

WHITE RIBBON



3. The positive roles that men can play

“Violence against women will only cease when men join with women to put an end to it.”

Men have a crucial role to play in stopping rape and violence.

Most men do not commit violence against women. Most men know that rape and sexual assault are wrong. But we have done little to reduce physical and sexual assault in our lives, families and communities. Too many men believe the common myths about violence. Too many have ignored women's fears and concerns about their safety. And, sometimes, we have been violent ourselves.

There is much that men can do to help stop sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of violence. Violence against women will only stop when men join with women to put an end to it. And, both men and women will benefit from a world free of violence.

Most men

Most men do not use violence. But when violence occurs, it is mostly males who do it.

Why?

Men's history of violence is the product of traditional gender roles and gender inequalities. In Australia, some men learn such traits as aggressiveness, control, a sense of entitlement to power, and emotional callousness, as well as a series of myths that justify men's violence and men's power. These include the myth that women say “no” and mean “yes”, that women lie about being raped, and that women provoke violence. Far too many men in the community still hold onto these myths. Men with sexist, rigid, and hostile attitudes towards women are more likely to use violence against them. Traditional models of male sexuality presented to men contribute to sexual violence. Men often learn that we should always take the initiative in sex,

be in control, prove our virility, and see ‘how far we can get’. Sometimes men don't listen to women, and we either don't recognise or choose to ignore women's refusals, discomfort, pain and fear. Some men learn to treat women as objects. We confuse sex and intimacy, trying to get all our emotional needs for closeness and support met through sex.

Sexual assault and domestic violence are also the products of sexism and power inequalities. Sexism (a belief in male superiority) and patterns of male power encourage men's violence against women. This violence is a threat to women's mobility, self-esteem and everyday safety.

Violence against women also is shaped by poverty and community disintegration, alcoholism and drug abuse, and mental illness. The good news is that most boys and men are not violent. Many men have loving and respectful relations with women. And most men share the belief that physical or sexual violence against women is never acceptable.

Violence against men

Males too are often the victims of violence. While boys and men are the large majority of perpetrators of violence, boys and men often are also the victims. Males are bashed up, bullied and sexually assaulted. Boys and men are most at risk of violence from other boys and men. Ending violence to girls and women and ending violence to boys and men are part of the same struggle — to create a world based on equality, justice and non-violence.

Men will benefit

In campaigning against violence done to women, it is important to remind ourselves of what we are standing for: we want friendships and relationships which are fair, empowering and peaceful; we want sexual lives based on consent, safety, and mutual pleasure; and we want girls and women to grow up free from the threat of violence.

Men have much to gain from ending violence. In our relations with women, instead of experiencing distrust and disconnection, we may find closeness and connection. The girls and women we love will lead safer, freer lives. No longer will men be viewed with fear or suspicion because of the threat posed by a minority. Men's sexual lives will be more pleasurable and mutual, rather than driven, obsessive and predatory. And boys and men ourselves will be free from the threat of assault.