

Workplace Equality and Respect



PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Responding to disclosures

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



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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 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:

- important background information on disclosures
- tips for how to respond appropriately and sensitively when someone discloses
- suggested comments and phrases you can use
- referral information for national support services.

Increasing awareness and understanding of violence against women can result in individuals feeling more comfortable disclosing their own experiences of violence to police, response services, peers, friends, or colleagues, or those delivering prevention activities.

Individuals and organisations undertaking prevention work need to feel confident to respond safely and respectfully when someone discloses, and to provide advice to others in the workplace on how they should respond.

What is disclosure?

Disclosure is when someone reveals they have directly experienced or perpetrated violence. This may be a woman, man or child that you work with, either directly or indirectly.

The violence may be ongoing, have happened recently or occurred in the past. Sometimes the disclosure is about violence experienced by a close family member or friend, rather than someone disclosing that they have experienced violence.

Disclosure can occur in many different contexts and it is important that those undertaking prevention initiatives are able to identify and respond in an appropriate and effective manner.

How do I recognise a disclosure?

Disclosures are not always expressed in ways you would expect. Some people do not name their experiences as 'violence', 'abuse', 'rape' or 'sexual abuse', and disclosures can occur when and where you least expect them. Some people will

disclose as part of a group conversation. Others may seek you out for a one-to-one discussion.

How do I respond?

Every instance of violence and disclosure will be different and there is no one way to respond. However, there are some key things to remember to ensure the person feels supported and able to access any help and support they need.

Showing you believe a victim/survivor is an important first step in supporting them.

If someone discloses their experience of violence to you:

- Believe the person’s experience.
- Show empathy.
- Avoid judgement or blame.
- Condemn the use of violence, but not the perpetrator.
- Be open and honest, including about your skills and knowledge.
- Establish whether there is an immediate risk to the safety of the person disclosing, their children or anyone else.
- Provide options for the person to seek specialist support if required (sometimes a person just wants you to know and understand that this has occurred and is not necessarily looking for assistance).
- Enable the victim to be in control of decisions.
- Provide accurate referral information.

Sharing their experience with you is an act of trust and it is important that you maintain this trust by affirming that the victim/survivor is not to blame. Be open and honest that you are not a counsellor and do not have skills or training in dealing with disclosures of violence, but that you can provide referral information about where to get more specialised support or assistance.

It is up to the person making the disclosure to decide whether they want to act and follow up on the referral information. People who have experienced violence have often had their ability to make decisions and control taken away from them; try to enable the victim/survivor to regain control and make their own decision about what action they want to take.

What do I say?

While you can't script every conversation, it can be useful to have some key phrases in mind to express empathy, withhold judgement and show support. Here are some examples:

- *Thanks for sharing your experience with me...*
- *That sounds like a terrible experience...*
- *I imagine it has taken a lot of courage for you to share your story with me...*
- *No one should have to experience what you have been through....*
- *It is because of experiences like yours that we are involved in this work...*
- *I don't have any special training in helping people with experiences like yours but I can give you contact details for people who do...*
- *I would like to make sure you know where you can get support from trained people; can I provide you with contact details for 1800RESPECT?*
- *What you choose to do with this information is up to you, but I can provide you with contact details for a free specialist service you can contact if you need to.*
- *Do you have contact details for any specialist services? If you grab a pen and paper I can provide them to you.*
- *Are you feeling safe at the moment? You can contact the police in an emergency on 000 or 1800RESPECT for specialist information and services.*
- *I want to make sure that you are able to speak to a specialist if you need to; 1800RESPECT is the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service.*

How do I support someone who discloses perpetration of violence to me?

While a disclosure from someone about their perpetration of violence is less likely to occur, it may happen. This could relate to current or past use of violence.

The basic principles that guide how you respond to a disclosure of violence still apply:

If someone discloses they have perpetrated violence:

- Believe the person’s experience.
- Don’t minimise or justify the use of violence.
- Show empathy.
- Condemn the use of violence, but not the perpetrator.
- Be open and honest, including about your skills and knowledge.
- Provide accurate referral information.

Here are some example comments:

- *Thanks for sharing your experience with me...*
- *I imagine it has taken a lot of courage for you to share your story with me...*
- *Do you think the people around you are safe at the moment? You can contact Mensline on www.mensline.org.au or 1300 789 978 to talk about ways to keep people around you safe.*
- *Talking to me is an important first step; the next step is to talk to someone who has specialist training to assist you. I can provide you with contact details...*
- *I am concerned for the safety of the people around you and I feel like you are too. I would like you to contact www.mensline.org.au or 1300 789 978...*

Know your role

You are not expected to be a counsellor. The most important things you can do are to listen to the person, show you believe them and take the disclosure seriously.

If you are concerned for someone’s current safety then it is important to consider helping them to act, but do not force them to do so. In some instances it may be enough to simply acknowledge that they have shared their experience with you.

Serious instances that cause you to believe someone is at immediate risk should be discussed with a manager or supervisor. Most organisations that have contact with the general community and public will have policies and processes for risks to immediate safety or for child protection notifications. Make yourself aware of organisational policies and procedures and seek consultation or advice from experts if immediate safety concerns are apparent. It is important to note that exposure to these situations in prevention initiatives are rare.

You should	You should not
<i>Be supportive</i>	Provide advice
<i>Be non-judgmental</i>	Try to fix the situation
<i>Have accurate referral information</i>	Provide counselling
	Try to find out more details
	Force the person to do or tell you anything

Support for people 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/domestic violence services are different all around Australia and 1800Respect can provide accurate information about available

services in a person’s area as well as provide telephone or online support and counselling.

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

National Numbers
<p>National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling, Information and Support Service (24 hours) www.1800respect.org.au 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)</p>
<p>Lifeline (24 hours) www.lifeline.org.au or 13 11 14</p>
<p>Kidsline (24 hours) www.kidshelpline.com.au or 1800 55 1800</p>
<p>MensLine (24 hours) www.mensline.org.au or 1300 789 978</p>
<p>No To Violence www.ntv.org.au <u>Call Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491</u> Tasmania and New South Wales - Open 24/7 All other state: 8am-9pm Monday-Friday /9am-5pm Saturday-Sunday <u>Live chat (national)</u> Monday-Friday 8am -9pm / Weekends and Public Holidays 10am - 3pm</p>

Wellbeing and self-care

[Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to change the story](#) provides guidance 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.