PREVENTION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN AND THROUGH PRIMARY EDUCATION

Teaching resources

# Acknowledgements

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## Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present.

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# Introduction

These materials have been prepared to assist academic teaching of primary prevention of gender-based violence content in undergraduate programs in the area of primary education.

Primary school educators have a key role to play in the social and emotional development of children. As such, they have a key opportunity to contribute to the primary prevention of gender-based violence – that is, stopping the violence before it begins. Evidence tells us that to prevent violence against women we need action across Australia to:

1. Challenge the condoning of violence against women.
2. Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships.
3. Build new social norms that foster personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes.
4. Support men and boys in developing healthy masculinities and positive, supportive male peer relationships.
5. Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.
6. Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice.
7. Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change.
8. Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres.

## How to use this resource

This resource includes discipline-specific teaching resources, including hypothetical scenarios which have been developed by Our Watch in collaboration with teaching academics.

The scenarios can be used in tutorials as group exercises or modified to form assessments. While they are designed with specific student groups in mind, they can also be tailored to meet the requirements of your teaching and learning needs. Further advice on using and tailoring the resources can be found in the [*Educators’ guide to upskilling preservice professionals to support the prevention of gender-based violence*](https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/educators-guide-to-upskilling-pre-service-professionals-to-support-the-prevention-of-gender-based-violence/?utm_source=PDF5&utm_medium=PDF+5%3A+Teaching+resources+prevention+of+gender+based+violence+in+and+through+health+settings), which provides general advice to teaching academics about integrating prevention of gender-based violence concepts into teaching content and practice.

It is necessary to spend some time developing understanding around the threshold concepts that students need in order to approach material related to gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence, so that it informs their way of thinking and knowing. These threshold concepts include:

* the social construction of gender
* privilege, oppression and intersectionality
* the socio-ecology of gender norms, practices and structures
* the gendered drivers of violence against women.

For additional information about teaching the threshold concepts that underpin these materials, please refer to [*Facilitation guidance – Prevention of gender-based violence in and through primary education*](https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/facilitation-guidance-prevention-of-gender-based-violence-in-and-through-primary-education?utm_source=PDF7&utm_medium=PDF+7%3A+Teaching+resources+prevention+of+gender+based+violence+in+and+through+primary+education).

# Scenarios

These scenarios aim to represent a diversity of situations that demonstrate the intersections of the drivers of gender-based violence and others forms of inequality and oppression. They can be tailored to meet the learning objectives of your unit or used as they are. If you plan to adjust any details of the scenarios, refer to the guidance in the [*Educators’ guide to upskilling preservice professionals to support the prevention of gender-based violence*](https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/educators-guide-to-upskilling-pre-service-professionals-to-support-the-prevention-of-gender-based-violence/?utm_source=PDF7&utm_medium=PDF+7%3A+Teaching+resources+prevention+of+gender+based+violence+in+and+through+primary+education).

## Scenario 1 – School fete

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| **Audience** | **Purpose** | **Key concepts** |
| Primary education students | * To explore the construction of gender and sexuality and how gender stereotypes can be reinforced or challenged in a school setting. * To engage students, parents and colleagues in actions to address gender stereotypes. | Gender, gender identity, gender diversity, sexual diversity, gender stereotypes, assumptions, critical reflection, drivers of gender-based violence, managing classroom behaviours, challenging myths about gender and sexuality. |

Adam is a teacher at a large primary school with staff and kids from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. At the school everyone is talking about the school fete, a fundraiser where people’s parents bring cakes and slices to sell.

In his grade three class students are chatting about what their parents are bringing to the fete and a commotion breaks out in Gabrielle’s group. Gabrielle gets up suddenly, knocking her chair over, and says really loudly, ‘I don’t want to sit with them anymore. They’re saying mean things about me and it’s not fair!’ She has tears running down her cheeks. She goes and sits with another group.

It turns out that two students in Gabrielle’s group have been calling her ‘Gay Gabe’. One of them, Thea, has said that her parents think it’s really disgusting that Gabrielle has two fathers who she lives with part-time. Thea says, ‘Two men together! That’s so yucky! I wouldn’t want to eat their gay cake. I don’t want to be gay!’

Ari, another student, has asked her which of her fathers did all the ‘mum stuff’. He kept asking, ‘But does one of your dads do all the cooking and cleaning? Who does it in your house? Who can make cake?’ Ari says, ‘There has to be a mum!’

Adam knows he needs to be careful not to shame Gabrielle any further by drawing any more attention to her right now, but he wants to address Ari and Thea’s comments, so that students learn about, and respect, different types of families. He wonders how best to do this, because the children are just repeating things they’ve heard their parents say.

Adam tells his colleague David about the incident, saying it’s part of a bigger issue where the mums and dads are expected to support the school in different ways. He gives the example of hearing other teachers telling their students, ‘Don’t forget to give your mum the letter about the fete cake stall!’

David replies, ‘Yeah, but maybe the mums don’t work, or maybe they’re just better cooks than the dads? My mum is!’

Adam says, ‘I think it’s probably more about willingness and effort on the part of the parents’.

David says, ‘Come on, man, stop overthinking it. Everyone loves the fete. I mean, what are you gonna do? You can’t insist the dads do more cooking! That’s really up to them.’

### Additional resources

* Our Watch, [Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: the power of parents](https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/06031050/Our-Watch-Parenting-and-Early-Years.pdf)

### Sample discussion questions and answers

1. **What are the assumptions that are being made about families, gender and sexuality by students, parents and teachers? What gender stereotypes are being reinforced?**

* The students picking on Gabrielle are being disrespectful based on the assumption that everyone’s parents are heterosexual and anything outside of this is not ‘normal’ or even acceptable. This approach to understanding the world is known as heteronormativity.
* There is the assumption that even within same-sex relationships there are distinct gender roles where one person is responsible for the ‘feminine’ work and therefore another is responsible for the ‘masculine’ jobs, for example, Ari expresses the view that one of Gabrielle’s fathers must do the ‘mum stuff’.
* There is an assumption that women/mothers cook and that men/fathers work. David’s comment that maybe the mothers are just better cooks than the fathers ignores the fact that gender inequality and gender roles are entrenched by systems like politics, the economy and even the education system, and not just a matter of personal preference. Teachers can give the example that the vast majority of teachers in Australia are female despite efforts to increase male representation, because teaching is often seen as a female profession. This view of gender roles is also held by the children in Adam’s class (Thea and Ari).

1. **How might Adam deal with the situation with Gabrielle, Thea and Ari in a way that ensures he is not shaming or condoning?**

* Adam needs to let Thea know on the spot that her comment is hurtful to Gabrielle and ask her to apologise.
* Ari’s comment is based on an assumption, but also expresses curiosity, so this could be an opportunity to talk to the whole class about gender roles and diverse families.
* The initial idea that Adam could communicate to his students is that everyone should learn how to cook and clean well, so they can care for themselves and others. This is the role of both parents in a family.
* Adam could follow this up by meeting with Gabrielle, Thea and Ari individually, so each child feels heard rather than shamed or blamed.
* Further classes could focus on gender roles and families, with some careful planning.

1. **How might Adam engage with Gabrielle and her dads in a productive and supportive way?**

* Adam could consider what is already happening in their school to support ‘rainbow’ families.
* He can then contact Gabrielle’s dads and let them know what has occurred and provide context around the commitments and actions the school is already taking to ensure all families are celebrated and respected. He could invite them to come and meet with him and discuss how to productively move forward (what they would ideally like and how the school could action that).
* This should be done in conjunction with the school leadership team so that Adam also has support and strategies are consistent across the school.

1. **How might Adam continue the conversation with Thea and Ari’s parents, or other parents, in a productive way?**

* This conversation would mirror aspects of the conversation with Gabrielle’s parents. However, Thea and Ari’s parents (and all parents) also need to be informed of the school’s commitment to inclusion and respectful relationships, as well as its duty of care and legal requirements to ensure the school is a safe space for everyone that does not discriminate against LGBTIQ+ students or families.

1. **How might Adam continue the conversation with his colleagues and the school staff as a whole in a productive way?**

* As this is a whole-of-school issue, a whole-of-school approach needs to be taken so that Adam does not bear the responsibility of educating his colleagues. He could approach the school leadership team (principal, assistant principal, welfare coordinator, etc.).
* The leadership team could engage with other schools or Department of Education representatives taking leadership on this issue, or expert NGOs who work in this space, to learn from their experience.

1. **Have you had a situation in your life where you or someone else challenged gender stereotypes? Were there any strategies that you can recall as being particularly successful?**

Students should be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of gender stereotypes. If they are new to this content or knowledge, they may need to be introduced to gender stereotypes as a concept and discuss briefly what typical gender stereotypes exist in Australia generally, as well as in their own community. Some students may find this uncomfortable or confronting to their identity. Encourage them to sit with the discomfort and share your own experiences of gender stereotypes if you feel comfortable to do so.

## Scenario 2 – Mother’s Day

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| **Audience** | **Purpose** | **Key concepts** |
| Primary education students | * To explore the construction of gender and sexuality and how gender stereotypes can be reinforced or challenged in a school setting. * To provide an opportunity to explore a whole-of-school approach to respectful behaviours and inclusive practices in relation to gender and sexual diversity. | Gender, gender identity, gender diversity, sexual diversity, gender stereotypes, assumptions, critical reflection, drivers of gender-based violence, managing classroom behaviours, dealing with resistance to gender equity approaches, challenging myths about gender and sexuality. |

A group of teachers are sitting and working in the staffroom after school. Leanne is preparing an activity for her class for Mother’s Day. She wants the students to write a story about their mother and then make a card saying what they most love and appreciate about their mum. Leanne suggests all the teachers do this and then the different classes could do a show-and-tell activity. They could invite the mums. David agrees this is a great way of combining art, writing and public speaking, plus community building.

Adam says, ‘But what about the kids who don’t have mums?’

Leanne says, ‘Generally speaking, it’s the dads who are missing! We’ve got a lot of single mums in our grade! Depressing really, so many dud dads. I despair about men sometimes!’ She does a big eye-roll.

David says, ‘Can we talk about this without getting into man-bashing? I find it really offensive.’

Adam says, ‘Some people don’t have a mum. Some women don’t have children. One of the kids in my class has two dads. So I’m still not certain we should have Mother’s Day, because it excludes quite a lot of people.’

Indira says, ‘Thank you, Adam! This is so true! I actually have two mums but I still agree we could take a different approach.’

David says, ‘Two mums? Oh yeah, I’ve got a stepmother too. My parents separated when I was quite young.’

Indira takes a deep breath, ‘My parents are still together, actually.’ Everyone looks at her like she’s just presented a brain-teaser.

David says, ‘Oh, right. You’ve never told us that! So they’re lesbian?’

Indira says, ‘Yeah. They are. They hate labels, but generally they say “queer” rather than lesbian.’

Leanne says, ‘Oh, that’s quite unusual for someone of your culture! So you don’t have a dad? That sounds sad, I really love my father.’

Indira says, ‘Well, actually, both my parents were born in Australia so that’s our culture as much as it is yours. And I didn’t feel sad growing up. I had, and still have, two really loving parents, and I also have some great men in my life.’

David says, ‘So you’re saying we shouldn’t have Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, because it would upset some people? It’s like how at my girlfriend’s work the Christmas party’s become the end-of-year party. Ludicrous!’

Leanne looks tearful and says, ‘I think this really undermines women! Motherhood should be celebrated! Mother’s Day has feminist roots. Mother’s Day is about appreciating women! What’s wrong with that?’

David says, ‘Yeah, I agree with Leanne! We need to teach kids about respect and love for their mothers. Mother’s Day reminds us how important women are.’

Adam interjects, ‘Yeah, I know what you mean. I think that respect for parents is really important to encourage too. But I’m just thinking we can be creative and do it in a way that doesn’t exclude anyone. Can’t we?’

### Additional resources

* Rainbow Families Victoria, [Including diverse families on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day](https://www.rainbowfamilies.com.au/_including_diverse_families_on_mother_s_day_and_father_s_day)

### Sample discussion questions and answers

1. **Discuss the assumptions that are being made about gender, culture and families by the teachers. Discuss where these assumptions might be coming from.**

* The assumptions of Leanne and David are heteronormative. They assume that children have a cis-gendered mother and father who are in, or have been in, a sexual and domestic relationship like a marriage. There is an assumption that this equals happiness and anything different to this is lacking or sad.
* There is also a subtle assumption that all women are mothers, or that motherhood and reproduction is ‘natural’ and desirable for all women.
* There is an immediate assumption made that all the single mothers had a male partner at one point. In fact, the single mothers may not be heterosexual and/or may have conceived alone via IVF. There may also be children who have two fathers, and children who have a parent who is gender non-binary (or two parents who are), as well as children who are being cared for by a member of the extended family, a foster carer or friend.
* Prejudice and unconscious bias stem from assumptions and stereotypes like these. These assumptions are informed by people’s upbringing (family and education) and the society around us (media, political messaging and public discourse). The messages we receive on a daily basis are both explicit and implicit and shape our values and world view.

1. **What are your own beliefs about family, gender and parenting? Where do these beliefs come from?**

Students should be able to reflect on their own attitudes family, gender and parenting, and identify any positive or negative biases they may hold. As they share their stories, you may like to use these prompts:

* Reflect on your own experiences growing up. Can you think of a time you or someone you know was excluded, discriminated against or unfairly treated because of gender?
* Think of a time you wanted to challenge a gender role, practice or behaviour. What action did you take? What did the people around you say? How did they influence your decision?
* Reflecting on intersectionality, what other aspects of your identity might influence your perceptions of gender, family and parenting? For example, where you went to school, where you grew up, your religious affiliation, etc.

1. **How did Adam speaking up help his colleague feel safe to share her family history?**

Adam was able to empathically understand the perspective of students, parents and teachers who do not conform to heteronormative ideas of parents and family. This is incredibly useful for his colleague Indira, who feels supported enough by his attitudes to open up to her colleagues about her own family.

1. **What would an alternative and inclusive approach to acknowledging and celebrating all types of parents look like?**

Carer’s day or Special Person Day could be celebrated instead. This would allow children to choose who they felt closest to and celebrate that connection.

1. **What would you need to do to ensure that everyone in the school community was on board with this inclusive approach?**

* Such a day would need to be contextualised/supported through teaching (across the curriculum) about family, love and family-like care, and all its diverse forms. It’s worth noting that quite apart from the diversity of rainbow families, some children do not have family, for a range of reasons**.**
* It’s important for the school to run some formal workshops for teachers about family, gender equity and sexuality which enable them to share their perspectives, learn about these topics, and recognise them as key life and whole-of-school issues. One person such as Adam or Indira should not have to educate their colleagues.
* Proactive communication with parents and carers would also be necessary, to describe the rationale for this approach and the benefits to everyone of being more inclusive of different family structures, behaviours and descriptors.

1. **Think of a time you’ve had to deal with myths, beliefs and assumptions about a topic related to gender or sexuality. How did you handle it? What would you do differently next time?**

Students should be able to discuss in small groups how they would approach a situation like this in real life to ensure that the language, attitudes and practices with students, teachers and parents are inclusive of different family configurations but also engaging to everyone in the school community.

## Scenario 3 – Ava’s inequality journal

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| **Audience** | **Purpose** | **Key concepts** |
| Primary education students | * To explore the construction of gender and gender stereotypes and their relationship to gender inequality. * To provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to make the links between gender inequality and gender-based violence, and understand the actions that can address violence. * To show the role of teachers in challenging inequities through behaviour management, classroom activities and assessments. | Gender, assumptions, critical reflection, masculinities, femininities, privilege, drivers of gender-based violence, challenging the condoning of violence, challenging of gender stereotypes. |

#### Day 1

What is with the world acting like boys are better than girls, or something? I’m totally over it. Like in class at school the girls put their hands up to answer a question, but the boys are chosen more often. And when a girl explains something, the teacher just says ‘Thank you’ and nods, but when a boy explains the same thing, the teacher’s like, ‘Fantastic work, that’s really impressive, blah, blah.’ It’s really annoying. I feel like secretly everyone thinks we’re less important or something. Boys get all the attention. It’s really weird, especially because there are just as many boys as girls.

I was saying this to Dad and Uncle Alex when we were on the train on our way to the footy the other day. Dad laughed but then he said that I should be careful not to be too opinionated and get people ‘offside’. Whatever that means. But Uncle Alex said it’s true and that gender inequality is a real problem. He said it’s good to ask questions, especially about inequality in the world.

At the footy Uncle Alex said, ‘Notice, Ava, how all the players are men and we’re giving them a lot of attention? What do you think of that?’ I said, well, that’s a bit like school too! I told him that at school there’s a girls’ footy team that my friend Cassie’s mum helps out with, but the boys’ team always gets first choice with the oval, which means the girls team can’t practice so much. Dad joined in and asked whether the girls were really serious about footy practice. He said he reckons that’s why they weren’t out on the oval more. He said that there are sports where boys are naturally more talented and footy was one of them. Uncle Alex said ‘But if you can’t practice something, then it’s pretty hard to get good at it, don’t you think, Eric?’

Uncle Alex suggested that since I like writing I should maybe write a story about what I think the problem is. So I’m now noting down everything that seems a bit unequal in my journal, and I’ll ask my teacher if I can write an article about it for the school magazine.

#### Day 2

My friend Mia was awarded Class Captain and Josh, who I also like, also got Class Captain. At my school they choose a girl and a boy to share the role, which I think is good. They’re supposed to have the same job, but sometimes they seem to be treated a bit differently and I’m trying to work out if this is because of their different talents or because of their gender. They both always finish their work before everyone else, get everything right. They’re both bookworms. But Josh is better at spelling. And Mia is great at public speaking – she actually won a competition at her local library for her speech ‘If I was Prime Minister’. She’s very funny and really good at telling stories. Josh is very serious and a bit shy when he has to speak in public. But he’s a really good person, especially to the younger kids at school. Once, during lunchtime, he stopped playing tag and helped a little kid who’d fallen and cut their knee open.

Josh got picked to speak at school assembly about the class report, which is something I know Mia put her hand up to do. Mia got asked to help some of the little kids in the library with their reading and writing. Mia asked Ms Patterson if she could do the report at assembly instead, but she said maybe next time and that being kind and helpful was a good way to role-model to the younger students.

Mia and Josh are also both good at sport but Mr Donatello, the PE teacher, is always calling on Josh to help him because he’s Captain, like carry sports gear and set up the soccer goals on the oval, even though I don’t think he’s stronger than Mia.

#### Day 3

Last week Cassie had a whole lot of mud on her T-shirt at the end of lunchtime and a really red arm. She was crying and said that some of the boys she’d been playing with had twisted her arm and pushed her over. They’d also tried to lift up Nasra’s skirt, because they thought it would be funny. Mia and I went with Cassie and Nasra to report it to Mr Anderson, who was on playground duty. He took Cassie to the school nurse, saying there’d been a bit of ‘rough playing, but it may have all been accidental, the boys were just doing boy stuff.’ They called Cassie’s mum to come and get her. Nasra said she went home and told her mum and her mum called the school. Nasra said she was really cross on the phone and told them it wasn’t good enough and they had to call in the boys’ parents for a meeting. Nasra said her mum went to the meeting and when she got home she was still really cross, saying that the girls ‘have a right to be free from harassment’. Nasra’s mum told her that at the meeting the boys’ mums said that Cassie and Nasra had been bothering the boys and were always following them around. Apparently they said that Cassie and Nasra were ‘a bit too interested in the boys’ and ‘they should play with the other girls’.

#### Day 4

When my parents went to the parent–teacher meeting last night, Ms Patterson said that I had an ‘inquiring mind’ and was ‘very motivated about answering things in class and very vocal in general’. Her feedback was that while this was generally good, I would benefit from being more humble. I’m not sure I even know what ‘more humble’ means. My dad laughed and said, ‘Oh yes, Ava can be a real loudmouth at times.’ Gosh, thanks, Dad! Mum said that she didn’t know what to say at the time, but when she got home she felt really annoyed. She invited Nasra and her mum over, and her mum said that the feedback for Nasra was a bit similar. The teacher said she was ‘very energetic and competitive’ but she didn’t always listen to all the instructions before starting her work. She said Nasra needed to listen more and talk less.

### Additional resources

* Victorian Department of Education, [Amplify: Student voice practice guidance](https://education.ourwatch.org.au/resource/amplify-student-voice-practice-guidance/)

### Sample discussion questions and answers

**How do the stories show how gender is constructed by social ‘rules’ and ideas that get set from a very young age?**

* Ava observes that girls and boys are treated differently in class when they put up their hands and answer questions/express perspectives. There are echoes of this in Ava’s interactions with her father.
* Ava is warned by her father not to be too opinionated. The assumption here is that girls and women should avoid having strong opinions, for fear of upsetting others.
* Ava observes that the girls’ footy team does not have the same opportunities for practice as the boys’ team. Ava’s dad calls into question whether the girls are serious enough, inferring that footy is really a male pursuit and dismissing any possible bias at the school.
* At school Mia and Josh are both Class Captains, but their opportunities for leadership are very different, for example, Mia is constructed as a helper, while Josh is encouraged to be a public speaker.
* When there is an incident with Cassie, Nasra and some boys, the boys are excused as simply engaging in rough playing and ‘boy stuff’. Rather than attention being shone on the boy’s aggressive, anti-social, sexualised behaviours, Cassie and Nasra are blamed by one of the parents. At the parent–teacher meeting Ava and Nasra are described in ways that make it clear that they are seen as too loud and confident. The implication is that these are characteristics that girls should have less of, and that they need to be more traditionally feminine.

**Discuss how adults/teachers/parents/carers take expressions of gender inequality for granted. How might this contribute to gender inequality?**

* There is an expectation (expressed via language used for personal qualities) that girls and women be far more passive, quiet and compliant than boys and men, which can equate to a feeling that women and girls should take up less space and accommodate others. This is expressed in Ava’s father’s comments to Ava’s teacher. It is also demonstrated in Ms Patterson’s differing treatment of Josh and Mia, and her feedback to Mia and Ava when they go to see her about the Class Captain roles and the division of duties. It is also expressed by Mr Anderson, who says that the boys’ aggression towards Cassie and Nasra is just ‘boy stuff’.
* Attributing certain traits to personality/individual behaviour is very easy to do if we’re not aware of, and don’t critically reflect on, our unconscious biases and don’t interrogate the values and ideas we’ve been brought up to believe are ‘natural’ or ‘normal’.

**What are the physical and non-physical forms of violent behaviour present in Day 3? Is Mr Anderson’s response appropriate? What could he have done differently to address these behaviours?**

* The boys have exhibited disrespectful and inappropriate behaviours towards Cassie and Nasra. One of them twisted Cassie’s arm and pushed her over in the mud, which is physical violence, and others tried to lift up Nasra’s skirt, which is sexual harassment. These early behaviours exist on a spectrum of violence towards women and gender inequity. Mr Anderson dismisses these behaviours as ‘boy stuff’, which is a way of condoning the violence.
* Mr Anderson could have intervened in the incident with Cassie, Nasra and the boys and used it as a teachable moment. A ‘restorative justice approach’ would ensure that everyone’s perspective was heard and that all the students were clear that this behaviour was unacceptable.

**Where in these stories is gender inequality challenged, and by whom? Where are some other points in the story where gender inequality could have been challenged by teachers and parents?**

* Uncle Alex acts as a supportive ally through his suggestion that Ava conduct research on the ways things are different for boys and girls, and his observation that the girls’ footy team at Ava’s school can’t improve without practice opportunities.
* Ava considers, questions and challenges gender inequality at school throughout the story.
* Nasra’s mother challenges gender inequality by ringing the school regarding the boys’ treatment of Cassie and Nasra, by organising a meeting with the boys’ parents to raise her concerns, and through her comment that Cassie and Nasra have a right to feel safe and respected at school.

Missed opportunities:

* Ms Paterson could have listened and responded to Mia’s concerns about the Class Captain roles. Mia and Josh could have taken it in turns to do the variety of tasks associated with the role, so that each got an equal go at all tasks.
* Mr Donatello could give different students the opportunity to be responsible for PE-related jobs, alternating between girls and boys.
* The boys’ parents could have expressed concern about their sons’ behaviour towards Cassie and Nasra and discussed with the school how to have productive conversations with the boys about gender, relationships and violence.
* During the parent–teacher meeting, Ava and Nasra’s mothers could have questioned the way their daughters were being described, which suggested that girls should be less active and generally take up less space. This may have been more difficult for Ava’s mother, as Ava’s father was colluding with the teacher.
* Nasra and Ava’s mothers could have contacted the school about the descriptions of their daughters during the parent–teacher meetings.

1. **Reflecting on your own experience/practice, what behaviours do you see that reinforce gender roles and stereotypes, and how do you challenge them?**

Students should be able to reflect on their own attitudes about gender, or anything they do as a result of unconscious bias that might reinforce gender roles and stereotypes. They should also be able to identify practices they have seen on placement or in their personal/work life, and describe how they might be able to do something/respond differently in the future, to challenge rather than reinforce gender inequities.

## Scenario 4 – Engaging male teachers in RRE

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| **Audience** | **Purpose** | **Key concepts** |
| Primary education students | * To explore the construction of masculinities and the multiple forces that create and maintain gendered social norms. * To support reflection on masculine roles and stereotypes and how male teachers in particular can take positive steps to support gender equality in the context of respectful relationships education. | Masculinities, engaging men, patriarchy, critical self-reflection, drivers of gender-based violence, actions to support a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education. |

Joe, a primary school teacher, is at home making tea for his three kids when his wife, Mei, walks in the door.

‘How was your day, hon?’ Mei asks Joe.

‘Aw, not bad, the usual. Although we had another one of those “respectful relationships education” meetings that we’re all supposed to be teaching. They say it’s about gender equality and teaching kids to respect each other, but it feels like man-bashing to me.’

‘Oh, I heard about that on the radio,’ Mei replies. ‘It sounds really good. They talked about the importance of challenging gender stereotypes with kids. What’s wrong with that? You’re fine when Alex wants to wear his sisters’ dresses or paint his nails. It’s the same thing, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah, that’s just when we’re at home, he’s just being silly. But this was more about the issue of domestic violence and making out that all men are bad, or something. I mean, I’m a man and I’m not part of the problem. I’m not violent. I even help you out at home, looking after the kids and doing chores. And I know that domestic violence is a real problem, but saying that it’s all because of men … It just puts me off, you know?’

‘I dunno, hon. Maybe you should talk to your colleagues about it,’ Mei suggests.

The next day at school, Joe’s having lunch with Adam in the staffroom. Joe asks Adam what he thought about the RRE presentation the day before.

‘Aw, mate, I think it’s really cool,’ Adam says keenly. ‘I can see how stuff about gender and social expectations are already having an impact on the kids in my class – the games and toys they like, the way they talk to each other ... It shows you how early this stuff starts. So getting the whole school involved, teachers and parents, it sounds like a great approach.’

‘Don’t you think it feels a bit like they’re saying it’s wrong to be a man or something?’ Joe asks incredulously. ‘Like, you and me, we’re primary school teachers. We’re not bad guys.’

‘I think they just know we’re role-models for the kids, you know?’ says Adam. ‘I know what you mean – it can be a bit confronting at first. But you’ve got to be able to sit with the discomfort. If you’re really honest with yourself, can you say you’ve never benefited from being a man?’

‘Yeah, of course. Like, I’ve never been sexually harassed or anything. But I don’t think this school has a problem with male privilege. I mean, look at our leadership team. We have a female principal!’

‘And what do you notice about her?’ Adam asks, waiting a few seconds for a response. ‘She doesn’t have kids, mate. You think that’s a coincidence? Meanwhile, Jameelah’s been working here part-time for ten years as a classroom teacher, but has never been a lead teacher or curriculum specialist, even though she has heaps of experience. And you? How many opportunities have you had to take on more senior roles? You’ve got three kids but never really had to stop full-time work, did you, mate?’ says Adam. ‘Being in a leadership position shouldn’t be dependent on whether you work full-time or not.’

‘What’s that got to do with the games we play and the books we read with the students?’ Joe asks.

‘Stereotypes, Joe. All these patterns of behaviour we see in adults start with the ideas we give to kids – ideas and expectations about what girls can do, or boys should do. In so many stories boys are seen as leaders, so they grow up expecting to be leaders in one way or another – at work, at home. Like I noticed myself, I thought “As long as I keep working, I’ll get promoted.” And I even took that attitude home with me too – you know, this sense of entitlement. My wife would ask me to help out with cooking and stuff around the house and I’d begrudge her. Or when I looked after the kids I’d call it babysitting,’ Adam explains.

Joe smiles. ‘My wife hates it when I say that to the fellas.’

‘I finally realised I had to be accountable at home,’ says Adam. ‘Just like I am at work. Accountable to my wife but also accountable to my kids, showing them that men can be lots of things – caring, expressive, respectful, responsible …’

‘Makes me think about my son, Alex,’ says Joe. ‘He likes to wear his sisters’ dress-ups. First time I saw him dressed like a princess I couldn’t believe it. I started laughing at him and he got upset and cried. He loves it so much though, so he keeps doing it, and I don’t really mind now ’cause it’s just at home.’

‘Kids should be free to be who they want to be. I’m really interested in this topic so I’ve been paying attention the last couple of terms to my teaching. I’ve been trying to be conscious about the language I use, who I call on to do things around the room, the texts I use, the songs I play. And the kids are picking it up. Like the other day in class, I heard a boy telling another kid he “plays tennis like a girl” and the boy responded, “You mean I play like Ash Barty? She’s awesome! I wish I could play like her!”’ Adam laughed. ‘Once you’re role-modelling this stuff, the kids pick it up, and they get more confident in their own skin.’

‘Yeah, maybe you’re right. Maybe I should go and have a look at that website they told us about,’ says Joe.

### Additional resources

* Our Watch, [Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/men-in-focus-unpacking-masculinities-and-engaging-men-in-the-prevention-of-violence-against-women)
* Our Watch, [Evidence paper: Respectful relationships education in schools](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/evidence-paper-respectful-relationships-education-in-schools)
* Victorian Department of Education and Training, [Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/ByPin?pin=2JZX4R) (learning materials)

### Sample discussion questions and answers

1. **What is different about the ways Joe and Adam understand the concept of ‘male privilege’?**

* Joe thinks that the only disadvantage women experience (compared to men) is sexual harassment/abuse. Adam sees how gender roles around care work and men’s dominance in leadership are also benefits of male privilege.

1. **How is Joe being compliant with his own role in maintaining patriarchy?**

* Joe thinks that because he works with children, and because he ‘helps’ his wife with housework, that he is not part of the problem.
* Joe doesn’t see how his own career trajectory has been favourable to him because he hasn’t had to take time out of the workforce to be a primary carer and can continue to work full-time, unlike his female colleague.
* Joe was resistant at first to his son’s dressing-up, which did not conform to dominant notions of how a boy should dress and play. He accepts the dress-ups but only as ‘silly’ play, not as a legitimate form of expression of his son’s identity.

1. **What do you notice about the way Adam engages with Joe on the topic? What kind of approach is he using to help Joe see the situation from a different perspective? What can you learn from this approach?**

* Adam comes across as thoughtful: gender issues are on his radar and he’s taking action. He’s getting Joe to think/question in a supportive way, by highlighting how inequality plays out at school and in everyday life. He’s suggesting practices that other teachers and adults in schools can adopt.

1. **Ask students to think of examples in their own social or relational settings where attitudes that condone gender inequality are/were tolerated and even perpetuated. How did the student respond to this situation? What could they do differently next time?**

* Students might think of their own experiences of being disadvantaged based on their gender and their social location in general (e.g. race, age, class, sexuality) or they may think of ways they have been complicit with inequality, bias or discrimination in the past.
* Students may be able to identify how in the future they can attempt to call someone/something out in a respectful manner.
* Students should be advised to always prioritise their own safety in any situation where there is the opportunity to be an active bystander. Students may like to explore what it means to be an active bystander as an additional exercise.

1. **What strategies can schools take to ensure that RRE is embedded across the whole school, and that teachers like Joe are on board?**

* Schools need to ensure they are taking a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education. Every member of the school has a role to play in promoting and modelling gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes.
* In addition to having an ongoing professional learning strategy for all teaching and non-teaching staff, schools need to ensure they integrate this work across the entire school, recognising that every policy, practice and activity has the potential to challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes and inequalities.
* As schools are also community hubs, it is essential that schools engage families in the process, so that they understand the nature and purpose of respectful relationships education, to ensure that messages about gender equality are also promoted and modelled at home.