

# HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT RESPECT

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**A conversation guide for parents and families**



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

# HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT



This information is written in an easy to read way.  
We use pictures to explain some ideas.



This guide is a tool to help you talk to young people about respect.



This Easy Read document is a summary of another document.



You can find the other document on our website at  
**[www.respect.gov.au/what-can-i-do/start-a-conversation](http://www.respect.gov.au/what-can-i-do/start-a-conversation)**



You can ask for help to read this document. A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

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# THE ISSUE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



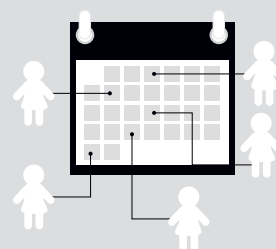
Most Australians agree that violence against women is wrong.

We know that:

**1**

on average, 1 woman is killed each week by:

- her current partner or
- a former partner



**1 IN 3**

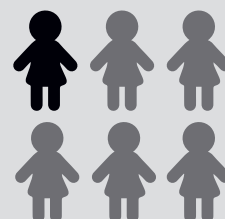
women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence, since the age of 15, from someone they know



**1 IN 6**

women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by:

- her current partner or
- a former partner



**1 IN 4**

women has been emotionally abused



**1 IN 4**

one in four young people is prepared to excuse violence from a partner



## This cycle of violence starts with disrespect



Not all disrespect towards women leads to violence.  
All violence against women starts with disrespect.



Sometimes adults might say or do things that give children the wrong message.



Children might get the message that disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is ok.



You can do this without meaning to.



Boys and girls can start to believe that disrespect is just a normal part of growing up.



# Together we can help stop the cycle of violence against women

As parents, family members, teachers, coaches, employers and role models we can:



- have a positive influence on young people



- let people know what's ok and what's not ok.

We can do this from the very start.



We can be more aware of the excuses we make and the lasting effect they can have.

We can start talking to boys and girls about respect.

**We can 'stop it at the start'.**

**We can help prevent violence against women.**



# WE SHAPE OUR CHILDREN'S BELIEFS FROM A YOUNG AGE

Parents and families want the best for their kids.

We all want kids to have:



- great experiences



- healthy relationships



- chances to shine and be happy.



You want them to understand right and wrong.



You want them to respect other people.



You want them to respect themselves.

This means they feel good about themselves.

You want them to grow up with good:



- values



- attitudes



- behaviours.



You do your best to talk about these things.



Parents and other family members can influence children.



You do your best to set a good example.



# What is disrespectful behaviour?

Some examples of disrespectful behaviour are:

- putting pressure on someone to do something they don't want to do
- using power over someone to
  - › control them
  - › abuse them
  - › hurt them
- treating someone as if they are not important
- treating someone differently because of their



› gender



› religion



› cultural background



› sexuality



› skin colour

- dismissing someone for



› how they think



› how they feel



› what they believe.



# WHAT DOES DISRESPECT HAVE TO DO WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?



Violence against women can be caused by disrespect.

Without knowing it, you might be making excuses for disrespectful behaviour.

You might not even realise that you're doing this.



Sometimes we let boys develop disrespectful attitudes towards women. By doing this, sometimes we teach girls to put up with disrespect.

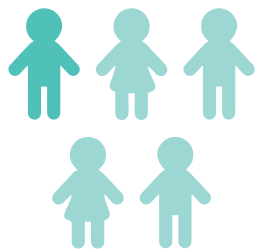


Disrespect can have a big impact on the way a girl feels about herself.



**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

Many things can influence the ideas young people have about the relationship between men and women including:



- popular culture, like TV, movies, the internet, social media and magazines



- their friends and other people the same age.



The adults in their lives, especially their parents and family members, have the strongest influence to make a positive change.



Most Australians think violence against women is wrong.

But we don't always know:



- how to change things



- when to change things.

# LET'S STOP ACCEPTING DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOUR



When you talk to young people about disrespect it's important to be clear about what is acceptable.



We need to challenge what we think and what we do about:

- the roles of men and women
- what's ok and what's not.



We might be excusing disrespect, aggression and even violence without meaning to.

Young people can misunderstand what we say.



They might take our words, or even the things we don't say, as an excuse or as giving them permission to behave in a certain way.



If this keeps happening, nothing will change in our community.



We want to encourage all adults to talk openly about these things with their children and young people.



What we do and say now can stop disrespectful behaviour at the start.



Parents and family members have the opportunity to make a difference.

They can help children have positive and respectful attitudes.



# WHAT IS GENDER INEQUALITY?



Gender inequality is when:

- girls don't have the same rights as boys
- girls don't have the same opportunities as boys
- girls miss out on things because they're different from boys.

For example, some girls can't play soccer at school because the competition is only for boys.

Parents might need to look closely at their beliefs about:



- boys and girls
- men and women.



What you believe affects how you react.

You need to think about your reactions too.

# HOW TO RECOGNISE THE MOST COMMON EXCUSES

Sometimes we excuse behaviour that is disrespectful or aggressive.

## Playing down the behaviour

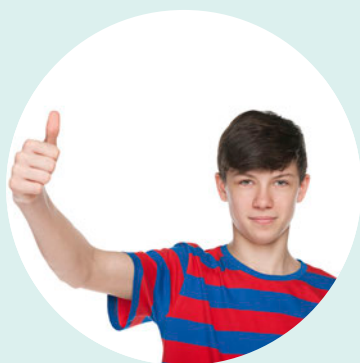


This is when we act like the behaviour is less serious than it is.

Have you ever thought or said:

“ Just ignore it, it wasn't that bad. ”

“ He's probably just trying to get your attention. ”



Responding like this teaches young people that the behaviour is ok.

## Accepting aggression as part of being a boy



When we take the boys' side it can suggest to other people that boys and men:

- find it hard to control themselves
- must have had a reason for what they did.

Have you ever thought or said:

“ Boys will be boys. ”

“ He was having a bad day, it's tough being a boy. ”



Responding like this teaches young people that disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is more ok for boys.

## Blaming girls



Sometimes we shift the blame for the behaviour from the male to the female.

This suggests that the girl or woman did something to cause the behaviour.

Have you ever thought or said:

“ Did you say something he didn't like? ”

“ It takes two to tango. ”



Thinking or speaking like this teaches boys that disrespectful or aggressive behaviour is not always their fault.



It also teaches young girls to wonder if they might be to blame.

# THINKING ABOUT THE CONVERSATION



Having conversations about respect with children can make a big difference.



It's hard to know when you should have these conversations.

If you prepare yourself, you will feel more confident.

## Be ready to talk early and often

You might be:



- in the car



- shopping



- making dinner



- watching TV



- walking the dog.



Be ready to talk when:



- you see or hear something you are uncomfortable with



- your child asks a question



- your child wants to chat with you.



Try to make the most of opportunities that come up in everyday situations.

The idea is to make difficult conversations become normal.



You want your child to know where you stand and that they can talk to you.

## Think of examples



It might be helpful to use things you have seen or watched together as examples.



It might help you to show them what you are trying to say.

## Be honest



Respect and disrespect are sometimes hard to understand.

Admit that you may not have all the answers.



Tell them it's important that:

- we treat others with respect
- others respect us.



Explain that we shouldn't make excuses for behaviour that might be hurtful or harmful to someone.

## Ask questions

While you are talking, ask your child:



- how they feel



- what they think.



Talk about what they tell you and also tell them how you feel and what you think.

## See it their way

Children can be influenced by lots of different things.

These influences don't always give them the same messages.



Children can:

- become confused
- be unsure of how they should react.



You can help guide them by:

- talking to them regularly about the issues they face
- helping them feel confident in the actions they take.



If you have a son this might be about:

- showing respect to girls
- not putting girls down
- not doing something just because his mates are.



If you have a daughter this might be about:

- encouraging her to speak up if a boy teases her or puts her down
- not keeping it to herself
- helping her understand that it's not her fault.



## Listen to them

In a conversation, listening is as important as talking.

What your child tells you can help you know more about their:



- thoughts



- feelings.

Listening helps you understand the:



- attitudes they have



- issues and challenges they are facing.



As a general rule you should try and listen more than you talk.

## Teach by example



Parents are important teachers of their children.



Children and young people watch you and listen to you every day.

What you say and do influences their:



- attitudes



- behaviours.





It's important to think about how children could learn from your actions and words.

No one expects you to be perfect.



It's important to be:

- honest
- consistent.



When you talk about how not to react in different situations, you can use examples of things that have happened to you.

This can help you be a good role model.

## When to get involved



Talk to your child about how they might handle a situation by themselves.



Tell your child if you think you need to step in and help.



Sometimes adults need to step in even if the child says they don't want your help.

# STARTING THE CONVERSATION



It isn't always easy to talk about behaviour that is:

- disrespectful
- aggressive.

You might be concerned that the topic will worry or scare your child.

You might not want to:



- make a situation worse than it already is



- cause conflict with other people



- discuss things that could affect your relationship with your child



- feel embarrassed



- feel like your actions don't match your words.



Feeling confident enough to start can be hard.



We have written a list of topics to help you start a conversation.



You don't need to have all the answers.



Learning about the topics and practising what you might say can help you get ready to talk about tough topics.

# SUGGESTED TOPICS TO TALK ABOUT

Respectful behaviour is treating someone kindly. Here are some topics about respectful behaviour that could help you start a conversation.

## Explaining respect



- What respect means and why it's important.
- Respect in the family.
- Self-respect.
- Respect between 2 friends.
- Respectful relationships between boys and girls.

## Recognising disrespect and aggression



- How to know if someone is being disrespectful.
- Laughing at others or putting them down.
- Bullying, teasing and name-calling.
- Fighting in the playground.
- Rough behaviour on the sports field.
- Treating someone badly in public.
- Physical violence.

## Personal privacy



- Taking photos, having photos taken and sharing photos without someone's permission.
- Giving out personal information online.
- Sexting, phone use and using the internet.

## Respectful relationships



- Treating people how you would like to be treated.
- Not putting up with disrespect and aggressive behaviour.
- Using Apps like iMatter.
- Using services like Kids Helpline and **1800 RESPECT**.

## Gender equality



- Boys and girls are both good at different things.
- Gender stereotypes.
- Males and females in the media.
- Why you are both equally 'in charge' of a relationship.



# QUESTIONS AND OPENING LINES YOU COULD TRY



**You don't need to have all the answers.**

**You do need to be ready to talk about the topics together.**

Here are some questions and opening lines you could try:



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

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

For example:



- are there sports that mostly boys play?



- are there activities that mostly girls do?



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



Has it ever been hard for you to talk to boys/girls?  
What are the main reasons?



What do you think of the way the women/men were treated  
in that movie?

You could talk about a game or a TV show instead of  
a movie.



Can you think of a time you might 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?



Have you ever felt unsafe around a boy or girl?

Where would you go for help?

# DURING THE CONVERSATION



Sometimes you can find out things you didn't know about your child while you are talking to them.



For example:

- a boy may have picked on them



- a friend may have pressured them to do something they didn't want to do.



If this happens, stay calm and keep listening.

You don't want your child to stop talking and end the conversation.

## Responding to your child's experience



Your child might try and make a situation sound less serious than it actually was.

They might:



- blame themselves



- blame the person who was affected by what happened



- believe and agree with the person who is in the wrong.



Let them know:

- these attitudes are not ok



- everyone deserves to be treated with respect



- they are not to blame for the way other people behave



- people who care about each other treat each other with respect



- they have a right to be treated with respect.



Even if you don't end up agreeing, let them know it is important that you keep talking about these issues.



## What if your child won't talk?

Some young people don't want to talk about tough topics with adults.

If this happens, there are things you can do to make it easier the next time:

- calmly tell your child what the issues are as you see them – encourage them to think about them
- always keep the conversation open – let them know you are glad they are talking with you
- talk about the difficult issues they face – admit it can be hard to work out what is right
- talk about successes as well as hard times
- talk about a time when they showed respect or handled a situation in a positive way.

**Let them know  
they can talk to  
you whenever  
they want or if  
they feel unsure.**



# Talking to your daughter



You might talk to your daughter about a situation where:

- a boy has treated her with disrespect
- a boy has been aggressive towards her.

It is important to be very clear that the behaviour is not acceptable.

Accept how she feels.

Explain that she should not accept disrespectful behaviour.

Recognise that sometimes it is hard to know what to do.

Talk about how she might respond to situations like this in future.

Get her to think about the situation through another girl's eyes. If one of her friends was in this situation, how would she react, and what would she say?

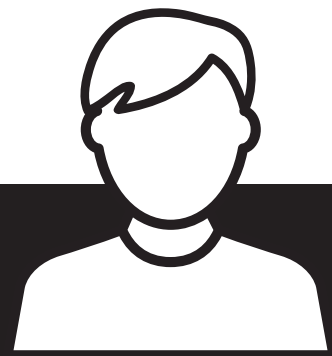
Talk to her about who she can go to for help.

Make sure she knows that whatever she is feeling is normal. This might include:

- frustration
- distress
- embarrassment
- guilt
- anger
- worry.

Talk about things she could do.

Make sure she knows that you will support her when she wants to take action.



## Talking to your son

You might talk to your son about a situation where:

- he has treated a girl with disrespect
- he has been aggressive towards a girl.

It is important to be very clear that the behaviour is not acceptable.

Stay calm and keep the door open for more conversations.

Explain that you understand why he behaved that way, but that it was wrong.

Separate the behaviour from the person. Let him know it is not ok to behave in a way that is disrespectful or aggressive towards girls.

Don't give him the message that he is not good as a person. Let him know you love him, but you don't like that behaviour.

Be a good role model. Try not to use threatening or aggressive behaviour yourself.

Let him know that he can choose to do things differently. Look at these choices together.

Ask him how he thinks a girl might feel when he behaves in certain ways.

Ask if he would treat a mate that way.

Talk about how to disagree in a way that is still respectful.

Talk about the difference between the emotion (feeling angry) and the behaviour (being aggressive).

# Talking to your son

Make sure he knows that whatever he is feeling is normal. This might include:

- frustration
- distress
- embarrassment
- guilt
- anger
- worry.

Encourage him to set a good example for his friends.



**Tell him that he is responsible for how he expresses his feelings.**

# KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING



Our children's attitudes and behaviours change over time.

We need to check in with them from time to time and offer them advice.

Talking to them regularly sets a good example.



It helps us teach them that all relationships should start from respect.



By talking about respect and gender equality we can influence the attitudes and behaviours they grow up with and hold on to as adults.





Talking to them while they're young can get them ready for the future.

Then, when they face a situation, they know:

- there are options
- there are different ways they can react.

Parents have the strongest influence.

The influence becomes stronger when we work with other adults in the child's life such as:



- other family members



- teachers



- coaches



- managers



- religious leaders



- community leaders.



We are:

- doing the best for our own children
- playing a very important role in reducing how much violence there is against women and their children in our society.



**By changing attitudes and behaviours,  
we can prevent violence against women  
before it starts.**

## FIND OUT MORE

Learn more at [respect.gov.au](https://respect.gov.au)



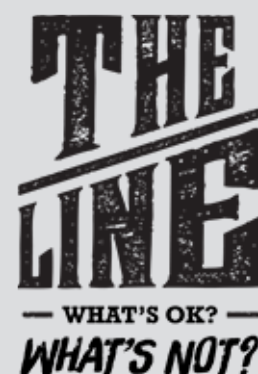
### The Line

The Line encourages healthy and respectful relationships.

It challenges attitudes and behaviours that support violence.

It aims to change these attitudes and behaviours.

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



### White Ribbon

White Ribbon is a campaign that aims to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls.

White Ribbon works directly with men and boys.

It encourages men and boys to take positive action to create change.

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



## Safe Schools Hub

The Safe Schools Hub has information and resources about what schools can do.

It is designed to help:

- teachers
- school leaders
- students
- parents
- support staff.

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



## OTHER USEFUL TOOLS

### The Respect Checklist

A practical checklist to help parents work out which aspects of respect and gender equality to talk about with children.



### The Excuse Interpreter

Find out the hidden meanings behind the words we use to talk about disrespect between men and women.



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**LET'S STOP IT**  
**AT THE START**



Australian Government

A joint Australian, state and territory government initiative.