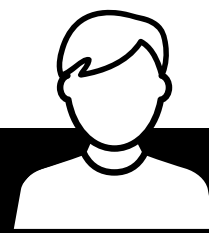
suggest and discuss ways she might respond to situations like this in future

encourage her to consider the situation through someone else's eyes—if one of her friends was in this situation, how would she would react, and what would she tell her friend to do?

talk to her about who and where she can go to for help

help her to understand what she is feeling (frustration, distress, anger, embarrassment) is normal

talk about actions that could be taken and let her know that you will support her when she is ready to take action.



### **TALKING TO YOUR SON/GRANDCHILD/ NEPHEW**

If you are talking to your son/grandchild/nephew about behaviour that is disrespectful or aggressive towards a girl it is important to:

stay calm and talk in way that will help to encourage more talks in the future

understand why he behaved that way but explain disrespectful behaviour is wrong and there are consequences

focus on the behaviour - let him know it is not ok to behave in a way that is disrespectful or aggressive towards girls, rather than criticising him as a person

be a good role model and avoid threatening or aggressive behaviour

let him know that he can choose to be respectful, and explore ways he can be more respectful

ask him how he thinks the girl feels when he behaves that way

question if he would treat a friend that way

talk about how to respectfully disagree

discuss the difference between feeling angry and being aggressive

help him understand what he is feeling (frustration, distress, anger, embarrassment) is normal

explain that he is responsible for how he expresses his feelings

encourage him to be a role model and set a good example for his friends.



# KEEP YARNING

**The more you talk to young people about difficult issues, the easier it becomes. Talking is also a way to stay connected, strengthen family relationships and for you to lead by example.**

Talking can also help you 'stay in touch' with your kids and other young people and can help them develop respectful relationships as they grow up.

You are their biggest influence. By speaking up when you see or hear harmful attitudes and behaviours, you can contribute to respect for women and girls in your community, and help to prevent the cycle of violence.

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*Making a positive change and building more respectful relationships in our communities starts with talking to our children.*”

Author, mother and survivor of domestic violence,  
Lani Brennan



# MORE INFORMATION

Visit [respect.gov.au](https://respect.gov.au)

For more tools and resources, including:

## UNDERSTANDING OUR EXCUSES THE EXCUSE INTERPRETER

to discover the hidden meanings of common expressions that can excuse disrespectful behaviour towards girls

## THE RESPECT CHECKLIST

to give you a picture of what your son or daughter might believe, and how they're likely to react when faced with disrespect or aggression.

On the website you'll also find more detail about the cycle of violence against women, and links to a range of national, state and territory services.



## THE LINE

*The Line* encourages healthy and respectful relationships by challenging and changing attitudes and behaviours that support violence. *The Line* is an initiative under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022* and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. It is delivered by Our Watch.

[theline.org.au](https://theline.org.au)

The Line – Respect Each Other provides young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders with ways to learn about healthy and respectful relationships, as well as resources for teachers, parents, relatives and other community members to help lead the way with lessons and activities. - See more at: [theline.org.au/indigenous](https://theline.org.au/indigenous)

## WHITE RIBBON

*White Ribbon* is a primary prevention campaign that aims to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls by working directly with men and encouraging men and boys to take positive action to create change.

[whiteribbon.org.au](https://whiteribbon.org.au)

## SAFE SCHOOLS HUB

*The Safe Schools Hub* is a one-stop shop for information and resources on safe school strategies to assist teachers and school leaders, students, parents, specialist professionals supporting students and pre-service teachers.

[safeschoolshub.edu.au](https://safeschoolshub.edu.au)

## NO MORE

The '*No More*' campaign is a domestic violence action plan program implemented in sporting clubs to help organise and plan individual approaches to reducing family and domestic violence in their communities.

[nomore.org.au](https://nomore.org.au)

## FIND YOUR NEAREST ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED HEALTH ORGANISATION

The NACCHO App contains a geo locator, which will help you find the nearest Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation in your area and provides health information online and telephone on a wide range of topics and where you can go to get more information or assistance should you need urgent help.

iPhone/iPad  
[ios.giveeasy.org/naccho](https://ios.giveeasy.org/naccho)

Android  
[android.giveeasy.org/naccho](https://android.giveeasy.org/naccho)

## FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAMS AND ORGANISATIONS

The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet is an innovative Internet resource that aims to inform practice and policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health by making research and other knowledge readily accessible. The section on Family Violence provides a list of current and non-current Indigenous Family Violence programs, organisations delivering family violence services and their contact details.

[healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/related-issues/family-violence/organisations](https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/related-issues/family-violence/organisations)

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
LET'S STOP IT  
AT THE START**



Australian Government

A joint Australian, state and territory government initiative.