

# Workplace Equality and Respect

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

## Reducing risk in workplace initiatives to prevent violence against women

**Our  
WATCH**  
End violence against  
Women And Their Children



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[www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

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 people.

## Workplace Equality and Respect documents available on the website

**Workplace Equality and Respect Standards**

**Workplace Equality and Respect Implementation Guide**

**Workplace Equality and Respect Self-Assessment Tool**

**Workplace Equality and Respect Key Progress Indicators**

**Workplace Equality and Respect Staff Survey**

**Practice guidance:** Engaging leaders

**Practice guidance:** Communications guide

**Practice guidance:** Dealing with backlash

**Practice guidance:** Equality and respect for all women - an intersectional approach

**Practice guidance:** Reducing risk in workplace initiatives to prevent violence against women

**Practice guidance:** Responding to disclosures

**Practice guidance:** Understanding your rights in the workplace and Victorian anti-discrimination law

**Practice guidance:** Workplace responses to staff who perpetrate violence

**Practice guidance:** Workplace gender equality and the law

**Practice guidance:** Workplace policies to support equality and respect

**Practice guidance:** Working in rural, regional and remote workplaces to prevent violence against women

**Practice guidance:** Workplace support for staff who experience family violence

## This guide aims to help you by providing:

- an overview of potential risks that might arise when undertaking prevention initiatives
- steps to identify and respond to potential risks
- tips to manage risks commonly associated with prevention programs
- referral information for national support services.

## Why do we need to consider risks and safety?

Prevention work can have unintended consequences. It often includes open discussions about the nature, prevalence and impacts of violence against women.

Violence against women and their children is a daily reality and a lived experience for many, so talking about violence will have an impact on many of the people we work with.

Safety needs to be considered and risks should be identified early to ensure prevention initiatives do not unintentionally cause harm.

## Who should we work with?

Collaborating or consulting with experts or specialised agencies will support you to plan for safety as part of your prevention work. Agencies who specialise in supporting women who experience violence will have knowledge and expertise that can help you plan for disclosures and to respond to victims. You may also consider talking to union representatives, or your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) representatives about mitigating risks to staff health and wellbeing.

## Risks commonly associated with prevention programs

### Disclosure

Disclosure means that someone reveals they have directly experienced or perpetrated violence. This may be a woman, man or child that your prevention strategy works with either directly or indirectly. Those involved in prevention work

should anticipate disclosures and be prepared to respond appropriately and safely. Please refer to the *Practice guidance: Responding to disclosures* for guidance on what to say and do if someone discloses their experience or perpetration of violence.

Building or strengthening links and partnerships with local specialised services and organisations that respond to violence against women – and ensuring this information is known by all involved – sends a clear message about how seriously you take the issue and that appropriate support is available if needed.

All prevention initiatives should have a clear process on how to respond to disclosures including up-to-date referral information for specialised services.

While people undertaking prevention work rarely have reason to ask someone directly about their experience or use of violence, noticing a person is distressed during a training session or conversation and following up with them privately to check if they require assistance or referral information may be required. People may also disclose their experience of violence regardless of whether you ask them directly or not.

All disclosures must be handled with great care and confidentiality, and you need to be sure that anyone who discloses their experience of violence has access to appropriate support services if required. This is particularly important where women or children may be placed at greater risk if the perpetrator discovers that they have told someone about the violence.

**A list of support services and contacts is included on page 10.**

## Working with children and young people

Practitioners working with children and young people in some settings may have a duty to report disclosures, and you should check with relevant regulatory or statutory requirements for your sector (which differ across Australian states and territories). Knowing your legal and ethical obligations is important, particularly as it relates to children and young people.



## Triggering content

With such high prevalence of violence against women in Australia (one in five women have experienced sexual assault and one in four have experienced violence from a current or former partner) it's important to consider the triggering nature of prevention activities.

Triggering occurs when a particular conversation, comment or image causes a negative emotional response in those exposed to it. The emotional response can be fear, sadness, panic, flashbacks or pain, as well as any physical symptoms associated with these emotions. Triggering can vary in severity, and the most harmful triggering tends to happen when the trigger has been encountered without any prior warning.

Prevention activities should include trigger warnings at the start of presentations or training and the group should be made aware of local support services in case the session raises issues or is triggering for any participants. Checking the content of presentations, training or other communication material with specialist response agencies is another way to ensure that it is not unnecessarily triggering. Care should also be given to consider population groups where the prevalence of violence is higher than the population average. This includes women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women who have come to Australia as refugees.

## Looking after yourself and others undertaking prevention work

Self-care is also important for people undertaking prevention work. Listening to people's experience can be distressing and can impact on wellbeing. Being constantly exposed to accounts of violence and discussing its impacts and costs can be overwhelming and draining. Some individuals may also have experienced violence in their own lives and this can increase the impact.

All prevention strategies should include mechanisms to promote self-care for those involved closely with prevention work. Self-care can include planning and budgeting for training on vicarious trauma, fatigue and burn-out; and encouraging team debriefing sessions.

[Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice – How to change the story](#) provides information on self-care for people undertaking prevention work.

As well as offering support to people who experience violence, 1800RESPECT also provides counselling and support to family, friends and professionals impacted by violence.

**A list of support services and contacts is included on page 10.**

## Messages

Testing and trialling messages and activities throughout the project cycle is an important way to ensure there are no unintended consequences or harm. Activities can have unintended consequences through messages that are exclusionary or actually contribute to harmful stereotypes. For example, an initiative targeting young people and respectful relationships may exclude LGBTIQ young people by only referring to heterosexual relationships. This can reinforce the marginalisation of young people and have negative and harmful impacts on attitudes and beliefs.

Consulting and testing ideas with key stakeholders and audiences can help to reduce this risk. Inviting different groups and target audiences to be involved in the development of prevention activities can help to identify risks and develop alternative messaging if required.

## Disrespectful conversations

Prevention work can often involve discussions on topics that make people feel uncomfortable, and this discomfort may be expressed in inappropriate behaviour, such as yelling at other people in the group, being excessively argumentative, inappropriate jokes or intimidating behaviour. These topics can include violence against women itself, or topics related to gender stereotypes, roles and identity.

If not dealt with appropriately, this behaviour can be traumatic for others involved in the prevention initiatives. One important step to mitigate this risk is to clearly establish group rules at the commencement of the initiative.

## How do we minimise risk in our prevention initiatives?

### Step 1: Identify

Identify any potential risks of your initiatives. There are several starting points that will be common to all violence prevention initiatives. These include dealing with

disclosures and the triggering nature of content for those who have experienced violence. There will also be risks unique to the activity or population group that you are working with.

**Step 2: Assess**

Assess the likelihood of the identified risks occurring and the level of harm this may cause to individuals and the community. Assess whether the risk can be eliminated or reduced.

**Step 3: Plan and manage**

Document all possible risks and strategies to mitigate them. If a risk cannot be eliminated, decide what processes or actions can be put in place to reduce the risk. This may include preliminary training and information for key people, engaging and working with additional community partners or stakeholders, consulting with experts in identified areas, or changing the planned implementation of the project.

**Step 4: Monitor and review**

It is important that safety plans are monitored and reviewed to ensure they are effective and relevant. This includes identifying any additional safety concerns that become apparent and monitoring whether the safety plans are working. Not all risks will be identified early in the initiative, and the monitoring and review process allows for unanticipated safety concerns to be addressed.

**Example of a risk and safety framework**

<b>Initiative:</b> Local scout group delivering Respectful Relationships Education sessions for members			
<b>Identify risk</b>	<b>Assess</b>	<b>Plan for safety</b>	<b>Monitor</b>
Disclosures	Members may disclose to leaders after the session that there is violence in their home or family.	Ensure key leaders have received training in managing disclosures and have correct information for referral.  Develop agreement with specialised response agency for advice and referral if required.	



Identify risk	Assess	Plan for safety	Monitor
Age of target group	Children under 16 years of age – note any ethical and legal considerations	Ensure all leaders are aware of legal requirements prior to the session.  Send an information note advising of sessions and session content home to guardians.	
Triggering content	Children may have experienced violence and may find discussion distressing.	Provide the opportunity to leave if upsetting; have referral information available (Kids Helpline).  Staff available to support if required	
Exclusionary messages	Sessions do have a focus on male–female relationships – consider LGBTIQ young people.	Explore using content that recognises sexual diversity – seek advice from content experts.	
Areas of expertise	Leaders are concerned about their ability to run the session and deal with any tricky questions.	Partner with an organisation with experience in Respectful Relationships Education to assist in the delivery of sessions.	
Impact on leaders	The content of violence against women could have a negative emotional impact on our leaders.	Discuss with peak body options for dealing with this, e.g. what leader support and debriefing is available?	

## Support for those who experience or perpetrate violence

If a community member, child or another person is in immediate danger, they should call 000.

Sexual assault and family and domestic violence services are different around Australia and 1800RESPECT can provide accurate information of available services in a person’s area, as well as provide telephone or online support and counselling.

<b>National Numbers</b>
<b>National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service (24 hours)</b> www.1800respect.org.au 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)
<b>Lifeline (24 hours)</b> www.lifeline.org.au or 13 11 14
<b>Kidsline (24 hours)</b> www.kidshelpline.com.au or 1800 55 1800
<b>MensLine (24 hours)</b> www.mensline.org.au or 1300 789 978
<b>No to Violence</b> <a href="http://www.ntv.org.au/">http://www.ntv.org.au/</a> or 1300 766 491 24 hours – Tasmania, New South Wales 8am-9pm Monday-Friday - All other states 9am-6pm Saturday-Sunday - All other states Live Chat (national) Monday-Friday 8am - 9pm / Weekends and Public Holidays 10am - 3pm

General support services are also available and these may be useful if a person does not identify their experience as sexual assault or domestic and family violence.