

# **Preventing violence against women: teaching children about respect**

## **25 Nov - International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

Prevention of violence against women starts with early role-modelling and talking to children about respectful relationships and positive attitudes towards girls and women. You play a vital part in helping your children develop respectful attitudes. That's because you are your child's most important role model. Although children take in beliefs and attitudes from the world around them, what you do and say guides your child's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs in the short and long term. This means that talking to your child about respectful relationships and attitudes towards women and girls from an early age can help shape your child's attitudes and behaviour throughout life.

Violence against women, gender equality and respectful relationships can be tough topics to talk about with your child. It's often best to use everyday activities and events to teach your child to treat everyone with respect, and to expect respect from others.

Teaching children that violence is never OK. It's important for your child to know that any type of violence – verbal, physical or emotional – is never OK. Here are some everyday ways that you can help your child understand this idea:

- Teach your child how to recognise aggression and violence – for example, bullying, teasing and name-calling in the playground are forms of verbal violence. Hitting, pushing, punching and smacking others are forms of physical violence.
- Let your child know that she doesn't have to tolerate violent or aggressive behaviour from friends or classmates. Teach your child to say, 'Stop – I don't like it'.
- Never excuse rough or violent behaviour by saying things like 'Boys will be boys' or 'He didn't mean to hurt you'.

- Show your child how to resolve conflicts using words and problem-solving skills. And let your child see you using words and problem-solving to sort out conflicts.

- Praise your child when you see them using words and skills to sort out problems. For example, 'It's great how you stayed calm and walked away when you were feeling really angry. You didn't take your anger out by hitting. Well done!'

- Don't tolerate sexist jokes from friends or family members. A sexist joke is a statement or story that tries to make people laugh by putting women down or suggesting that women aren't as smart or good as men. If someone makes a joke like this in front of your child, it's OK to call it out.

- Teach your child that everyone can do and be what they want to be. Point out examples of men and women in 'non-traditional' roles and activities. Examples might be women playing cricket, rugby and AFL, and men working in midwifery or child care.

- Avoid gendered roles in your family relationships and domestic chores. This helps your children learn that they don't have to do things just because they're girls or boys. For example, if you live in a different-sex relationship, make sure your children see both of you cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, mowing the lawn, taking the rubbish out, changing nappies and so on.

- Tune in to the way your child and other people talk about girls and women. For example, saying that someone 'runs like a girl' or is 'strong for a girl' is disrespectful because it suggests that girls aren't physically strong and skilled. You could make a joke of it – for example, 'Yep, she runs like a girl – try and keep up' or 'She's not strong for a girl – she's just strong'.

- Be aware of your own language, and avoid saying things like 'Don't act like a girl' or 'Man up' to boys. These statements reinforce unhelpful messages about how boys and girls should feel and behave.

- Consider choosing gender-neutral toys and dress-ups for your children. For example, you might choose teddy bears rather than baby dolls or encourage children of both genders to dress up as astronauts or prime ministers.