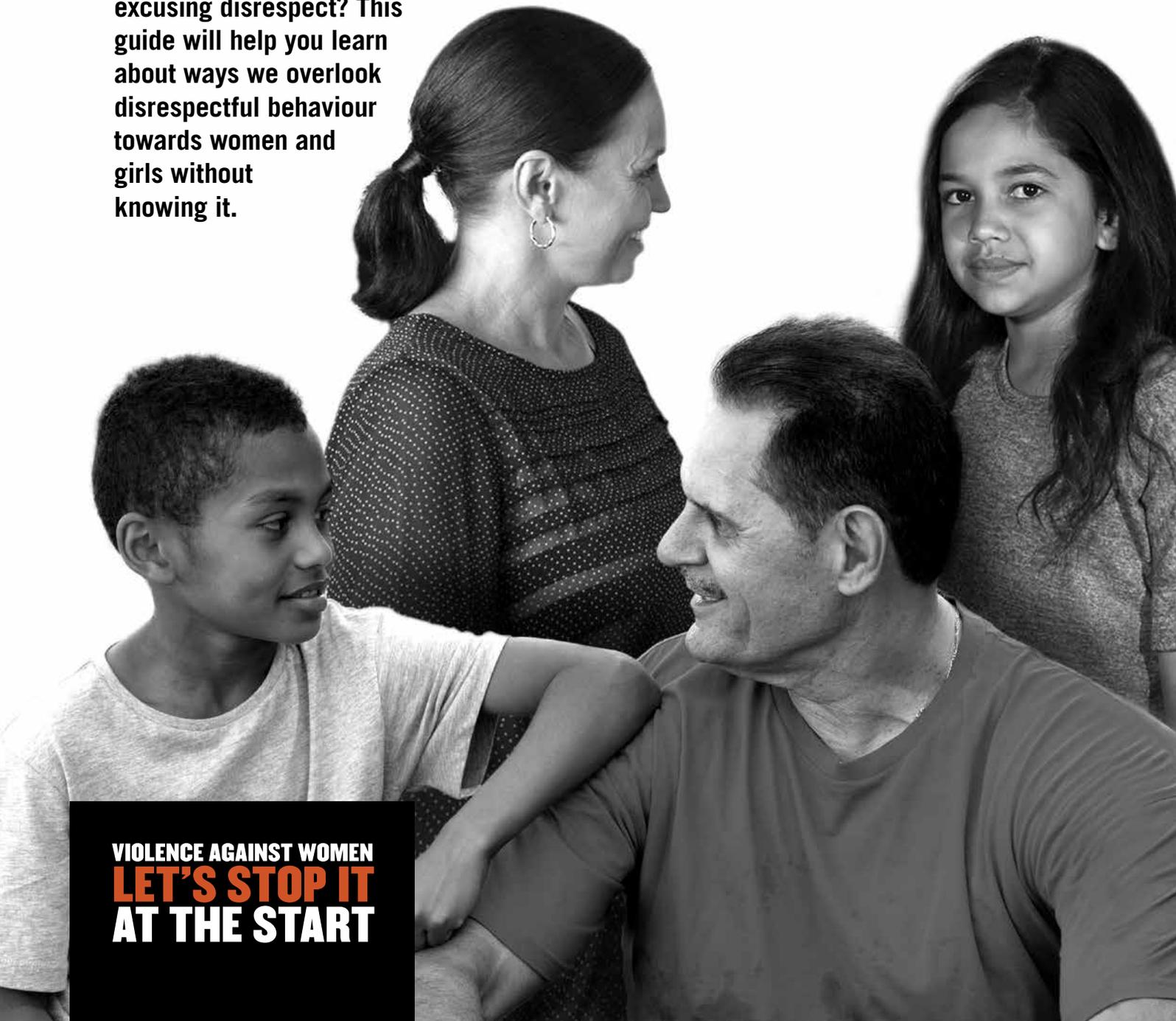


UNDERSTANDING OUR EXCUSES

THE EXCUSE INTERPRETER

How do we know we are excusing disrespect? This guide will help you learn about ways we overlook disrespectful behaviour towards women and girls without knowing it.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
LET'S STOP IT
AT THE START

INTRODUCTION

THE ISSUE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Most people agree violence against women is wrong.

However, 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. ¹
- › Indigenous women in remote and regional areas experience rates of family violence up to 45 times higher than other women. ²

THIS CYCLE OF VIOLENCE STARTS WITH DISRESPECT

When we disrespect women it doesn't always end in violence but all violence against women starts with disrespectful behaviour.

Disrespect starts as kids through what we see, the stories we hear and what we learn from adults.

We just want what's best for our kids but without meaning to, we can ignore disrespectful behaviour, not want to get involved or make excuses when our kids show disrespectful behaviour.

Making fun of girls because of what they look like, or using gender as an insult (for example, 'don't throw like a girl'); these are examples of disrespect that may seem harmless at first in our kids.

Without knowing it, we can say and do things that make our kids think disrespect and aggression are ok.

Some of the most common ways we excuse disrespectful and aggressive behaviour are:

- › not taking disrespectful behaviour seriously
- › accepting aggression as just part of being a boy
- › blaming girls who are treated with disrespect.

We teach boys this behaviour towards girls is 'just what boys do'. We teach girls to accept it, and tell them 'it's ok, he probably did it because he likes you'.

Over time, boys and girls start to believe that disrespect is a normal part of growing up.

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 our kids and show them what's ok and what's not, right from the start.

We can be more aware of the excuses we make, and how these excuses influence our kids.

We can start talking about respect with our kids.

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

HOW TO USE *UNDERSTANDING OUR EXCUSES*

How we talk to our kids – the words we use, influences what our kids' think is ok and what is not.

But our words can have hidden meanings. The things we say in front of our kids can be taken in the wrong way. Without meaning to, we can say things or use words that excuse disrespectful behaviour towards women.

You can use *Understanding our Excuses* to avoid words and phrases that might be taken the wrong way by our kids and, without us knowing it, give them the wrong message about respect.

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.

PLAYING DOWN DISRESPECT TOWARD GIRLS

This is when we try to lessen the seriousness of disrespect and aggression.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...	WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT THINK
"He picks on you because he likes you"	GIRL I shouldn't get upset when he insults me.
	BOY It's okay to do it if you like them.
"Don't take it seriously, he didn't mean it like that"	GIRL I'm making a fuss about nothing.
	BOY She overreacted.
"It's only a bit of fun"	GIRL I shouldn't take it so seriously.
	BOY I can get away with this.
"It's just a joke"	GIRL I shouldn't get upset about this.
	BOY It's okay to make jokes about girls.

ACCEPTING AGGRESSION AS JUST PART OF BEING A BOY

This is when we excuse disrespect and aggression as a normal part of being a boy.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...	WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT THINK
"It's tough being a boy"	GIRL It's okay for boys to disrespect me.
	BOY It's not my fault if she makes me angry.
"It's ok. He'll grow out of it"	GIRL If I just accept it, he'll grow out of it and it'll stop.
	BOY I have the right to act this way.
"Boys will be boys"	GIRL It's just what boys do – I should get used to it.
	BOY We're just like that, it's fine.
"He didn't know he was doing anything wrong"	GIRL It wasn't his fault.
	BOY I'm not responsible for this.

BLAMING GIRLS

Sometimes we blame the girl when a boy is disrespectful or aggressive towards her. This sends the wrong message that she must have done something to cause or deserve the disrespect, or that we should doubt what has happened because she is not being honest.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...	WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE MIGHT THINK
"It takes two to cause trouble"	GIRL I probably did something to start it.
	BOY She started it, so how I reacted is ok.
"She probably made him do it"	GIRL I caused this.
	BOY She asked for it.

RESPECTING WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

Women are an integral part of our community and we need to honour their role in our community.

Sometimes we can be guilty of 'stereotyping'. Examples of stereotypes are that boys shouldn't show their emotions or feelings, or that girls should go along with what boys say and care more about what boys say or think than their own thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, the things we say reinforce these gender stereotypes.

While we may not mean to, this can lower the confidence and self-esteem of our kids. We need to stop using these words and phrases, otherwise stereotypes about men and women will carry on.



MALES

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...

- "Act like a real man"
- "Stop acting like a girl"
- "She shouldn't tell me what to do"
- "Boys don't cry"
- "Your girlfriend's the boss in your relationship"

WHAT A BOY MIGHT THINK

- Men need to be tough.
- I'm too soft.
- I should be in control of the relationship.
- I shouldn't show my emotions.
- She's in control of me.

FEMALES

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OR SAID ...

- "She bosses people around"
- "She argues about nothing"
- "Why are you being so uptight?"
- "She thinks she knows everything"
- "She acts like a boy"
- "She's a little princess"

WHAT A GIRL MIGHT THINK

- I shouldn't stand up for myself.
- I shouldn't give my opinion / I shouldn't stand up for myself.
- I shouldn't be clear about what I want.
- I shouldn't say things that make me sound clever.
- I shouldn't be myself / I shouldn't play the sports that I like / I should look more feminine / I shouldn't dress the way that I like / I am judged on how I look.
- I shouldn't be myself / I should look less feminine / I shouldn't dress the way that I like / I am judged on how I look.



WHAT YOU CAN DO NEXT

Thinking about our own attitudes, which might excuse disrespect, and being aware of the things we say to our kids is the first step towards making a change.

By talking to our kids about respect, we can have a positive influence on their attitudes and behaviours as they grow up.

Other useful tools:

RESPECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Advice and tips for challenging talks with your kids and to help you speak openly with them.

THE RESPECT CHECKLIST

A practical checklist to help parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles identify important aspects of respect and gender equality to talk about with your kids.



Learn more at respect.gov.au



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Australian Government

A joint Australian, state and territory government initiative.