

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN BACKGROUND

Why do we need this campaign?

Violence against women and their children is a serious issue in Australia:

- ABS data¹ shows that:
 - One in six women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner since the age of 15. This figure increases to nearly one in four women when violence by boyfriends, girlfriends and dates is included.
 - one in six women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner.
 - one in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse from a current or former partner.

Note: figures have been rounded.

The good news is that awareness and understanding of violence against women is high, and most adults agree it's wrong². We also agree violence against women isn't just physical – it includes a range of behaviours designed to intimidate or control.

However, what we often don't realise is that the cycle of violence can start with the beliefs and attitudes boys and girls develop from a young age.

From early on boys and girls begin to believe there are reasons which make disrespectful or aggressive behaviour acceptable. Girls question whether it's their fault, and boys tell each other it was a bit of a joke. This can lead to attitudes like:

- one in four young people don't think it's serious when guys insult or verbally harass girls in the street.³
- one in five young people believe there are times when women bear some responsibility for sexual assault.⁴
- one in four 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.⁵
- over one in three young men believe that women prefer a man to be in charge of a relationship.⁶

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, *Personal Safety*, cat. no. 4906.0, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0/

² VicHealth 2014, *Australians' attitudes towards violence against women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

³ Hall and Partners | Open Mind 2015, *The Line campaign – Summary of research findings*, Hall & Partners | Open Mind, Sydney.

⁴ VicHealth 2015, *Young Australians' attitudes towards violence against women*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Youth Action NSW & White Ribbon Australia, *Young people's attitudes towards domestic and dating violence*, Youth Action NSW & White Ribbon, Australia, North Sydney.

Since young people's attitudes and behaviours are shaped by those around them it's important to expose them to positive influences where they live, work, learn and socialise.⁷ As adults, we need to recognise and reconcile our role as important influencers of the younger generation.

How was it developed?

The campaign approach was informed by extensive qualitative and quantitative research across Australia by Kantar Public. The research report is available on the [Department of Social Services website](#). Parenting experts and child and behavioural psychologists helped develop the range of resources and tools for parents and other influencers.

What were the main research findings?

There's a link between violence towards women and attitudes of disrespect and gender inequality. But when thinking about our own reactions, we might be surprised to recognise some of the most common ways we excuse disrespectful and aggressive behaviour.

There are some automatic assumptions and responses we make, often without realising:

- We play down disrespectful or aggressive behaviour ("don't worry, it wasn't that bad").
- We accept aggression as just part of being a boy ("boys will be boys").
- We blame girls ("what was she wearing?").
- We raise girls to accept disrespect ("it's okay, he probably did it because he likes you").

When we make these excuses, we're allowing disrespectful behaviour to become a normal part of growing up.

The research also found that many parents and other adults are worried about whether they should get involved. They're concerned about embarrassing their child, or being in conflict with other parents.

Another important finding was that young people want consistent messages – to hear many voices across the community advocating for a cultural change.

What does the campaign aim to do?

The campaign aims to help break the cycle of violence by encouraging adults to reflect on their own attitudes, and start a conversation about respect with the young people in their lives. All adults, including parents, grandparents, other family members, teachers, coaches, employers and role models, have a role to play in influencing how young people understand respectful relationships.

We know that children are keen observers of what adults say and do and are greatly influenced by them. When it comes to teaching respect, we all influence a child's idea of what is right and wrong.

Young people pick up simple things like our gestures, reactions, and the words we choose. They might take our words at face value and interpret them in ways we didn't intend, or see it as an excuse or permission to behave in a certain way. Over time, these everyday interactions shape what children believe about how others should be treated.

Stop it at the Start highlights the role we all play in raising a generation of respectful young people, and the potential for a positive change if we come together as a community.

We can make small changes by having conversations about respect and gender equality with young people aged 10-17 years in our everyday lives. By taking small, simple steps – such as questioning

⁷ ibid

seemingly harmless comments or jokes, role modelling positive behaviours and having ongoing, proactive conversations about respect – we set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable.

When we bring up respect with our kids, we bring up respect.

These steps all help move us closer to a future for our children that is free from disrespect and violence against women.

What has been the campaign response so far?

Evaluation research is conducted following completion of all phases of the campaign. Following Phase four of the campaign, evaluation research has found:

- Campaign recognition has remained strong; with 56 per cent of all people recalling an element of the campaign activity.
- Audiences continued to perceive the campaign as informative, engaging and encouraging action.
- Key attitudes and perceptions, including those in relation to personal responsibility and disrespect, held steady among influencers when compared to the benchmark and previous phase.
- There was an improvement in broader attitudes relating to women, with a larger proportion of influencers disagreeing that 'women often bring disrespect on themselves' and that they need to 'toughen up'.
- Phase four elicited a strong behavioural response with two thirds of recognisers claiming to have taken a key action as a result of exposure to the campaign. For example:
 - 33 per cent personally tried to be more respectful to others
 - 29 per cent thought about how they respond when they see a young person behave disrespectfully to another person
 - 23 per cent had a conversation with a young person about how to treat the opposite sex with respect
- At a population level, it could be extrapolated to indicate that 45 per cent of all influencers took action as a result of the campaign.

What resources are available?

A range of resources and tools are available on the [campaign website](#). They include:

- [The Conversation Guide](#) to help parents and family members talk about respect with young people about the importance of respectful relationships from an early age.
- [The Excuse Interpreter](#) to discover the hidden meanings of common expressions that can excuse disrespectful behaviour.
- [The Respect Checklist](#) for adults to become more aware of what young people might be thinking about disrespect.
- [Generation Respect](#) a guide to help adults build confidence to start conversations with other adults about raising a respectful generation of young people.



Australian Government

A joint Australian, state and territory government initiative.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
LET'S STOP IT
AT THE START

Resources are available for Indigenous Australians, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and parents and family members who have children with disability. Please visit the [Department of Social Services website](#) to access these resource materials.

Where can I get more information?

- The issue: <https://www.respect.gov.au/the-campaign/the-issue/>
- Advertising materials: <https://www.respect.gov.au/the-campaign/campaign/>
- Tools and resources: <https://www.respect.gov.au/resources/>
- Policy background: <https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/>