

Step 1:

Getting Started



Step 1 includes:

- understanding the importance of the whole school approach
- creating a team and confirming commitment to action
- providing student and staff disclosure support
- completing a school public commitment statement ([Template A](#))

If you or someone you know needs support or information, call the National Sexual Assault Domestic Family Violence Counselling Line on 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit <http://www.1800respect.org.au>



Education and Training

Step 1: Getting started

It's natural that each school will be at a different stage in addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality and respect among staff and students. Before you start this important work it is critical that you have a thorough understanding of Respectful Relationships Education and are committed to seeing this work through. Read the overview section of this Toolkit to understand key concepts and terminology.

Understanding the importance of the whole school approach

When doing this work in your school it is important to recognise the school as more than a space for young people to learn. As illustrated in Figure 1, the school is an important hub in the community and has the opportunity to lead, influence and contribute to healthy community culture. It is also a workplace where all staff deserve to feel respected, safe and valued and to be treated equally regardless of their gender, when thinking of who will benefit from Respectful Relationships Education, it is not just your students, but your staff, families and the wider school community.

Figure 1: Our school is a workplace, education institution and a community hub



Creating a team

Before you start this work, it is important to establish a Respectful Relationships Education leadership team in your school to drive the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education. The group generally includes the principal, assistant principal(s), wellbeing leaders and key teachers who are delivering the Respectful Relationships curriculum in classrooms. In many cases, a team may already be established to run programs across the school, such as the leadership or wellbeing team.

It is important to ensure that this team, and all key decision makers in your school, have a strong shared understanding of what will be expected of them in Respectful Relationships Education, and in particular that they understand what will be expected in the whole school approach. Student voice is an important part of a whole school approach. You may want to consider including students on this group, or setting up or using an existing student committee such as the school student council, to feed into the Respectful Relationships Education leadership team.

This team will be involved in – and committed to – identifying, leading and resourcing actions to promote gender equality and implement respectful relationships across the school community.

This responsibility means:

- supporting staff in the delivery of the Respectful Relationships curriculum and releasing selected staff for professional learning
- making time to brief and build the understanding of all school staff on gender-based violence and the importance of Respectful Relationships Education
- creating mechanisms for staff feedback on gender equality in the workplace
- undertaking a school gender equality assessment to highlight areas of need
- identifying actions to promote gender equality across the school community.

Committing to action

It is important to ensure key stakeholders and leaders in your school have a strong shared understanding of what the whole school approach is and what will be expected of them while implementing Respectful Relationships Education.

It is also important to ensure this commitment is communicated to all staff and other members of the school community. One means of doing this is to prepare a School Public Commitment Statement such as that found at Template A (An editable version of the template can be downloaded here). Discussing this commitment and displaying it somewhere prominent within the school can be a great way to ensure that the whole school community are aware of the commitment made by your school.

Providing student and staff disclosure support

Before undertaking this work you will need to think about what support might be required for your students and staff, in particular those who disclose witnessing, experiencing or perpetrating violence.

We know that gender-based violence is prevalent and that 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. Often people will choose to disclose their experience of violence to someone they trust and feel they can confide in, a colleague, a teacher and a principal can be the first person someone might tell. Especially when they know that their school has taken a leadership role in this area. Keep in mind, that the person who people will confide in may not always be the designated wellbeing staff member or teacher who is trained to deliver Respectful Relationships curriculum.

In line with the 'do no harm' approach to primary prevention, all staff should receive professional learning on appropriately responding to disclosures of violence or discrimination and be made aware of processes to refer students and fellow staff for further support. In developing internal policies and processes for responding to disclosures, you can look to your department of education for policies and professional guidance and beyond that look to your local women's organisation or response service. You will find more information about this throughout the toolkit, including in Step 3 Understanding where you are at.

Suggested actions for Step 1

- Build your and your school's understanding of the prevalence, impacts and key drivers of gender-based violence.
- Establish a Respectful Relationships Education Leadership team which will lead your whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.
- Ensure that this team is supported in its work and adequately resourced.
- Publicly communicate your commitment to Respectful Relationships Education using the School Public Commitment Statement (Template A).

Support resources for Step 1

- Our Watch: Understanding Violence
- Our Watch: Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia – various resources including report, video, infographic and implementation guide
- Our Watch: Evidence Paper: Respectful Relationships in Schools

Step 1 Checklist

You have completed Step 1 and are ready for Step 2 if you have:

- ✓ Developed a strong shared understanding among key staff and leaders of the drivers of gender-based violence and the core elements of Respectful Relationships Education.
- ✓ Ensured key staff and leaders are committed to the whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education and understand how they contribute.
- ✓ Set up your Respectful Relationships Education leadership team.
- ✓ Signed and displayed your School Public Commitment Statement.
- ✓ Ensured key staff and leaders are committed to building a school culture that promotes gender equality among both staff and students.
- ✓ Considered what you need to do to prepare for implementing Respectful Relationships Education at your school.
- ✓ Started to think about how you will communicate your commitment to your whole school community.

Step 2:

Talking to your staff
and community



[Download a Word version of this document here](#)

Template A: School Public Commitment Statement

School Public Commitment Statement

<SCHOOL NAME> is committed to implementing a whole school approach to Respectful Relationships Education.

We recognise that our school is more than a place for young people to learn. Our school is a workplace where all staff deserve to feel respected, safe and valued. Schools, like ours, are also important hubs in the community and we have the opportunity to lead, influence and contribute to healthy community culture.

As part of this commitment:

- Our principal will actively promote gender equality and speak out against gender-based violence.
- Our school will provide:
 - professional learning for leadership staff for the planning and implementation of the whole school approach to promote respectful relationships and gender equality
 - professional learning for teachers delivering Respectful Relationships curriculum in the classroom
 - professional learning for all school staff on gender equality, the prevention of gender-based violence and Respectful Relationships Education.
- Our school will undertake a thorough assessment and planning process to identify gaps and limitations in existing culture, policies and practices in gender equality.
- Our school will create mechanisms for staff feedback on gender equality in the workplace.
- Our school will identify, resource and implement key actions to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence.
- Our school will engage with external experts for advice and support in promoting gender equality and respectful relationships among staff and students.
- Our school will build partnerships with expert family violence services to increase school capacity to respond to students and staff who experience, witness or perpetrate gender-based violence.
- Our school commits to continual improvement and evaluation of Respectful Relationships Education.

Signed:
(Principal)

Date:

Glossary

A bystander is someone who sees or hears about an act of sexism, harassment, discrimination or any other form of inappropriate behaviour. People who witness inappropriate behaviour, but aren't involved in an incident (either as an instigator or a target), are increasingly recognised as having the potential to be powerful allies in challenging sexist or discriminatory behaviours and attitudes.

Drivers are the underlying causes that are required to create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life, but which must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.⁴ See also family violence.

Emotional/psychological violence can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.⁵

Family violence is a broader term than domestic violence, as it refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members.⁶ This includes for example, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents. Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful.⁷ In Indigenous communities, family violence is often the preferred term as it encapsulates the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships, as well as intergenerational issues.⁸

Gender refers to the socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defines masculinity and femininity.⁹ Gender expectations vary between cultures and can change over time.¹⁰

Gender-based violence is usually used to explain violence against women, referring to violence that is specifically 'directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately'. However it is also useful to explain other forms of violence, in recognition that rigid, binary and hierarchical constructions of gender, sex and sexuality are also a driver of violence against people whose experience and/or identity does not conform to such binary definitions, including members of the lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer and intersex communities.¹¹ In Respectful Relationships Education, the term gender-based violence is often used as it is considered to better encompass the experiences of girls and young women than 'domestic violence' or 'violence against women'. The term encompasses the various forms of violence that girls and young women experience, such as dating violence, sexting and revenge porn, and is also inclusive and extends to violence experienced by the lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer and intersex communities.

Gender equality¹² involves equality of opportunity and equality of results. It includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between women and men and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality. It is about recognising diversity and disadvantage to ensure equal outcomes for all¹³ and therefore often requires women-specific programs and policies to end existing inequalities.

Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of rights, responsibilities and resources between women and men according to their respective needs.

Gender identity is a person's deeply held internal and individual sense of their gender¹⁴ in how they define themselves in relation to masculine and feminine characteristics.

Gender inequality is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity and value afforded to women and men in a society due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.

Gender roles are the functions and responsibilities¹⁵ expected to be fulfilled by women and men, girls and boys within a given society.

Gender stereotyping is a form of sexism. Gender stereotypes are simplistic assumptions about the behaviours, attributes, skills, differences and roles of women and men. These attributes are often perceived as natural or innate but are more often the result of women and men being socialised in different ways. Gender stereotypes can be positive, for example 'women are naturally caring and nurturing' or negative, for example 'men can't communicate their emotions very well', but they are usually incorrect and based on generalised assumptions about how we believe people will act, what people are good at or what people will like and dislike, simply because of their gender.

Gender transformative approaches move beyond 'gender blind' or 'gender specific' approaches to encourage critical awareness of, and explicitly challenge, harmful gender roles, practices and norms, and shift the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men.

Gendered drivers are the specific elements or expressions of gender inequality that are most strongly linked to violence against women. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life. The gendered drivers are the underlying causes required to create the necessary conditions in which violence against women occurs. They must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

Gendered norms consist of a set of dominant beliefs and rules of conduct which are determined by a society or social group in relation to the types of roles, interests, behaviours and contributions expected from girls and boys, women and men.

Gendered practices are the everyday practices, processes and behaviours undertaken at an individual/relationship level, organisational/institutional and societal level that reinforce and perpetuate gendered norms and structures.

Gendered structures are the laws and systemic mechanisms that organise and reinforce an unequal distribution of economic, social and political power and resources between women and men.

Intimate partner violence is any behaviour by a man or a woman within an intimate relationship (including current or past marriages, domestic partnerships, familial relations, or people who share accommodation) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to those in the relationship. This is the most common form of violence against women.¹⁶

Respectful relationships refer to relationships among intimate, romantic or dating partners characterised by non-violence, equality, mutual respect and consideration and trust.

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 as workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender based violence and to create a future free from such violence.

Settings are environments in which people live, work, learn, socialise and play.

Sex refers to the biological and physical characteristics used to define humans as female or male.

Sex discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than a person of the opposite sex would be treated in the same or similar circumstances. Direct discrimination (for example women and men doing the same job but receiving different pay) and indirect discrimination (for example a policy requirement that all managers must work full time) are both illegal in Australia.

Sexism is discrimination based on gender, and the attitudes, stereotypes and cultural elements that promote this discrimination.¹⁷

Sexual harassment is unwelcome or unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which could be expected to make a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. Sexual harassment can be obvious or subtle, direct or indirect, physical or verbal, repeated or one off, and can be perpetrated by both women and men against people of the same or opposite sex. Men are most likely to perpetrate sexual harassment against both women and other men, and women are most likely to be the victims of sexual harassment.

Sexual violence is sexual activity that happens where consent is not obtained or freely given. It occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, sexual harassment and intimidation, forced marriage, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape.

Social norms are rules of conduct and models of behaviour expected by a society or social group. They are grounded in the customs, traditions and value systems that develop over time in a society or social group.¹⁸

Socio-ecological model is a feature of public health and is used to demonstrate how violence is a product of multiple, interacting components and social factors.¹⁹ The model conceptualises how the

drivers of violence manifest across the personal, community and social level and illustrates the value of implementing multiple mutually-reinforcing strategies across these levels.

Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life.²⁰ This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience, including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, financial and others, that are gender-based. See also gender-based violence.

Violence prevention refers in Respectful Relationships Education to the primary prevention of gender-based violence. Primary prevention focuses on stopping gender-based violence before it occurs, rather than intervening once an incident has already happened. Primary prevention involves working with whole communities to address the attitudes, behaviours, norms and practices that drive gender-based violence.

Whole School approach refers in Respectful Relationships Education to providing students with multiple exposure to key messages across the curriculum and in different areas of the school and community. It involves engaging not just students, but school staff and the wider school community in the process of cultural change. For example, school staff, including non-teaching staff, might undergo professional learning and development around the drivers of gender-based violence and their role in prevention.

- ¹ Morgan, A. and Chadwick, H. (2009) *Key issues in domestic violence*, Summary paper, no. 7, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/1-10/07.html>.
- ² Council of Australian Governments (2011) *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022*, p. 1, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>.
- ³ Morgan, A. and Chadwick, H. (2009). See note 4
- ⁴ Australian Law Reform Commission [ALRC] and New South Wales Law Reform Commission [NSWLRC] (2010) *Family violence: a national legal response: Final report, volume 1*, ALRC Report 114/NSWLRC Report 128, ALRC and NSWLRC, Sydney, p. 17, http://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/ALRC114_WholeReport.pdf.
- ⁵ Stanley, J., Tomison, A.M. and Pocock, J. (2003) *Child abuse and neglect in Indigenous Australian communities*, Child abuse prevention issues no. 19, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues19/issues19.pdf>.
- ⁶ Australian Women's Health Network (2014) *Health and the primary prevention of violence against women position paper 2014*, http://www.gasgasgas.com.au/AWHN/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/172_AWHNHealthandThePrimaryPreventionofViolenceAgainstWomen2014.pdf.
- ⁷ World Health Organization (2015) *Gender*, Factsheet No. 403, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs403/en/>.

- ⁸ Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015). *Change the story: a shared framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. OurWatch, Melbourne, Australia. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/0aa0109b-6b03-43f2-85fe-a9f5ec92ae4e/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children-AA-new.pdf>
- ⁹ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, opened for signature 1 March 1980, 1249 UNTS 13 (entered into force 3 September 1981) <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No 25, on Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on Temporary Special Measures [3]-[14] [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20(English).pdf), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 47th session, UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/28 (16 December 2010) ('General Recommendation 28'); Report on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Thirtieth Session <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Recommendations.aspx>.
- ¹⁰ Australian Women's Health Network (2014). See note 6.
- ¹¹ Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) *Resilient individuals: Sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex rights*, National Consultation Report, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/SOGII%20Rights%20Report%202015_Web_Version.pdf.
- ¹² World Health Organization (2015). See note 7
- ¹³ World Health Organization and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2010) *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: Taking action and generating evidence*, World Health Organization, Geneva, <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564007/en/>.
- ¹⁴ Australian Women's Health Network (2014). See note 6.
- ¹⁵ VicHealth (2007) *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/preventing-violence-before-it-occurs>.
- ¹⁶ Wall, L. (2013) *Issues in evaluation of complex social change programs for sexual assault prevention*, Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, <http://www3.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/issue/i14/i14.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ This definition derives from United Nations (1993) *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>, and in turn is used in Council of Australian Governments (2011) *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>.

Alternative text for Figures

Alternative text for Figure 1: Our school is a workplace, education institution and a community hub

Figure 1 depicts a venn diagram with three overlapping spheres which represent the three key roles of a school in relation to respectful relationships education. The first of these roles is as a workplace; where all staff should feel equally respected, safe and valued and have equal opportunities, regardless of gender. The second role is as a community hub; and influential voice in the school and wider community that can promote gender equality and respectful relationships, and the third role is as an education institution; a safe space where young people can learn about gender equality and respectful relationships, in and out of the classroom.

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