

# RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES AND PREPARING FOR BACKLASH

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25 November - 10 December

Violence against women can be prevented.  
This 16 Days of Activism and beyond,  
let's change the story.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



Respect Victoria acknowledges the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we rely. We proudly acknowledge Aboriginal communities of Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside Aboriginal communities to effect change.

We recognise the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

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# RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURES



## Responding to disclosures

When you open-up conversations about gender equality, respectful relationships and violence against women, there's a good chance that someone may share that they have experienced or witnessed violence. Here's how to respond to disclosures like this effectively.

### The three most important things you can do when responding to disclosure are:

1. **listen without interruption or judgement**
2. **believe and validate their experience**
3. **provide information about referral pathways**

These are some ideas of what you could say – but it's important you only say these genuinely, and that you use your own words.

- What happened is not okay, and it was not your fault.
- I'm glad you told me.
- No one should have to experience what you've been through.
- Do you feel safe at the moment?
- I'm not a specialist in helping people with experiences like yours – but I can give you the contact details of a support service (**see page 11**) you can talk to if you want.

### Remember your own self-care

**Self-care is a priority and necessity – not a luxury. If you find yourself feeling down, depleted, or irritable you may need to take some time out. There are lots of ways you can do this, including:**

- Reach out to someone. This could be a family member, trusted friend or colleague, your manager, a counsellor, or another support person, including the support services on **page 11**.
- Find a way to rest and recharge. Have some time with no goals – spend time reading, take a day off, spend some time outside, see your friends, take a nap... whatever helps you reenergise
- Play – have fun and do things that make you laugh. This might look like playing with children and pets, creative activities, watching a favourite comedy.



### Find out more

- **Responding to Disclosures virtual training** – Safe and Equal.

## TRY TO

- **Listen**, without interruption or judgement, giving the victim survivor time to share their experience.
- **Believe** what the victim survivor is saying to you.
- **Affirm** the victim survivor is brave in being able to come forward.
- **Emphasise** that they are not to blame for their experience.
- **Be honest and open** about your skills and knowledge and the types of support you can provide.
- **Provide information** about specialist support services ([see page 11](#)) in a way that is safe and supportive. Ask them if they would like some personal or professional support, and whether they would like any help identifying particular services.
- **Keep the conversation confidential.** The only exception is if you believe the person's safety is at immediate risk (call 000), or you become aware that a child's safety is at risk.

It is important to recognise however, whether you are a professional service and have a responsibility for escalating an issue.

## TRY NOT TO

- **Find** out the details.
- **Fix** the situation for them.
- **Suggest** the situation is somewhat their fault – don't ask questions like 'why do you put up with it?' or 'how can you still stay with them?'
- **Give advice** or tell them what to do – it will reduce their confidence to make their own decisions.
- **Judge or criticise** their choice – even if you don't agree with it.
- **Criticise the perpetrator** – it may only make the victim survivor want to defend the perpetrator. Focus on criticising the abusive behaviour and let them know that no one should abuse them.
- **Provide counselling** – if you are not a counsellor or do not have specialist training in responding to disclosures, be honest and open about that.

# PREPARING FOR BACKLASH



When you bring up gender equality messages, it is likely that you will face resistance or even backlash. It is an uncomfortable experience for most people when their long-held beliefs are challenged – and naturally they want to resist.

Experiencing resistance is not necessarily a bad thing, and in some instances can indicate that you are having a difficult but necessary conversation to help someone think about, or reflect on, an issue in a new way.

Proactively preparing for resistance and backlash is important for developing strategies and responses, and for caring for your own safety and wellbeing.

To prepare, you might:

- share this section of the toolkit with your co-workers
- organise internal training and briefing
- customise or develop backlash response templates
- share internal communications guides
- connect local advocates and practitioners for support in responding to backlash
- use existing networks, including social worker advocates
- reflect on past experiences in managing backlash.

In previous years, councils and organisations involved in 16 Days of Activism grassroots initiative have shared their approaches for responding to resistance and backlash including:

- blocking or removing offensive comments on social media; not responding to less offensive comments; providing a standard response explaining the rationale for 16 Days of Activism
- arranging a phone call or in-person discussion with the person to acknowledge their comments, allow them to vent, and ensure they hear your reply
- engaging multiple managers to take the lead in providing responses to their departments.



### Find out more

- **Unpacking Resistance training** – Safe and Equal
- **Overcoming Resistance and Backlash** – Safe and Equal

## Responding to resistance and backlash

Preparing for potential resistance and coming up with responses in advance will help you communicate better on the spot and may help you open more conversations with the community. You could prepare standard responses for you and your team to utilise, or practice framing and crafting productive responses.

### Dealing with online abuse

**It's easy for people to say online what they wouldn't say in person – so resistance is often expressed through social media.**

**As a social media moderator, it's important to strike a balance between allowing audiences to self-moderate, and intervening when comments are offensive and derail constructive conversation.**

**Having clear moderation guidelines will support you to effectively manage resistance on online forums.**

## How to frame responses to resistance

Using values-based messaging as a framework can be a useful way to develop your response.

Remember: don't get too caught up in an unproductive conversation with someone who is determined to not change their mind. Do use evidence to debunk their untrue statements, but don't let them pull you into a repetitive or unproductive argument – move on and don't let them frustrate you.

**Example resistance statement response:** The following example shows how a common question about gendered violence can be framed and responded to, using values – based messaging. We’ve used statistics from Safe and Equal’s Fast Facts 2023 to reinforce the message.

## “WHAT ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN?”

### VISION

I agree with you that all forms of violence and discrimination are unacceptable.

### BARRIER

Men and women experience family violence, most commonly from a male perpetrator. This campaign focuses on violence against women because there is clear evidence that women experience violence at disproportionate rates. Women also experience casual and structural sexism daily in a way that men do not.

Most family and gender-based violence is perpetrated by cisgender men against women, children, LGBTIQ+ people – as well as other men. 95% of all victims, regardless of gender, experience violence from a male perpetrator.

### SOLUTION

Advocating for the safety, equality and rights of women doesn’t detract from the safety, equality and rights of others. We are trying to create a society where we are all safe, equal and respected – which means challenging the underlying conditions that drive violence against women.

There are some great resources out there to help you prepare and respond to resistance and backlash – do take the time to check them out with your team.



#### Find out more

- [Overcoming Resistance and Backlash – a Guide for Primary Prevention Practitioners](#) – Safe and Equal.
- [Encountering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives](#) – VicHealth.

# SUPPORT SERVICES AND REFERRALS



## Support services and referrals

During the 16 Days of Activism – and beyond – it's important to let your community know where they can find further support. Make sure you have this poster displayed and available as a handout.

**DOWNLOAD ALL FILES**

**At a minimum, the Safe Steps phone number should be included on any collateral you are creating for the 16 Days of Activism.**

If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police. If you or someone you know is experiencing family violence, help is available.

# FINDING SUPPORT

#### SAFE STEPS

Safe Steps is a confidential and supportive family violence response line for Victoria. Phone services available 24/7. [safesteps.org.au](http://safesteps.org.au) 1800 015 188

#### THE ORANGE DOOR

The Orange Door offers family violence support and services for all Victorians. Find your nearest location: [orangedoorvic.gov.au](http://orangedoorvic.gov.au)

#### ELIZABETH MORGAN HOUSE

Elizabeth Morgan House Aboriginal Women's Service provides culturally safe, holistic case management and support. EMH is open 24/7. [emhaws.org.au](http://emhaws.org.au) 1800 364 297

#### DJIRRA

Djirra is a culturally safe place where practical support is available to all Aboriginal women, particularly those who are currently experiencing family violence, or have in the past. [djirra.org.au](http://djirra.org.au) 1800 105 303

**If you or someone you know is experiencing violence or using violence, help is available.**

#### INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTRE AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE

inTouch is a specialist family violence service that works with multicultural women, their families, and their communities.

[intouch.org.au](http://intouch.org.au) 1800 755 988

#### 1800 RESPECT

1800 RESPECT is the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. Phone and online services are available 24/7. [1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au) 1800 737 732

#### KIDS HELPLINE

Kids Helpline is a counselling service for Australian children and young people aged between five and 25 years. Phone and online services are available 24/7. [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au) 1800 55 1800

#### RAINBOW DOOR

Rainbow Door is a free specialist LGBTQ+ helpline providing information, support, and referral to all LGBTQ+ Victorians, their friends and family. [rainbowdoor.org.au](http://rainbowdoor.org.au) 1800 729 367

#### MEN'S REFERRAL SERVICE

Men's Referral Service provides anonymous and confidential telephone counselling, information, and referrals to men, to help them take action to stop using violent and controlling behaviour. [ntv.org.au](http://ntv.org.au) 1300 766 491

#### SENIORS RIGHTS VICTORIA

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) provides information and advice to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights of older people. [seniorsrights.org.au](http://seniorsrights.org.au) 1300 368 821

**If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 000 and ask for the police. Respect is a future where we are all safe, equal and respected.**

**RESPECT VICTORIA**

# GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS



## Backlash

Describes extreme, aggressive, or organised forms of resistance to preventing gendered violence. Resistance can range from denial to passive attempts to maintain the status quo. Examples may include men's rights groups inciting misogyny or online trolls abusing social commentators.

## Coercive control

Coercive control is defined as a course of conduct or behaviour that is aimed at dominating and controlling another person. Coercive control can involve strategies like physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional abuse; psychologically controlling acts and manipulation; depriving someone of resources and other forms of financial abuse; social isolation; exploiting systems, including the legal system to perpetrate harm; stalking, deprivation of liberty; intimidation; technology-facilitated abuse; and harassment (ANROWS, 2021).

## Disclosure

Occurs when someone tells another person about violence they have experienced, perpetrated, or witnessed. Undertaking prevention of violence against women activities can lead to an increase in disclosures as people learn more about harmful attitudes and behaviours and think about their own lives. In some cases, it is because the activity has created a safe space for people to discuss their experiences.

## Domestic violence

Is sometimes interchanged with 'family violence'. Victorian legislation and policy documentation uses the term 'family violence' as it is more inclusive of diverse family units and kinship networks. As noted below 'family violence' encompasses more than just violence occurring in a domestic situation.

## Family violence

Involves patterns of coercive, controlling, and abusive behaviors inflicted on victim survivors resulting in fear for their own or someone else's safety and wellbeing. Family violence can take many forms including coercive control, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and cultural violence. It also includes financial/economic abuse and technology-facilitated abuse.

Family violence can occur within a diverse range of family units including:

- intimate partners (current or former): married or de facto couples with or without children
- other family members; including siblings, step-relations, extended kinship connections
- adolescent or adult children and their parents
- older people and their adult children, relatives, or carers
- people with disabilities and their relatives or carers
- other family members; including but not limited to siblings, step-relations, chosen family, extended family members, kinship networks and communities.

## Gender-based violence

Describes violence rooted in gender-based power, inequality, and discrimination.

Gender-based violence causes or can cause physical, sexual, psychological, or financial harm. It can occur in the home, at work, online or in public. People of all genders can experience gender-based violence, including transgender and/or non-binary people.

Gender-based violence is sometimes used interchangeably with 'violence against women' because of the disproportionate number of women and girls who experience violence.

## Gender equality

Is the outcome reached through addressing gender inequality. Achieving gender equality is not about erasing gender differences, but protecting and upholding people's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, and ensuring that access to these is not dependent on their gender or the sex they were assigned at birth.

## Intersectionality

Describes the interactions between multiple systems and structures of oppression (such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism, heteronormativity and cissexism), as well as policy and legal contexts (such as immigration status). It acknowledges that some people are subject to multiple forms of oppression and 'the experience is not just the sum of its parts.'

An intersectional approach is 'a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other'.

Intersectionality highlights the intersection of multiple forms of power and privilege. An intersectional approach is critical for preventing violence against women because patriarchal power structures always intersect with other systems of power. Violence against women occurs in the context of both gender inequality and other multiple forms of structural and systemic inequality, oppression and discrimination. All of these intersect to influence the perpetration of violence, the prevalence, nature and dynamics of violence, and women's experiences of violence.

Understanding and addressing these intersections is necessary to effectively address the drivers of violence against women and prevent this violence across the population (Our Watch, 2021).

### **Perpetrator**

Is the term most used in Victoria to describe people – mainly men – who choose to use family violence or commit violence against women. 'Offender' or 'sexual violence offender' are used to describe perpetrators of violence in clinical or legal contexts.

### **Primary prevention**

Is a public health approach that addresses the underlying causes of a problem to prevent it from occurring in the first place. It is geared towards education, upskilling individuals, communities and organisations to identify the issue, and generating systems and practices to stifle the issue's 'progress'.

### **Prevention of/preventing violence against women (PVAW)**

Often used interchangeably and generally understood to mean the primary prevention of violence against women.

While there is an established evidence base around the drivers of violence against women, our understanding of what drives other forms of family violence is still emerging.

### **Resistance**

Is an active pushing back against initiatives that aim to prevent violence against women and promote gender equality. Examples may include denial of the problem, refusing to make a change or dismantling a change initiative.

### **Respect**

Understanding and appreciating every person for who they are. All people deserve to be treated with respect, as a basic human right.

# TOOLKIT CONTRIBUTIONS



**Safe and Equal**, on behalf of **Respect Victoria**, will be distributing funding to support local prevention activities during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Funding is available to each of the 79 local councils. Consortium funding to the regional and state-wide women's health services will support work with their primary prevention partnerships across Victoria.

This toolkit was first developed by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) in 2020 and since updated in partnership with Safe and Equal and Respect Victoria.

We acknowledge the contributions of our 2023 Project Advisory Group members: GenWest Gippsland Women's Health, Northern Grampians Council, Victorian Council Of Social Services (VCOSS), Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), No To Violence (NTV) and Maroondah City Council.





For more information relating to this toolkit,  
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