



ANGLICAN  
DIOCESE OF  
MELBOURNE

# How to talk to your church about **violence against women**

---

A Communications  
Guide for Leaders



I have been greatly encouraged by the commitment and support demonstrated by our partner agencies together with people from across our Diocese to see the Melbourne Anglican community take positive steps to prevent violence against women. The development of this Communications Guide has been one such example of this. Many people, including church leaders and theologians from our training colleges, have contributed to its development through consultation and discussion. As leaders and champions of the Program vision, I encourage you to make use of this resource, together with all the Program offerings, so that people across our Diocese are inspired and equipped for action.

**The Right Reverend Genieve Blackwell,  
Chair of the Committee of Management  
for the Preventing Violence Against  
Women Program.**



As the Church, we have both a responsibility and an opportunity to make a transformative contribution to the broader societal effort to prevent violence against women. Meaningful and effective action depends on all of us playing our part: being informed, equipped and ready to act. Our Preventing Violence Against Women Program is playing an important role across the life of the Diocese in supporting our ministry. This Communications Guide is one of a number of valuable tools produced by the Program to help us talk about this serious issue in constructive and engaging ways. I commend the Communications Guide for Church Leaders.

**The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier,  
Archbishop of Melbourne.**

## ABOUT THE MELBOURNE ANGLICAN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROGRAM

The Preventing Violence Against Women Program has been established in order to support and equip the leaders and church communities of our Diocese to work towards a future in which women and girls can live lives free from violence and free from the fear of violence.

The Program's holistic approach includes training and mentoring for church leaders, resources and tools for church communities, developing best practice policy and governance procedures as well as connecting churches with specialist and local service providers.

For more information about the Program and the ways you can take action visit [melbourneanglican.org.au/pvaw](http://melbourneanglican.org.au/pvaw).

### Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 3 Why we need to talk about violence against women
- 4 How to talk about the problem: what is violence against women?
- 7 How to talk about the problem: why is violence against women so prevalent?
- 10 How to talk about solutions: the role we – the Church – can play
- 11 How to talk about solutions: from response to prevention
- 14 How to talk about marriage and divorce in light of violence against women
- 15 How to talk to men about violence against women
- 16 How to tailor the message for your audience
- 17 How to respond to resistance
- 18 How to find out more

*Violence against women is preventable. The norms, practices and structures that perpetuate violence against women can be changed. It is undoubtedly a task of significant social transformation but we know that, with God, such transformation is possible.*

## Introduction

Since 2011, the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has been taking formal steps to better understand and respond to the serious and widespread problem of violence against women. Substantial efforts have been made to raise awareness and improve our knowledge and skills. In 2018, as a reflection of its deep and continuing commitment to tackling this problem, the Diocese established the Preventing Violence Against Women Program.

This Program, with its primary focus on prevention in a church context, is among the first of its kind anywhere in the world. Its vision is an Australia where women and girls can live lives free from violence and free from the fear of violence. It is a bold vision staked upon the knowledge that God is with us, working amongst us to bring healing, restoration and justice in our lives and across our communities.

The challenge for church leaders and champions of this vision is to inspire and equip others to join them in bringing about the necessary change. This Communications Guide has been developed for that purpose. Created with input from church leaders, theologians and lay people from across our Diocese, it has been designed to help us all talk about this serious issue in constructive and engaging ways so that, across our Diocese, people understand the part they can play and are inspired and equipped to act.

## Why we need to talk about violence against women

As Christians, we believe all people are created in the image of God. All are precious, all are equally loved and all should have the opportunity to thrive according to their God-given potential. Yet too many women are denied this opportunity because of the impact of violence.

Violence against women is a serious and widespread problem in Australia. The statistics are staggeringly high.



One in three women has experienced **physical violence**.<sup>1</sup>



One in five women has experienced **sexual violence**.<sup>2</sup>



One in four women has experienced physical or sexual violence from a **husband or intimate partner**.<sup>3</sup>



One in two women has experienced **sexual harassment**.<sup>4</sup>

Violence affects women across every part of our society – regardless of their socio-economic background, race, age, culture, or faith. Violence affects women in our churches too.

The harm caused by violence against women is profoundly deep and long-lasting. It is a leading contributor to poor health outcomes for women and girls in Australia. Violence against women is too often fatal.

Women experiencing violence often have children in their care. The impact of violence on the health and development of children in these situations is seriously detrimental to their lives and potential. This immeasurable suffering falls far short of the abundant life God intends for us in Christ.

At the heart of what unites us in our Christian faith is Jesus' ultimate expression of love in action. Throughout his life, Jesus was moved to action by his love for people who were suffering and marginalised, restoring them to wholeness and challenging the injustice that robbed them of their God-given dignity.

*On average, one woman in Australia is murdered each week by her current or former partner.<sup>5</sup> The single greatest risk factor for death, disability and illness amongst Australian women aged between 18 and 44 years is not cancer or heart disease: it is violence at the hands of her husband or partner.<sup>5</sup>*

*As the Church, we are called to be a witness of God's light and love in the world. We need to talk about violence against women not only so we understand the prevalence and seriousness of the problem, but also to be better equipped to respond and, with a love as selfless and courageous as Christ's, to take action to prevent it.*

*The term "violence against women" is defined as any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such harm (United Nations, 1993).*

## How to talk about the problem: what is violence against women?

Violence against women can take many forms.

Although we may first think of physical or sexual violence, violence against women is not limited to these things. It incorporates any incident or pattern of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour. This includes verbal, emotional or psychological abuse, social control and isolation, financial abuse, stalking, harm to animals or property, serious neglect where there is dependence on care, electronic monitoring, image-based abuse and spiritual abuse.

Violence against women reflects a harmful desire to dominate or control women and is a failure to acknowledge and respect their God-given dignity and autonomy. No biblical text or theological teaching can ever be used to condone or justify violence against women.

*Regardless of the form it takes, violence against women is a sin. To tolerate, excuse or cover up violence against women is a sin.*

## PREFERRED TERMINOLOGY FOR TALKING ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### Women who have experienced violence

If you are speaking with a woman who has experienced violence, listen to the language she uses and use the terms that she prefers. Otherwise, we recommend using the phrase "a woman who has experienced or is experiencing violence".

The term "victim" can accurately describe a woman who has been the victim of a crime. It is helpful in emphasising that she was not at fault for the violent actions. However, it becomes problematic if it is used to encapsulate the woman's identity by diminishing her agency or capacity and portraying her as powerless and weak. The term "survivor" speaks to a woman's strength, agency and life beyond violence. However, it can also minimise the fact that she has been the victim of a crime and create pressure to act like a survivor which may not be how she feels.

Avoid language that portrays women as vulnerable or weak or that emphasises the behaviour or identity of the woman. This can shift responsibility away from the person who chose to use violence. Violence is always the responsibility of the person who chooses to use it. Intersecting issues of discrimination or socio-economic inequality mean some women are more likely to experience violence. In these cases, we talk about women being more likely to be targeted by men rather than being more vulnerable.

### Men who have used violence against women

The best choice in describing men who perpetrate violence against women is usually "men who choose to use violence". Words such as "perpetrator" or

"offender" are appropriate in some situations. They are positive in that they name the person responsible for the violence. However, we want to avoid using these terms in ways that portray men as being intrinsically or permanently violent.

Sometimes men who choose to use violence are described in terms of their positive qualities such as being "a great father" or "a respected member of the community". Doing so challenges the unhelpful monster myth – that all men who use violence are inherently violent monsters or freaks. However, care needs to be taken to avoid using this language in a way that excuses, minimises or creates sympathy for the man's choice to use violence, suggesting it was an accident, a mistake or that it must have been provoked.

### The violence itself

Violence against women is a sin. There is no situation in which violence against women can be justified, excused or tolerated. Avoid any language that suggests otherwise or that violence may be legitimate in certain situations.

Violence perpetrated by a husband or partner, current or previous, is usually referred to as "family violence"<sup>7</sup> or "intimate-partner violence". We choose to avoid the term "domestic violence" as it is problematic for a number of reasons, not least that it normalises or minimises violence as a private family matter neither requiring nor justifying intervention. Use of the terms "violent relationship" or "abusive relationship" is also problematic as it minimises the responsibility of the person choosing to use violence and suggests that both people or the relationship are violent or equally at fault.

Avoid language that minimises the impact or harm caused by violence against women, particularly when describing non-physical forms of violence. Creating a hierarchy of one form of violence over another may serve to justify or excuse violence against women.



## WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

---

The language we use to describe and discuss violence against women is important because it frames our understanding of the problem: its impact, the contributing factors and what needs to be done to address it. Our language choices also influence how our audience responds to the message. The language we use can engage, alienate or leave our audience ambivalent.

While most people will agree that violence against women is a harmful problem we should seek to prevent, some of the associated concepts and commonly used terminology can be problematic for some people. Being mindful of the words and phrases we use, and understanding that they can have different meanings or associations depending on their context, can help prevent language becoming a barrier to effective engagement with the message.

We should also be mindful that our audience will likely include women, men, girls or boys who have experienced violence. Making well-informed and sensitive choices about the language we use can help to minimise any further harm and trauma we may unintentionally cause.

## ACKNOWLEDGING MALE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

---

At the societal level, women and men are at greater risk of different types of violence. Women are most likely to experience violence from a known person, in their own home, or in other situations of sexual violence whereas men are more likely to experience violence from a stranger, in a public space.<sup>8</sup> Having said that, we need to acknowledge that men and boys can be victims of family and sexual violence and experience devastating damage and suffering as a result. Violence is always harmful, irrespective of the victim's gender.

*What we understand from an extensive body of international research is that violence against women is inextricably linked with issues of gender and equality.*

## How to talk about the problem: why is violence against women so prevalent?

---

To properly understand why violence against women is so pervasive and prevalent, we need to look beyond the circumstances of individual cases to the broader social and historical context in which they occur.

When we use the phrase "violence against women" we are describing acts of violence primarily or exclusively committed against women and girls expressly because they are female. Most men are not violent. However, in most cases of violence against women, the person choosing to use violence is a man. In fact, around 95% of all victims of violence – regardless of gender – experience violence from a male perpetrator.<sup>9</sup> These and other related gendered patterns of violence are observed consistently across cultures.



*Our Christian faith is unequivocal in its assertion that all people are equal: all bear the image of God and are mandated by God to exercise dominion over creation and fulfil the mission of the Church. However, even in our churches, women have not always been, and are still not always, respected as equals in practice. This inequality can exist in any church, irrespective of its stated theological position on gender and roles.*

To varying degrees around the world, women do not currently experience equal access to the same rights and opportunities as men. This is commonly referred to as gender inequality. Examples of gender inequality in Australia include the difference in average levels of pay, the gap in superannuation savings and the under-representation of women in government and at senior decision-making levels of business.

This unequal access to power, resources and opportunities restricts the ability of women and girls to carry out their divine mandate and participate equally and fully in public and private life. It denies them their full status as God's image bearers. Instead, it contributes to and reinforces a social hierarchy that gives greater value to men and certain traits associated with masculinity. It also cultivates a social context in which violence against women occurs at such a high rate.

*No particular act of violence against women can be explained by any one cause. However, there are a range of identifiable social factors – with gender inequality at their root – that have consistently been shown to explain gendered patterns of violence and the alarming prevalence of violence against women.*

## THE INTERSECTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH OTHER ISSUES OF DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY

Violence against women often intersects with other issues of discrimination and inequality. These may be related to race, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic status. This means that, while all women are at risk of violence, for some women the risk and impact of violence is even greater. For example:

### Aboriginal women...

are **32 times** more likely to be hospitalised by family violence than other women.<sup>10</sup>



### Women and girls with disabilities...

are at least **twice** as likely to experience violence as those without disability.<sup>11</sup>



### Culturally and linguistically diverse women...

face **additional barriers** to safety related to language, isolation, strict cultural beliefs, fear of police and courts, immigration risks and financial support.<sup>12</sup>



Women experiencing multiple levels of discrimination are more likely to be targeted by men because they are perceived as less powerful, less worthy of respect and more isolated. These factors can also mean that it is harder for these women to get help or leave a violent situation.

When we speak about violence against women and the social context, we should ensure we take into account the additional hurdles some women may face.

## ACKNOWLEDGING VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE IN THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

The focus of the Melbourne Anglican Preventing Violence Against Women Program is on the issues surrounding men's violence against women, its gendered nature and contributing factors. However, it is important to acknowledge that people in the LGBT+ community, including those who do not identify with binary forms of gender, also experience family and intimate partner violence. This includes, but is not restricted to, women in the LGBT+ community who experience violence by men. Violence experienced by LGBT+ people can be distinct from other forms of violence and will require specific strategies that are not addressed by this Program.

The use of gender binary language and pronouns in this Guide reflects the focus of the Program but is not intended to exclude or minimise the experiences of people who do not identify with them.



## How to talk about solutions: the role we – the Church – can play

Churches help to shape the values and beliefs that influence how people think about and behave in their individual relationships as well as their views on how social systems and structures should function. Churches also have many opportunities to make a positive impact in the wider community through their formal and informal channels of community engagement, such as playgroups, youth activities and marriage preparation.

It is important that we acknowledge the times the Church has failed in its responsibility to love, care for and defend women who have experienced violence. In some instances, the response of the Church has perpetuated even further harm. It is right to express our genuine and deeply heartfelt sorrow over the devastating consequences this has had in the lives of the women and, in many cases, the lives of their children.

We need to acknowledge the ways in which women still experience inequality within our own church culture and structures, alongside our failure to prioritise and take proactive steps to address this injustice. We also need to acknowledge the ways in which we have failed to speak out against the destructive attitudes and behaviours that underpin the prevalence of violence against women across our society.

As we acknowledge our failures and as we commit to doing better and doing more, we – the Church – have an opportunity and a mandate to demonstrate prophetic leadership on this issue. We can bring about change within our own church communities and look for opportunities to speak up for and model those core Christian values of love, equality and justice to the wider community around us.

*Church leaders and their communities can play a transformative role when it comes to addressing issues of inequality and preventing violence against women – both within the Church and amongst the wider community – but we need to do better and we need to do more.*

## How to talk about solutions: from response to prevention

As a first step, we need to be well-equipped to respond to people who are either experiencing or choosing to use violence. This is particularly important for church leaders, who are often among the first ones to suspect or be informed about situations of violence against women within their church communities. The right training and tools, such as those provided through the Preventing Violence Against Women Program, are vital for understanding how to respond safely and constructively to people experiencing or choosing to use violence.

However, our action should not stop there. We need to take steps to prevent the injustice of violence before it starts. Our understanding of the interconnected relationships between violence, gender and equality provides a framework for how we do this.

We need to address four factors embedded in the social norms (beliefs and attitudes), structures and practices of our society that enable violence against women to occur at such high rates. These factors or enablers are:

### 1. Justification of violence against women

This means any attitudes, words or behaviours that support the idea that violence against women is acceptable or excusable in any instance for any reason. It also means any attitudes, words or behaviours that minimise the seriousness of, or harm caused by, any form of violence against women. Men who hold these attitudes are more likely to use violence against women. Both women and men who hold these attitudes are less likely to actively support victims of violence or hold perpetrators of violence to account.

### 2. Disrespect towards women

This means any attitudes, words or behaviours that disrespect, humiliate or are aggressive towards women. This is particularly relevant in the context of male peer relations, when men bond or gain approval through conversations, jokes and behaviours that put women down, are sexually hostile or otherwise express male dominance over women. Men who express these aggressive attitudes in their relationships with each other, or who privilege their male peers over their relationships with women, can be more likely to use violence themselves or to excuse, tolerate or support the violent or disrespectful behaviour of other men.

*As a society and as a Church the most effective way we can work towards preventing violence against women is by taking steps to address four social factors associated with gender inequality that have most consistently been shown to predict higher rates of violence against women.*



### 3. Male-dominated control of decision-making and resources

This means any attitudes, words and behaviours in the home or in public life that enforce unhealthy limits on women's autonomy and support the idea that men should make all the decisions, hold all the power and control resources such as education and finances. Male-dominated control of power can reinforce messages of male dominance and women's inferior value, increasing the likelihood that some men will see women as legitimate targets of violence. Furthermore, in situations where men abuse their control of power with violence, it is much more difficult for women to stop, report or escape it.

### 4. Fixed ideas and harmful expressions of masculinity and femininity

This means attitudes, words or behaviours that impose fixed limits on what it means to "be a man" or "be a woman": what women, men, girls and boys should look like, how they should behave, what they should like or dislike and the type of tasks or jobs that suit their gender. It also encompasses expressions of masculinity or femininity that are intrinsically harmful to others or oneself. They include ideas that suggest men are naturally less caring and more violent than women or driven by uncontrollable sexual urges. They also include ideas that suggest women are naturally more passive and submissive or portrayals of women as naturally deceitful or unfaithful and needing to be controlled. These ideas can be damaging for men and women who do not fit the stereotype. They can be used to support male dominance and normalise violence as a legitimate means of controlling women who do not conform. They can also make it more difficult for men to respond in non-violent ways to past trauma, manage conflict in healthy ways and seek help when they need it.

Preventing violence against women means looking for the ways these four factors may be present in the culture, practice and structures of our churches and taking action to address them.

Regardless of whether or not we have any direct experience of violence, we are all contributors to a culture in which violence against women currently thrives. We need to reflect on our own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and consider whether there are ways we need to change. We need to think critically about the culture, practices and structures in our church. At times we might need to be willing to grapple with uncomfortable and complex ideas, to speak out and challenge unhelpful attitudes or practices and to do things differently.

An Australia where women and girls can live lives free from violence and free from the fear of violence is a bold vision. Its realisation will depend on all of us working together, with God's help, to play our part. So let us be similarly bold in our efforts. As we trust in God's power to heal and restore, let us take steps towards our vision with courage, humility, respect and, above all, love.

## ACROSS ALL ASPECTS OF OUR CHURCH WE NEED TO BE LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO:

*Challenge attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that justify violence against women.*

*Cultivate ways of relating with one another that are based on mutual respect, equal dignity and Christian love.*

*Promote opportunities for women's equal contribution and participation in decision-making in the family, the church and the public sphere.*

*Foster positive and healthy expressions of identity that respect the manifold ways people reflect the image, creativity and character of God.*



## How to talk about marriage and divorce in light of violence against women

Marriage is a precious gift from God: a covenant partnership in which women and men can experience loving intimacy in the safety of a faithful, committed relationship. It is God's gift given for the mutual benefit of women and men and their mutual outworking of God's purposes.

In light of this, there are important points to be made within our teaching on marriage in order to challenge the attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women in marriage and keep women trapped in dangerous relationships. These include:

- Violence, abuse and any behaviour that is controlling or threatening, is contrary to God's will for marriage. Violence or abusive behaviour undermines marriage and violates the marriage covenant. There is no biblical text or theological teaching that can be used to promote, excuse or justify attitudes or behaviours in marriage that are physically, emotionally, spiritually or otherwise harmful towards women.
- In relationships where women (or men) are experiencing abuse it may not be safe for them to remain in those situations. We need to make it clear that it is okay for them to leave these relationships - to separate or divorce - if they wish to and it is safe for them to do so. It is not a sin to leave a violent or otherwise abusive spouse. When women can and wish to leave, we should support them to do so and refer them to the appropriate professional services for specialist support.
- Forgiveness does not mean women should stay in violent relationships, nor does forgiveness necessarily lead to reconciliation or restored trust. Jesus' teaching on forgiveness and divorce does not mean women should remain in relationships with abusive partners. There is no biblical text or theological teaching that requires a woman to accept or remain in a relationship with a violent or abusive husband or partner.
- Loving and healthy relationships that reflect God's intention for thriving marriages are characterised by mutual respect and affirmation, partnership, honesty and accountability, trust and fairness. There is no biblical text or theological teaching that implies a measure of superiority or inferiority with respect to the inherent value or capacity of women or men. In marriage, as in all circumstances, women and men should be equally encouraged and supported to exercise the gifts given them by God.

## How to talk to men about violence against women

It is important to emphasise that men have a critical role to play in efforts to prevent violence against women. We cannot achieve our vision without the active support of godly men who are willing to demonstrate Christ-like leadership and champion change.

The gendered patterns associated with violence against women and violence more generally make it a men's issue as much as it is a women's issue. Men are not inherently worse (or better) than women and most men know that violence is wrong. Being male is not a problem in and of itself. However, fixed and harmful ideas about masculinity – what it means to "be a man" – can play out in ways that are damaging to all people – men and women alike. For instance, research demonstrates that pressure to conform to harmful masculine stereotypes is linked to poorer mental health and a greater likelihood of engaging in risky or violent behaviour amongst young men.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, young boys who experience violence in the family home can carry that trauma into adulthood and throughout their lives. All men and boys can benefit from efforts to promote healthier attitudes and behaviours regarding masculinity.

For some men, there are barriers that keep them from playing this critical role. These may include a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, viewing violence against women as a women's issue and a lack of knowledge or skills about how to intervene. However, we need to make an effort to engage men and encourage them to play an active role in challenging the norms, practices and structures that perpetuate the problem.

*Sadly, marriage and other intimate partner relationships are the contexts in which women are most likely to experience violence.<sup>13</sup>*



## How to tailor the message for your audience

---

Being a large and diverse community is one of the strengths of our Diocese. It also means we need to think about how best to communicate our message to people of different ages, genders and cultural backgrounds, at different life stages and with varying life experiences. Some people will be familiar and comfortable with the issues and factors associated with violence against women, but for others this will not be the case. For some people with a lived experience of violence, this is likely to be a highly sensitive and painful topic.

One of the ways we can seek to talk about violence against women more effectively is by connecting our message with the intrinsic values that are deeply embedded in our Christian faith. Values such as love, compassion, justice, peace, the inherent dignity of human life and the value of family strongly influence how we respond to a social issue such as violence against women. If we can connect our message with these values from the outset, we are much more likely to engage our audience and positively influence how they respond.

For some audiences, we need to give special consideration to their life stage or cultural context. Examples of these are as follows:

### Talking to youth and young adults

Young people are at a critical and formative time in their lives when it comes to establishing the behaviours and norms that define their relationships, including with intimate partners. It is also a time (aged 16 to 24 years) when women are at the greatest risk of experiencing violence.<sup>15</sup> Messages that engage young women and men in this stage of their lives is vital for effective prevention efforts. It is a crucial opportunity to address problematic attitudes before they start to impact their experiences and become embedded in their relationships.

Some of the latest research into young Australians' (aged 16 to 24 years) attitudes towards violence against women indicates that nearly all young people recognise intimate partner violence as a serious issue and the majority understand its gendered nature.<sup>16</sup> This understanding provides a helpful platform from which to address their greater likelihood, compared with older Australians, to hold concerning attitudes and behaviours regarding the use of communications technology and non-physical forms of violence, support for male dominance in the private sphere, excusing perpetrators of violence and blaming victims.

Generally speaking, ensuring young people have a good knowledge of the scale and nature of violence against women makes them more likely to recognise violence, support victims and encourage action to prevent violence. Involving young people in developing and delivering key messages helps to create more effective and engaging communications. Encouraging young men to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours is important, as is supporting them to step into the role of active bystander and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours amongst their peers.

### Talking to linguistically and culturally diverse communities

Violence against women and girls is a problem in all cultures. When engaging with culturally diverse communities, it is important to be aware of this. We can sometimes avoid naming and addressing the violence in our own culture by focusing on the violence in other cultures.

Just as violence against women is a consistent issue across cultures, so too are the underpinning social and structural issues that create inequality between women and men – albeit expressed differently according to traditional and cultural practices. Therefore, the messages and principles for tackling violence against women apply consistently.

Traditional cultural practices and beliefs exist in all communities; many are beneficial to all members but some are harmful to specific groups, particularly women and girls. We can be respectful of another culture and still challenge the cultural practices and norms that lead to harmful outcomes for women or men. Where there are certain topics that are traditionally taboo or shameful to discuss, these things should be understood and addressed as sensitively as possible. If you are speaking to a linguistically and culturally diverse community that is not your own, try to identify people from within that community who are supportive about preventing violence against women. Ask for their advice and feedback on your approach and partner with them where possible.

### How to respond to resistance

---

As we start to have more open and direct conversations about violence against women and the interconnected issues of gender and equality, we can encounter people responding in all sorts of ways. They might be concerned, supportive, surprised and curious but also defensive or even angry. It's a topic that can provoke strong reactions.

When people express their resistance to the concepts or changes being introduced, take time to try to understand what lies at the heart of their resistance. It may be a fear of change, feeling threatened by a disruption to the status quo or even a sense of shame associated with talking about what has traditionally been viewed as a private matter.

If people do challenge or reject the ideas you are presenting, take steps to keep the conversation respectful and productive. Acknowledge the question, try to clarify exactly what is at the heart of their concern and respond with the correct facts and supporting evidence. If you do not have all the information at hand, make a note to get back to them.

Above all, try to find the common ground. People may hold different theological views or will vary in their life experiences and perspectives. However, most people will agree that a society in which women and girls can live free from violence and free from the fear of violence is a good thing, and worth putting in the effort to achieve.





## HOW TO FIND OUT MORE:

The Melbourne Anglican Preventing Violence Against Women Program has been established in order to equip and support people across our Diocese better understand, respond to and take steps to prevent violence against women.

For any further information about what you can do and where to get help, please contact the Preventing Violence Against Women Program Manager at [pvaw@melbourneanglican.org.au](mailto:pvaw@melbourneanglican.org.au)

[melbourneanglican.com.au/pvaw](http://melbourneanglican.com.au/pvaw)

preventing  
violence  
against  
women  
program

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cox, P. (2015) Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey 2012, Horizons Research Report, Issue 1, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, Sydney.
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Personal safety, Australia, 2016. Canberra, ACT.
- <sup>3</sup> Cox, P. (2015) Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey 2012, Horizons Research Report, Issue 1, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, Sydney.
- <sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Personal safety, Australia, 2016. Canberra, ACT.
- <sup>5</sup> Bryant, W. and Bricknell, S. (2017), Homicide in Australia 2012 – 2013 and 2013 – 2014: National Homicide Monitoring Program report. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Criminology. The 2017 National Homicide Monitoring Program report by the AIC showed that over a 2-year period from 2012/13 to 2013/14, there were 99 female victims of intimate partner homicide. Women continue to be over-represented as victims of intimate partner homicide, accounting for 79% of all intimate partner homicides.
- <sup>6</sup> VicHealth (2004), The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- <sup>7</sup> Family violence is a term that can also be used to describe other forms of violence that are less common, such as violence perpetrated within a family by adolescents or violence perpetrated against elders, children and men.
- <sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. cat. no FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>9</sup> Diemer, K. 2015. ABS Personal Safety Survey: Additional analysis on relationship and sex of perpetrator. Documents and working papers. Research on violence against women and children, University of Melbourne.
- <sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. Cat. no FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW. Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is perpetrated by men of all cultural backgrounds, in many different contexts and settings across the country. Refer to <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/Prevention-of-violence-against-Aboriginal-and-Torr> for more information.
- <sup>11</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. Cat. no FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.
- <sup>12</sup> Dimopoulos M & Assifiri H (2004) 'Pathologising NESB women and the construction of the "cultural defence"', Point of Contact Book 9 Working with Diversity, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- <sup>13</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety and VicHealth (2015), Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.
- <sup>14</sup> Jesuit Social Services, The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia, <https://bit.ly/2OKgWwB>.
- <sup>15</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017), Personal Safety, Australia 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra. Compared to the overall female violence prevalence rate of 4.7%, women aged 18-24 were the most likely to have experienced violence. In 2016, an estimated 12% of women aged 18-24 years experienced violence in the 12 months prior to interview.
- <sup>16</sup> Harris, A, Honey, N, Webster, K, Diemer K & Politoff, V (2015), Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16-24 years, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.