

# YARNING ABOUT RESPECT

Lizzie hurried home after work. She wanted to catch her son PJ before he went to footy training. She'd been worried about him for months. He was increasingly rude to his sister Ruby, putting her down and making her feel bad about herself, and there'd been a call from school to say he'd been rude to the girls there too.

She wondered where she would find time to talk to him while cooking dinner and helping Ruby with her homework. Still, she knew it was important to find the time to yarn with her son. She knew from her own experiences growing up that boys could be disrespectful to girls.

Putting her bag down, she walked into the lounge room.

Her mum was watching telly and her dad was reading the day's newspaper.

Lizzie sat beside her mother, just watching the TV. The conversation she'd had with her mum the day before about PJ was still fresh in her mind.

"You OK love?" said Lizzie's mother, sensing something was troubling her daughter.

Lizzie sighed.

"Actually mum, I've been thinking about PJ and the stuff that's come up at his school, the stuff we talked about the other day."

"I still think that girl did something to start it", her mum said, "you shouldn't worry so much about it."

"Now come on mum, you wouldn't want Ruby to hear you saying that. You and I both know that PJ's been saying some awful things to her lately too, like 'girls aren't as smart as boys, and can't do the same thing as well'. I don't think we should be excusing these things anymore."

Her mum shook her head. "Still don't think our boy's to blame. More than likely that girl did something to deserve it."

Lizzie wasn't so sure. Her mum would always stick up for PJ, and she understood that, but it wasn't helping anyone in the long run, including PJ. She didn't want him growing up to think that it was ok to treat women with disrespect.

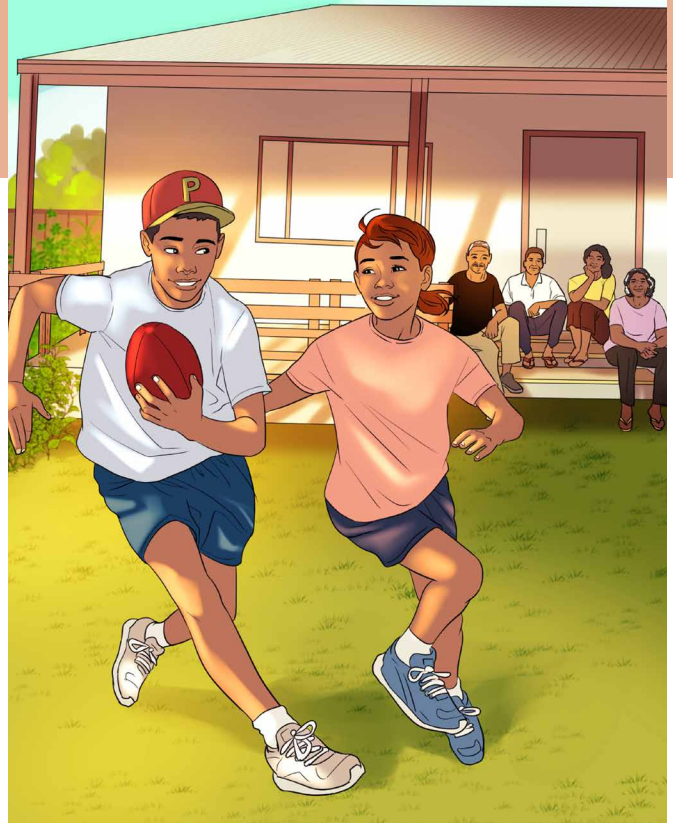
"Thanks mum but we both know that the cycle of violence grows when we make excuses for it by saying things like 'it's not that bad' or, 'it's just boys being boys'. Those excuses teach our kids that disrespect is normal."

She closed the door and went to find PJ, who was playing a computer game in his bedroom. "Hey son," she said, bending down to kiss him on the cheek. "Have you got a few minutes?"

"Yeah, sure mum. What's up?"

"I want to talk to you about respect PJ. That OK?" she said, sitting down on his bed. He nodded.

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



PJ seemed puzzled. "Well they don't disrespect me mum".

"Let me put it another way. If one of your friends was teasing your sister and was disrespectful to her, what would you think about that?"

"Well I'd stand up for her".

Lizzie frowned. "That's the point PJ. I've noticed you've been disrespectful to your sister at home, and to the girls at school, teasing them and using disrespectful terms. How do you think that makes them feel? How do you think Ruby feels when you say things like 'girls can't play footy, only boys can'?"

"Bad, I guess. I never thought of it like that before."

Lizzie leant over and gave him a hug. "Well how about you set a good example at school for your friends to follow, you know, treat the girls better and maybe they'll notice that, start them thinking a bit."

"Yeah. I'll have a think about it."

Lizzie ruffled her son's hair and smiled at him.

He grinned at her. "What's for tea mum?"

She laughed. "Whatever your dad is cooking son. He's home now and I've got to help Ruby with her homework."

On her way to the kitchen to talk to her husband, she stopped at the lounge room. "Hey Mum, I had that yarn with PJ."

"Yeah, how'd it go? You weren't too hard on the boy were you?"

"Nah Mum, just making sure that PJ learns about respect while he's young. I don't want to make excuses and allow disrespectful attitudes to grow in him," she said. "I'm stopping it at the start."

*The above story is a fictionalised account of a parent reflecting on her own attitudes and behaviour and realising her role as an influencer. This story accompanies the Storybook Respect Starts With Us and other resources that have been produced for the Australian Government's national campaign to reduce violence against women and their children. The campaign aims to help break the cycle of violence by encouraging adults to reflect on their attitudes, and have conversations about respect with young people.*

*Resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been produced as part of the national campaign, including a conversation guide to help parents talk with their children about respect. For more information about the campaign, resources and tools, visit <https://www.respect.gov.au/campaign/atsi-materials/>*