

# Here's how you can talk to your kids about gendered violence, and seven ways to model good behavior

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Children and young people may be seeing news headlines about men murdering women or footage of people rallying to call for action.

Perhaps they or their friends have even gone to the protests.

As Australia confronts the shocking numbers of men murdering women, children and young people may have questions or want to talk about violence against women and children.

If you are a parent you may also be wondering how you can help your child develop the attitudes and skills they need to have healthy and respectful relationships throughout their lives.

While there has been consistent messaging that "we all have a role to play" when it comes to stopping violence against women, actual guidance on what parents should do can be difficult to find.

## **Talking to your kids about recent events**

If current headlines are leading your child to ask questions, it is certainly OK to answer them. In fact, this is an excellent opportunity to talk about these issues.

Be guided by the questions your child asks and keep your response simple. Young people will typically ignore anything that exceeds their current needs. But don't be afraid to ask your child about their thoughts first. It can be a useful way to know what they understand.

If your child is showing distress, reassure them the media attention is a positive thing. As a nation we are much more aware these issues are occurring, we are talking about it more openly, and we want to keep an eye on our friends and family.

Governments are funding various programs and Australians are holding them accountable. These issues will not be resolved quickly, but we are moving in the right direction.

Ask your child if they have any followup questions and remind them they can check back with you at any stage.

If you feel they are overly anxious about these events, it could be a good idea to seek professional advice from someone like a school counselor or GP.

## **How to approach gender and relationships**

There are many things parents and caregivers can do to help the children and young people in their lives develop healthy ideas about gender and relationships. Here are seven ideas:

### **1. Model respect**

One of the most important things adults can do is to model respect for others, both offline and online.

This includes respecting other people's boundaries. For example, you might seek permission before hugging someone, or ask people if it's OK to share a picture of them on social media.

Showing respect means genuinely and politely communicating with others. This should include how you speak about people, or a group of people, when they are not present.

This is particularly important as [research shows](#) young people want less fear-based messaging from adults and more practical guidance on how to have good partnerships.

### **2. Point out and talk about stereotypes**

Television shows, movies, [popular music](#) and online influencers can provide young people with unrealistic or harmful messages about gender roles, relationships, dating, [sexual activity](#) and our bodies.

Take advantage of these opportunities to instill more accurate messages. You can tell your child most relationships don't play out like a romantic comedy film or "reality" dating show. Falling in love might be easy, but staying in love often takes work and communication.

The bodies and sexual acts we might see on screens have also been heavily curated and most people don't look or act like that. Sexual activity shouldn't be violent or aggressive and both partners should enjoy the process equally.

Discuss how gender norms and stereotypes are problematic for everyone, no matter our gender. They create unhelpful expectations about how we are supposed to look, feel and act and can pressure us to conform to certain ideals. For example, boys can and should express their emotions. They don't have to love football or want a six pack.

Encourage your child to dress, play, study and engage in activities that bring them joy with less concern for what society might "expect" them to do.

### **3. Teach your child to stick up for themselves and others**

Talk to your children about [how to respond](#) to sexist or inappropriate behavior that might happen to them or to others.

There are [various ways](#) to approach this. You might encourage them to speak up and challenge the behavior, to use their body language to show

they don't approve of what is happening, or at least redirect everyone's focus onto something else.

They might also be able to ask a third party to get involved and help intervene.

Sometimes, there isn't much you can do in the moment, or it might not be safe to directly involve yourself. The best thing to do in these moments is to at least check in afterwards with the person who has been harassed to make sure they're OK.

#### **4. Don't have different messages for boys and girls**

Try not to have different messages for boys or girls. Partly, this is because many [young people today](#) see themselves as something other than male or female, but more importantly we want everyone to receive the same key information and to develop the same skills.

#### **5. Avoid lectures and look for everyday opportunities to chat**

Your conversations don't need to be lengthy sermons. Drip feed your thoughts and little bits of information throughout your everyday activities.

For example, you could share your thoughts about a news report, a movie scene you're watching together, or a song on the radio.

#### **6. Provide other information**

Not all [young people](#) are big talkers, so it can be helpful to provide your child with other materials from [books and websites](#).

If, for whatever reason, a child won't listen to their parents, ensure they have a support network of other trusted adults they can rely on. This could be people like another family member, a close family friend, a school teacher or a sports coach.

## **7. Think about your own upbringing**

Parents may need to reflect upon their own backgrounds before having some of these conversations. Perhaps there was a lack of correct information, positive attitudes, or modeling of appropriate behaviors when you were growing up.

Attitudes and understanding about gender-based violence and gender relations have changed a lot in recent years.

So it can be a good idea to challenge or discount anything that is unhelpful, or impacts our ability to model or speak openly about respectful relationships.

## **More resources**

Here are some websites and podcasts with information and advice for parents on how to talk to their children about gender, sexuality, violence against women and respect.

- [Talk Soon. Talk Often](#) is a free West Australian government resource to help parents talk to children (from infancy to 18) about sex.
- [Yarning Quiet Ways](#) is a free WA government resource for Aboriginal parents and caregivers to talk about safe and healthy relationships with their kids.

- [The Conversation Guide](#) is a free federal government resource for parents to talk to their children about respect for women and gender inequality.
- [Project Ari](#) is a free podcast by the federal government's Stop it at the Start Campaign and NOVA Entertainment. It follows the story of 10-year-old Ari, "the world's first artificial intelligence prototype, as he tries to wrap his 'data brain' around the human experience". It is designed to be a funny series to teach kids about respectful behavior.
- [Sex Ed Rescue](#) has free and paid resources for parents about sex education and pornography, split into topics and ages. The site is run by sex educator Cath Hakanson.
- [Talking the Talk](#) is the website of sexual health educator Vanessa Hamilton, with free tips, scripts for talking to your children and book recommendations.
- [Doing "IT"](#) is a free podcast by Sexual Health Victoria. Every episode contains different relationships and sexuality advice for parents and caregivers. Topics vary from gender pronouns, to pornography and taking care of your body.

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