Respectful relationships education toolkit



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Our Watch acknowledges and pays our respects to the traditional owners of the land on which our office is located, the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. As a national organisation we also acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of Country across Australia and pay our respects to elders past and present.

Acknowledgement of those involved in respectful relationships education work

Our Watch acknowledges the various organisations that have pioneered respectful relationships education in Victoria and elsewhere, particularly colleagues in the family violence and sexual assault sectors. Their efforts and advocacy have put gender-based violence prevention in schools at the forefront of prevention activity.

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Introduction



Respectful relationships education is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence.

It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence.

The respectful relationships education toolkit (the toolkit) consists of two documents:

- overview includes the evidence, background information and components of a whole-school approach to preventing gender-based violence in schools, and
- implementation steps outlines the actions to be undertaken at each stage of the implementation cycle.

Respectful relationships education is designed to be adaptable so that schools across Australia can support the implementation of a whole-of-school approach to this work. Each school is unique and will be at different stages of addressing gender-based violence and promoting respectful relationships, non-violence and gender equality. The toolkit has information to assist you at every stage.

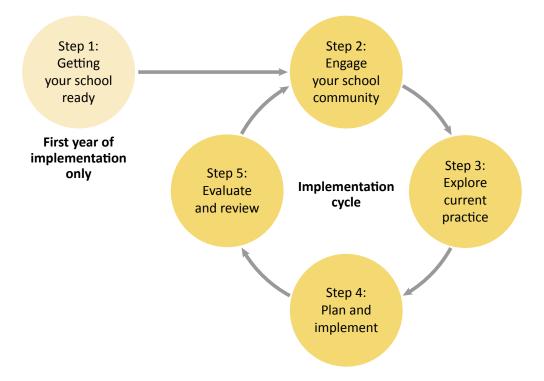
It is critical that your school leadership and staff in the respectful relationships education implementation team have a thorough understanding of the basis of respectful relationships education and are committed to seeing this work through. You need to have read the respectful relationships education toolkit overview to understand the rationale, evidence and terminology of respectful relationships education.

The implementation steps and resources have been developed to support schools in understanding, planning, implementing and sustaining a whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence by promoting gender equality and respectful relationships.

The Our Watch Respectful Relationships Education website features tools and resources to accompany this toolkit and may support the steps you take to implement respectful relationships education in your school. The resources it contains are not comprehensive nor definitive, but the current accumulation of what we know. As Our Watch, along with education departments, schools and other experts, continues to build on the evidence base, we will update the website, toolkit and its associated tools and resources.

Taking action

Every school is different. Respectful relationships education acknowledges this, providing clear implementation steps that are flexible and adaptive so that you can choose actions that are appropriate for your school. These steps, outlined in the figure below, are designed to enable continuous improvement.



This cycle will support your school to:

- build your understanding of gender-based violence and violence prevention
- evaluate where your school is at every school is at a different stage of promoting gender equality and respectful relationships
- prioritise and set goals
- implement strategies that are sustainable
- monitor activities and outcomes.

A whole-of-school approach brings together school leadership, staff, students and families to work together through this continuous improvement cycle of planning, implementing and review. We recommend your school repeat the implementation steps annually, embedding them in school processes and culture. By following this step-by-step process, you can ensure your school prioritises action that can provide real and lasting change.

Step 1: Getting your school ready

This step is designed to ensure that you have leadership commitment and resourcing to do this work and that the process is safe and supportive for your staff and students.

✓	 Step 1 objectives Understanding gender Build your school's understanding of the prevalence, impacts and key drivers of gender-based violence. Establish a respectful relationships education implementation team
	Ensure that this team is supported in its work and adequately resourced.

Building school readiness could take up to a year, depending on the size of your school and whether it is already doing work to promote a culture of equality and respect. When planning for respectful relationships education, several components need to be addressed prior to implementation.

Understanding gender

Ensuring staff, both teaching and non-teaching, across your school understand what gender is and how it relates to respectful relationships education is foundational to effective respectful relationships education.

Gender is a social construct. The characteristics of women and men, girls and boys, are shaped by the norms, roles and behaviours that are associated with each of those identities. It is vital to understand the distinction between gender and sex, which is the biological and physiological characteristics of female, male and intersex persons.

Gender can significantly impact on the power, status and resources we access and control, how we relate to each other and how we make decisions. Power is not only about how much influence we have as individuals and as groups over others – it also relates to our access to, and control of, opportunities and resources that support us to live comfortable, productive and safe lives. You will find more information on gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in the toolkit overview.

Understanding the 'gender lens'

A gender lens is used not just to see differences in people, but also differences in power.

A gender lens is a way of seeing difference in the way women and men experience the world, and recognising when, where and how this difference occurs. Diversity makes our communities stronger and allows us all to make unique contributions. However, it is critical that the 'gender lens' is used not just to see differences in people, but also differences in power and status.

We acknowledge that violence is also experienced by those whose lives and/or identities do not conform to binary definitions of sex and/or gender. Working with a gender lens means taking gender into account by acknowledging the different experiences, expectations, pressures, inequalities and needs of women, men and non-binary people. Using a gender lens when analysing, planning and making decisions means carefully and deliberately examining all the implications of our work in terms of gender.

Ensure you are operating with a gender lens by taking a gender transformative approach to this work. Gender transformative approaches seek to actively challenge and transform the current gender system through critical reflection on the attitudes, norms, structures and practices of gender that both underpin this system of inequality and help drive violence against women. Working in this way can inform actions to address inequalities arising from the different roles of people in your school, the unequal power relationships between them, and the consequences of these inequalities on their lives, health and wellbeing. Failing to apply a gender lens, or relying on our own assumptions when doing so, can reinforce existing inequities and stereotypes and contribute to a society in which men's gender-based violence continues to be perpetrated and excused.

Real life example

A female student wore short shorts on a casual clothes day and some boys in her class reported that they 'felt distracted'. The girl was pulled out of class to be told her clothing was considered inappropriate and asked to change. There was no discussion with the boys.

Stereotypes perpetuated by this response: By identifying the issue as the girl's clothing instead of the boy's behaviour, the school has sent a message that women and girls are responsible for modifying their behaviour to avoid 'distracting' or 'tempting' men and boys, and that women and girls' agency is subject to men and boys' behaviour.

Impact: When my school pulled me out of maths class because they thought my clothing was distracting the boys ... [they] demonstrated to me that my education is less valuable than that of the boys in my class. The way I felt the day I was pulled out of class, nervous and violated and insubstantial, I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

How to use a gender lens

It is helpful to think of a gender lens as a list of questions that we should routinely ask to make sure we are not being unmindful of harmful gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and inequality. These questions might include:

- How will this policy, action or approach impact on women and men or girls and boys?
 Will this impact be different for different genders?
- How will the realities of girls, boys and non-binary people impact on their ability to participate in this situation?

- What are the needs of women, men, girls, boys and non-binary people in this instance?
- Is power shared equally between females, males and non-binary people in this instance? How will this policy, action or approach impact how power is shared?
- How might the policy, activity or approach inadvertently perpetuate or actively work to
 overcome existing stereotypes and gender inequalities? Are there measures in place to
 address gender inequities and to ensure that girls and boys, women and men have equal
 opportunities, and are equally valued and respected?
- How might your own values, biases and assumptions affect your decisions? Do you have specific beliefs about women's and non-binary peoples' roles in society? Does this impact on your actions and decision making?

'Using a gender lens' tip

Consider who you and the respectful relationships education implementation team within your school represent.

- Does your team include a diverse range of ages, career stages, genders and cultural backgrounds?
- Do you have staff who are parents or primary carers?
- Will some of these policies, action and approaches impact upon those who are not represented?
- How can this be considered or accounted for during their development?

Creating and maintaining space for safe and honest communication and feedback about gender equality in the school community is necessary to understand how female, male and non-binary staff, students and parents might perceive and experience policies, actions and approaches.

Real life example

Upon return to full-time work after working part-time for a year to care for young children a man is jokingly mocked and asked if he had 'finished breastfeeding yet?'

Stereotypes perpetuated by this response: That caring for a child is an inherently female role, and that men who act as shared or primary carers must be 'women' – that is, they are seen as less 'masculine' than other men.

Impact: Criticism, ridicule and rejection are common ways that feminine and masculine norms are reinforced. This 'policing', which often occurs playfully within peer groups, sends a message that it is not acceptable to go outside the norm and that doing so is a threat to an individual's 'status' as a woman or man. This is a strong deterrent to change, both for the individual being 'policed' and those listening, and reinforces rigid gender roles.

Establishing a respectful relationships education implementation team

When starting this work, it is important to establish a respectful relationships education team to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate respectful relationships education in your school. This team will lead the work internally and should include representatives from all areas within the school community, including:

- leadership team
- · teaching staff
- non-teaching staff
- wellbeing team
- the student body.

Your school may also wish to consider including the following members to support implementation:

- families or the broader school community
- partnering with a community organisation or service

It is important that the team, and all key decision makers in the school, have a strong shared understanding of what will be expected of them, and in particular that they understand and value the whole-of-school approach. Student voice is an important part of this approach. Schools may want to consider including students on the implementation team, or setting up or using an existing student action group or committee such as a student council to confer with the respectful relationships education leadership team.

It's worth investing time and energy to help your implementation team understand that your school has the power and responsibility to promote gender equality, and that members of the team have a role to play as leaders and role models. It is also important to ensure this commitment is communicated to all staff and other members of the school community. This could be done at staff meetings, school council meetings or other school forums and events. You may also want to provide resources to staff so everyone is equipped to respond to questions, concerns and feedback.

Schools are encouraged to consider how respectful relationships education can be linked to other work within their school such as Reconciliation Action Plans, cultural safety and inclusive education initiatives. By doing so, schools can address other forms of disadvantage and privilege that intersect with gender inequality.

Making sure staff understand gender-based violence and how schools can prevent it

It's important to make sure the all teaching and non-teaching staff understand the dynamics of gender-based violence and how to prevent it. A key action to support this understanding is a professional development strategy that ensures that staff build and maintain a strong shared understanding of the issues to address and key steps to take.

Step 1: Getting your school ready

Ensuring your school can respond to disclosures of violence

Gender-based violence is prevalent. For young people and adults alike, being supported appropriately when disclosing an experience of violence can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and recovery. All staff should receive ongoing professional learning on appropriately responding to disclosures of violence, harassment or discrimination and be made aware of processes to refer students or colleagues for further support.

It is important that you consider what policies and practices need to be in place to support staff and students experiencing violence, such as paid family violence leave and appropriate referral processes to victims' services. In developing internal policies and processes for responding to disclosures, utilise appropriate department of education or professional guidance for policies and local women's organisations or services responding to violence against women.

Background resources for Step 1

- The issue page on the Our Watch website
- Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia
- Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children
- Respectful relationships education as part of a national approach to preventing gender-based violence: A brief for policy makers
- Respectful relationships education in schools: Evidence paper



Visit <u>Our Watch's Respectful Relationships Education website</u> to access tools and resources that will support you to implement respectful relationships education in your school, from the classroom to the staffroom and in the wider community.

Step 2: Engage your school community

Communication with all staff and gathering evidence from the wider school community ensures a genuine whole-of-school approach is taken to successfully embed respectful relationships education in your school.

gender equality	
Establish pathways for students to contribute to this workPublicly communicate your commitment to respectful relationships education.	•

The whole-of-school approach

A whole-of-school approach is the most critical aspect for the success of respectful relationships education in your school. While classroom activity targeted at students is important, respectful relationships education needs to address all six elements of a whole-of-school approach as outlined below:



For respectful relationships education to effectively address the key drivers of gender-based violence, gender equality and respect need to be embedded throughout the school using a whole-of-school approach, considering:

- the social, physical, cultural and spiritual environment of the school
- the school's policies and procedures
- families and community partners and organisations that can support the school community.

Classroom learning will only change attitudes and behaviour when the core concepts of respect, equality, gender, power and consent are reinforced and modelled across the whole school community.

Engaging staff

A genuine whole-of-school approach requires that all staff understand the importance of promoting gender equality and respectful relationships. All staff need to be supported to build a culture where gender stereotypes are challenged and gender equality is actively promoted and modelled, in and out of the classroom. It is important to note that staff start with different perceptions, experiences, history and levels of support. Resistance and backlash are normal experiences in change processes – when things change, many people's response is to push back because they feel uncertain or threatened, or disagree with the change being proposed. If you're leading initiatives in your workplace to prevent violence against women, thinking about backlash as part of your planning¹ will help you reduce risk, increase engagement and make progress.

The best approach to increasing staff understanding will depend on your school structure and culture, but consider some of the following methods:

- providing an on-site, ongoing program of professional learning, either internally or externally facilitated
- including communications in staff bulletins and sharing information and resources on the staff intranet
- displaying informative posters in staff areas
- using video clips or recent news items to prompt discussion among staff about gender equality and/or gender-based violence.

Engaging students

Meaningful and active engagement with students is vital, valuing students' perceptions of their environment, what changes they envision for their school and giving them tools to shape their own experiences within the school environment. There may be opportunities to involve students in planning through informing and consulting with the wider student body through any leadership or council processes that exist. Students are often strong advocates for this work and can have significant influence and impact on gender equality in both their school and social settings.

When schools value the voices, thoughts and opinions of students, actively promote their engagement and see it as crucial to whole-of-school change, that change will be more effective.

Engaging families

Parents, caregivers and families have important roles to play in supporting your school's work to promote gender equality and respectful relationships. While this toolkit can support you in developing your whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education, it's important to make sure what is developed and implemented is based on the experience of your whole school community. Creating opportunities for discussion with, and feedback from, parents, caregivers and families is essential for ensuring your action plan is tailored and sustainable. Surveys are an effective way to get valuable insight into families' awareness, understanding and support of prevention of gender-based violence work.

As with planning for this work with your staff, consider how other members of your community might resist the changes you are trying to implement in your school. Planning for obstacles to your changes will give you opportunities to explore and counter resistance from members of your community.²

Addressing unconscious bias

We all perceive situations and make decisions based on our own background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes and cultural context.

This can be true for organisations as well as individuals, so it is important to recognise potential areas of unconscious bias or assumptions about the way others experience the school environment. Unhelpful stereotypes, unconscious bias and a lack of role models can act as barriers to gender equality, even in a predominantly female workplace.

Whole-of-school approach and unconscious bias

An effective whole-of-school approach relies on grounding priority actions and key messages in an understanding of the different perceptions, experiences, history and levels of support of students, staff and families. Creating opportunities for regular feedback from staff and students is an important way to uncover our unconscious bias in areas of potential inequality.



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Step 2: Engage your school community

Step 3: Explore current practice

To effectively implement change, you need to gather data on your school's current state and undertake a self-assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

	Step 3 objectives
۲	Consult with the whole school community about their expectations and experiences of gender equality at the school.
	 Use this data to form the baseline assessment of your school's current activity and capacity for change.

An effective whole-of-school approach relies on building your action plan and messages with a deep understanding of the different perceptions, experiences, histories and levels of support of students, staff and families. Every school begins this work from a different starting point.

Completing school self-assessments

The <u>school self-assessment – staff</u> allows you to capture valuable insights into how staff perceive your school, not just as a school but as a community hub and workplace. It is recommended that all staff have the opportunity to participate in this assessment so that you are capturing a true representation of staff thoughts and opinions. If this is not possible, the respectful relationships education implementation team should complete the assessment and report the findings to all staff. You will revisit this tool in the next step, to complete an action plan based on your findings.

The <u>school self-assessment – student</u> is an example of how your school can access students' unique thoughts and opinions on the school culture and environment. This tool was created for grade 5 and 6 cohorts and will help to create targeted actions and strategies in the implementation step of this process. Use the guidance information in the document to assist with planning and adapting this tool for your student cohort.

Both staff and student self-assessment tools reflect the whole-of-school approach. Together, they will provide crucial information about how all aspects of your school is perceived and experienced and may identify priority components of the whole-of-school approach for future improvement. If prevention work does not adequately consider gendered experiences and impacts, or is not inclusive and accessible, then your work is unlikely to achieve its objectives.

The tools can be used as both as baseline assessment of your school's current activity and capacity for change and as tools to guide planning actions. Gathering this data is important because this gives you a point to measure improvement from.

Step 4: Plan and implement

Based on your school assessments from Step 3, you will form a plan of action, such as setting milestones, dedicating resources and creating achievable timelines.

✓	Step 4 objectives ☐ Identify priority actions from the data gathered in Steps 2 and 3. ☐ Develop an implementation plan to map out priority actions across the school year and assign resources and responsibility to ensure accountability. ☐ Communicate your priority actions and implementation plan to the
	wider school community.

Developing an implementation plan

After completing your school's <u>self-assessments</u>, you will be able to map out your priorities over the six components of the whole-of-school approach. These priority actions can then be used to develop an implementation plan. You'll find that many actions in your plan will support each other. It is also important to consider short- and longer-term actions – don't commit to do everything in the first term!

There's a broad range of actions your school can take, including developing or reviewing key policies for staff and students, mainstreaming the promotion of gender equality across different learning areas, and communicating regularly with the school community.

Before agreeing on your school's priority actions, it is important to ask:

- Do these actions response to the feedback and evidence gathered from members of the school community?
- Do these actions equally address the needs of staff and students?
- Are these actions likely to help us create sustainable cultural change in our school?
- Do these actions align with the goals and strategies in our school's strategic plan or other overarching planning documents?
- Are these actions feasible right now? Do we have the knowledge, resources and support systems to undertake these actions?



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Step 4: Plan and implement

Step 5: Evaluate and review

Evaluation is a vital part of respectful relationships education that should be considered throughout planning, implementation and reviewing.

✓	Step 5 objectives
	Ensure that the respectful relationships education implementation team recognises the importance of integrating evaluation and monitoring throughout the annual cycle of implementation.
	 Build your and your school's understanding of the essential elements of evaluation and the ethics of conducting evaluations.
	Maintain accountability by reporting on your school's progress of implementing changes to the wider school community.

Evaluation data can provide valuable information on how your approach is benefitting different members of your school community, identify your successes, and inform decisions on how to improve your approach. Any school-based primary prevention strategy should be continually reviewed and updated to ensure it reflects the needs and practices of young people, staff and the wider school community.

How can you collect data?

Within your school there are already a range of tools that can support you in evaluating your action. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods generally works well for evaluating respectful relationships educations. Methods can include staff and student surveys, audits, interviews, focus groups, and collecting school data such as staffing and leadership demographics. It is important to consider inclusivity and accessibility in data collection tools and processes, to manage barriers to participation.

Evaluation indicators for respectful relationships education in schools can include:

- Availability and application of policies relating to harassment, violence and bullying.
- Gender and other demographic make-up of leadership teams.
- Staff confidence in teaching respectful relationships.
- Staff and student attitudes towards gender and gender equality, such as opinions about what careers women, men and non-binary people can pursue, or what activities girls and boys can engage in.
- Participation of male family members in school activities.

Tracking your progress

Using the same data collection tools at the beginning and end of each annual cycle allows you to compare results over time, which is important for monitoring both student outcomes and shifts in staff perceptions and experiences in their workplace. The <u>monitoring tools</u> listed from **Step 3: Exploring current practice** can be used to help you track your school's progress.

Setting achievement milestones and measures

As part of your planning process, it is important that achievement milestones (changes in practices or behaviours you are trying to achieve) and measures (data or information collected to measure this change) are determined so that you can the evaluate and review whether there have been positive changes as a result of your engagement in RRE.

Example

Achievement milestone: Increase in staff confidence to deliver respectful relationships teaching and learning materials

Measure: Survey of staff pre and post professional learning (qualitative method)

How quickly will things change?

Changes in attitudes, norms, structures and behaviours occur slowly and you should not anticipate a dramatic shift as soon as your school begins to implement respectful relationships education – this change is usually gradual. It is therefore advisable to measure attitudinal change no more frequently than at six-month intervals, and behaviour change on a yearly basis.

Remember that cultural change takes time and cannot always be measured in spaces of time. This is why it is important to monitor and observe all changes across the school using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Using findings and sharing feedback with your school community

Evaluation is at its best when it's a participatory process and sharing findings can be a useful tool for engaging everyone, making them feel heard and included in the process. This is particularly important for those students, staff, families and other community members who have participated in surveys. Sharing findings with them builds awareness of the whole-of-school approach, assures participants that their contribution is taken seriously, and reinforces that school leaders are committed to action.

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Checklist for best practice evaluation

These items have been drafted on the basis of scholarly literature and Our Watch's own evaluation experience. (Note: these represent best practice, so it's rare that we see all items demonstrated in one evaluation.)

- Use of established tools for measurement
- Pre-test/post-test design ideally, the same survey respondents would participate on both occasions.
- Program logic or theory of change may be an appropriate methodology to map out long-term goals, acknowledge assumptions and encourage collaboration by all relevant members of your community
- Attitudinal assessment of impact on the gendered drivers of violence against women in your community
- Use of mixed methods quantitative methods tell us how much and for whom, qualitative methods tells us why.
- Measurement and documenting of the impact context, including other intersecting forms of discrimination/privilege, advantage/disadvantage.
- Measure of fidelity (did we do what we said we would do?).
- Longitudinal follow-up, to measure the sustainability of changes.
- Inclusion of feedback loops make sure the evaluation participants (participating members of your school community) hear about the results.
- Translation, publication and promotion of findings to advance the primary prevention evidence base.

Ethics of conducting evaluation

There are a number of important standards for conducting evaluations, including ethical requirements. Any school staff member undertaking or commissioning evaluation should be familiar with the appropriate guidelines and allow time for ethical approval in project plans. Relevant guidelines include:

- Australian Evaluation Society (2013), Guidelines for the ethical conduct of evaluations
- National Health and Medical Research Council (2014), Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities.

What will you do with your findings?

Before commencing any form of evaluation or research, the school needs to have a plan for sharing findings. This toolkit supports schools to undertake their own internal evaluation and plan for the ongoing improvement of respectful relationships in their school community. Any research communicated externally, outside the school, may require additional approvals.

Whose approval is required to conduct the evaluation?

Contact the education department relevant to your school for advice. You may need their approval to communicate the evaluation findings outside the school.

Who will have access to the data?

It is strongly advised that schools ensure all information collected is de-identified to remove any information that could identify participants, and is stored securely.

How will you ensure anonymity?

All evaluation activities that you conduct, particularly on sensitive topics such as gender-based violence and school culture, should maintain participant anonymity. This is for ethical reasons and to ensure that the responses from the school community are recorded honestly, without concern that participants will be identifiable. In practical terms, you should:

- conduct surveys online, anonymously distributed via a secure provider such as Survey Monkey
- ensure internet protocol (IP) and email addresses of online participants are not recorded
- ensure participants' names are not recorded
- remove identifiable information (for example, if a participant mentions the names of other individuals or their role at the school) prior to data storage.

How will you ensure participants have voluntarily consented?

Participation in any form of data collection should be voluntary and all staff and students must be given the opportunity to opt out of an evaluation activity if they do not wish to participate. It is important that participants receive a written, plain language explanation of the purpose(s) of the evaluation activity and how the findings will be used.

Background resources for Step 5

- Respectful relationships education in schools: Evidence paper
- Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence: Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools
- Respectful relationships education as part of a national approach to preventing gender-based violence: A brief for policy makers
- Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia
- Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children
- Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring
- Our Watch Prevention Handbook website



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Endnotes

- Our Watch. (2017). Workplace Equality and Respect Practice Guide: Dealing with backlash. Melbourne: Our Watch. https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/practice-guidance-dealing-with-backlash
- VicHealth. (2018). (En)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.
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