

Practitioner support guide

Understanding, preparing for and responding to backlash and resistance

PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS VIDEO SERIES - CHAPTER 6

Purpose of the support guide

This is a support guide for the video *Men in focus: Practitioner reflections*, Chapter 6. It provides further support on understanding, preparing for and responding to backlash and resistance.

The guide includes:

1. Introduction to Chapter 6.
2. Tips for understanding, preparing for and responding to backlash and resistance.
3. Suggestions for how to respond to common questions about the links between masculinities and men's violence against women.
4. Supports available.



Men in focus evidence review

ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/men-in-focus

About Chapter 6

This video is relevant to anyone working with men and boys and seeking to challenge and transform masculinities in the prevention of men's violence against women.

Chapter 6 features practitioners reflecting on their experiences of backlash and resistance, and providing guidance on how to understand, prepare for and respond to it.

Chapter 6 has three parts:

1. Expecting backlash and resistance.
2. What can backlash and resistance look like?
3. Tips and considerations for dealing with backlash and resistance.

Tips for practitioners

#1 Focus on the moveable middle

#2 Resistance is inevitable and can be a sign of progress

#3 Prepare for potentially heightened backlash against some communities

Tips for practitioners

#1 Focus on the moveable middle

- Most Australians are receptive to progressive messaging about gender equality, freeing men from outdated masculine stereotypes and ending men's violence against women. See VicHealth's [Framing gender equality: Message guide](#) for more information.
- A focus on persuading the majority of people (including men) who are in the 'moveable middle' is more beneficial than responding to people with entrenched oppositional views, who form a small minority of the general population. See VicHealth's [Framing masculinity: Message guide](#) for more information.

#2 Resistance is inevitable and can be a sign of progress

- Backlash and resistance are inevitable parts of working to end gender inequality.
- Backlash and resistance can also be anticipated when working with men and boys and addressing masculinities in preventing men's violence against women.
- The social change messages in the *Men in focus* resources can provoke difficult reactions from some people, especially those who hold sexist or violence-supportive attitudes, or are advantaged by the status quo, or are just used to ignoring the problem.
- This is not a sign to change direction. Rather, resistance is a sign that we are perhaps starting to address the structures, norms, and practices that we seek to change. It can be sign that we are making progress in challenging inequality.
- Nevertheless, resistance and backlash can take a personal toll on us. Therefore, self-care and collective care should be factored into our work to look after our wellbeing and ensure sustainability in this work.
- See Eastern Health's [Engaging men: Reducing resistance and building support](#), and Safe and Equal's [Talking about change: How to navigate resistance to gender equality](#) for more information.

#3 Prepare for potentially heightened backlash against some communities

- Inequalities are connected. When one form of inequality is challenged, it can provoke backlash and resistance about others. For example, backlash and resistance to gender equality is often also rooted in racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism.
- Backlash and resistance can increase the risk of harm to people and communities who experience multiple forms of marginalisation. It is important that practitioners are aware of this and prepared to support and respond.
- Collaboration, partnership and solidarity with organisations that represent LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, refugee and migrant communities, and people with disabilities are especially important to understand the risks of backlash and resistance and be prepared and supportive in response. It is important that we work together to create and sustain social change, in spite of the backlash and resistance we may face.
- Learn from different communities about how to prepare and respond to backlash and resistance in Rainbow Health Australia's [Pride in Prevention messaging guide: A guide to support communications and engagement in primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities](#), Women with Disability Victoria's [Resistance and backlash to gender and disability inclusive practice](#), and Safe and Equal's [Overcoming backlash and resistance: A guide for primary prevention practitioners](#).

Common questions

Below are common questions, with model answers, that Our Watch's primary prevention practitioners often hear in their work with men and boys and addressing masculinities.

Practitioners can use these model answers to prepare their own responses. It is important that responses are tailored to participants' needs to ensure they are appropriate, safe and effective.

Consider connecting with colleagues to role play as the questioner and the responder to practice and build confidence in responding.

Questions

Examples of how to respond

**What about men?
Don't men experience violence too?**

Men do experience violence. But men, like people of all genders, experience violence overwhelmingly from male perpetrators, so we need to focus on addressing men's use of violence. Men also experience high rates of violence largely from other men due to racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other factors. So, we need to be addressing these forms of discrimination and oppression as well.

Many men are disadvantaged by their class, income, race, sexuality, disability - what about them?

It's true that many groups of men experience and are victims of disadvantage, oppression and discrimination due to colonialism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other factors. But that doesn't erase the degree of privilege men collectively experience in a gender unequal society. A good example is the gender pay gap. Not all men earn more than all women, but overall men as a group earn more than women as a group.

Are you saying that masculinity is toxic?

Masculinity is not inherently toxic, but some of the attitudes and behaviours that men display can harm themselves, the people in their lives, and others that they don't know. Most violence is perpetrated by men, so addressing our society's ideas about men and masculinity is important. Stereotypes about what it is to be a man or how men should behave can be harmful when they support gender inequality, sexism and male dominance and aggression.

Are you saying masculinity is always a problem? Are you telling men how they need to be?

Just the opposite! There are many ways in which men define themselves that are positive and we want to encourage men and boys to express a full range of emotions without fear of judgement from other men or from society.

The problem is that outdated, stereotypical ideas about being a man are socially dominant and this can make men feel they can't express themselves in other ways. This can be harmful because some of these stereotypes associate masculinity with aggression and violence. Pressure to rigidly adhere to outdated masculine stereotypes can also hurt men. Men who do subscribe to dominant norms of masculinity experience greater health risks and poorer wellbeing outcomes, like higher rates of depression and suicide and higher risk-taking behaviours.

More information is available in *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia* by The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services, a comprehensive study that focuses on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of Australian men.

Questions

Isn't violence against women only a problem in some communities?

Examples of how to respond

Violence against women is perpetrated by men across all parts of society and in all communities. Men's violence against women is a national problem in Australia and men from every community can be a part of ending violence against women.

If most men don't perpetrate violence, why do all men need to be part of the solution?

Most men are not violent. But many men may act in ways that maintain gendered power imbalances and structures that privilege men and do not promote gender equality. For example, they may tell sexist jokes or display other sexist behaviours they think are harmless. They might turn a blind eye to other men's sexism or disrespect and make excuses for other men's harmful behaviour. In these ways, they are complicit in maintaining a society where gender inequality and disrespect towards women is normalised. This in turn creates the context in which violence against women continues to be condoned and trivialised.

Men and boys need to be a part of the solution. Men represent half of the population, and their participation can help achieve positive, long-lasting, and structural change. Men also hold many positions of power in society. They account for most CEOs, employers, politicians, and board members, and that gives many men a powerful platform to promote gender equality and help prevent men's violence against women. Men are also the main perpetrators of violence against people of all genders. All men can play a role in ending violence against women.

Support is available

Violence against women is widespread across our society and impacts the lives of many people. If the content in these resources raises any issues for you, the following supports are available:

1800 RESPECT

☎ 1800 737 732 🕒 24-hours 📍 1800respect.org.au

Free national family and domestic violence telephone, online chat, and online video counselling services.

Australian Human Rights Commission National Information Service (NIS)

☎ 1300 656 419 or 02 9284 9888
📍 humanrights.gov.au/complaints

Information and referrals regarding workplace sexual harassment, for individuals and employers.

Men's Referral Service

☎ 1300 766 491 🕒 24-hours 📍 ntv.org.au/mrs

Information and referral for men who are concerned about their use of violent or abusive behaviour.

13 Yarn

☎ 13 92 76 🕒 24-hours 📍 13yarn.org.au

Crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

QLife

☎ 1800 184 527
🕒 3pm-midnight, 7 days a week 📍 qlife.org.au

LGBTIQ+ peer support and referrals for people wanting to talk about a range of issues.

Find out more at ourwatch.org.au



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Preventing violence
against women