

Putting the
prevention
of violence against
women

into practice:

How to Change the story

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 past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledges.

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Building on a history of Australian women's leadership in primary prevention

Good prevention strategies already exist across Australia and signs of progress are emerging. This Handbook builds on the valuable work by individuals and organisations in many sectors. Our Watch would like to acknowledge the numerous women and women's organisations across Australia that pioneered the work in the prevention of violence against women, in particular our colleagues in the women's health, gender equality, family violence and sexual assault sectors. We would also like to acknowledge the important leadership and work of women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in working to end violence against women across Australia. Their collective leadership, commitment, efforts and advocacy – which are underpinned by a feminist, social justice and human rights approach – have put the primary prevention of violence against women at the forefront of the national agenda in ending violence against women. This has provided an important basis upon which this work can continue.

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Section 4: What knowledge, skills and attributes are needed to do prevention work?

In this section you will find:

- different levels of practitioner skill and knowledge
- an overview of the skills, knowledge and attributes required for prevention work
- guidance for male practitioners.

With the right skills and knowledge, anyone can undertake work to prevent violence against women. Practitioners may have prevention as part or all of their work focus and they may work in range of settings or contexts.

As detailed in Section 1, prevention practitioners are people undertaking activities (or practice) that address one or more of the essential actions that will prevent violence against women:

- challenge condoning of violence against women
- promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships
- foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys
- promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.

Prevention work is a new and emerging field of work and therefore it requires creativity and innovation. This handbook sets out a way to translate and understand [Change the story](#)⁴² in practice, but it is not the only way. We can only begin to imagine the possibilities for prevention work, particularly in settings where work has barely begun.

There will be practitioners who have extensive experience and knowledge of prevention work. These experts and specialists are essential to continue to lead prevention practice and provide guidance for others. There will also be people who have little knowledge of the underlying drivers of violence against women and may not have considered the gendered nature of violence, but from attending a training session or reading an article have developed an interest and desire to learn and do more. Wherever you fit and regardless of your previous experience, prevention work is something you can do. Prevention work can be the sole focus of your job or it can be a smaller component you integrate into your core tasks. There is a role for everyone.

Section 5 describes the key principle and approaches that are fundamental to and effective practice and that all prevention work should adhere to. Throughout the Handbook there is guidance and tips based on consultations with experienced practitioners and evidence that can support and assist in prevention work.

Knowledge, skills and attributes required for prevention work

As prevention practice continues to emerge as a field of work, our understanding of the knowledge, skills and attributes required to do this work is also growing. The following provides a brief and preliminary overview of the knowledge and types of skills and attributes required to undertake prevention work. You can use this to recognise those you already have and the ones that you may need to work on further.

Knowledge

This is your theoretical understanding of the issue. This can be gained from reading *Change the story* and this Handbook and having a clear understanding the drivers of violence and the essential actions to prevent violence against women, other research and resources related to preventing violence against women (referred to throughout this Handbook) and from your own experiences working in prevention. Such knowledge can have profound impacts on the way you work as a prevention practitioner. For example, the evidence demonstrates that the change required for prevention does not come about from working with individuals alone, but requires work at the community, organisational, institutional and societal level. This radically affects the way we design our programs and initiatives.

Skills

These can be developed and built over time and are what you need to put your knowledge and understanding into practice. While formal qualifications are still in development, key skills required include being able to communicate ideas about prevention and to work with others to put prevention into practice. Another important skill is reflective practice, discussed in Section 5.

Attributes

General qualities or characteristics define the sort of person you are. While we often think of attributes as central to our sense of identity, this does not mean they cannot be strengthened or even changed as we gain new life experiences and knowledge. Key attributes in prevention work can include determination, positivity, resilience, creativity, innovation, an inclusive approach and collaboration. Other key attributes include a commitment to gender equality and social justice, and a willingness to work from the evidence that gender inequality is at the core of violence against women, which can sometimes be personally challenging. When undertaking work in prevention, remember that you can 'bring people in' who have the knowledge or skills that you may not yet have to assist your initiative. This can provide an opportunity to learn from them as well as strengthen the work as a whole.



A number of skills and attributes needed for practitioners working in the prevention of violence against women field have been identified by advanced practitioners who attended a [VicHealth community of practice forum on managing difficult conversations](#).⁴³ They suggest some ideas you can use these ideas to ‘add light rather than heat’ to your conversations:

- *Keep perspective: it’s a process* – understand that you are engaged in a social change process, influencing change over time. Each conversation is just one part of that bigger process. Allow time for individual conversations and for relationships to develop. This helps avert ‘desperate’ conversations.
- *Be present in the conversation* – use self awareness, mindfulness and active listening to focus on what is happening now in this conversation.
- *Be open versus dualistic* – rather than always having your end point in mind and trying to ‘ram it home’, come into the conversation with openness. Look for common ground and values that align.
- *Gauge readiness* – know your audience and meet people where they are at.
- *Preparedness* – do your homework. Do you know the background and context of this situation? Do you have the data or influential examples you need for this meeting or forum? What issues are you likely to come across? Do you have a repertoire of questions? Plan your conversations.
- *Develop the craft* – the skill of creating effective conversations is a craft that is honed over time. You can get better at it by practising the skills, techniques and self-reflection required.
- *Take up your authority* – you understand the issues, you know the research, you have the experience, so have the confidence to take up your authority to be in this space and do the work you do.
- *Self-reflection* – reflect on your practice and the assumptions you bring to your work.
- *Reconnect with what drives us* – take time to reconnect with the vision and your own convictions about the importance of this work. Take time to nurture yourself so that you can work sustainably.
- *Respect* – practice what you preach. Endeavour to hold the person in positive regard. Respect that people come from different starting points and acknowledge that engaging with prevention of violence against women can mean changing identity, behaviour and privilege. It’s an integrity issue that we work with respect in relationships, given that’s what we are promoting.

Engaging male practitioners

Currently the vast majority of practitioners are women. This in part reflects the history of work to prevent violence against women in Australia, the types of industries that practitioners have been drawn from and is itself indicative of the gendered nature of many occupations.



As prevention practice grows and innovates, increasing the number of male practitioners is an important goal. Given much of violence prevention work involves challenging and reframing existing expressions of masculinity, there are particular ways that men can engage in these conversations that will support effective prevention. Male practitioners have opportunities to model different ways of expressing masculinity and to bring a personal perspective into conversations with other men about the ways in which men are socialised into particular and limiting expressions of masculinity.

The prevention of violence against women is an issue for men and boys. Jackson Katz, an American violence against women educator, argues that men have a clear role in challenging one another and showing leadership in this area (which he presents in a [TED talk](#)⁴⁴). Violence prevention work also benefits men and boys through promoting healthier attitudes to masculinity. Tony Porter, an American educator and violence against women activist, shares his story in a [TED talk](#)⁴⁵ in which he encourages men to break free of the violence supportive ‘man box’ in which many boys were raised (see Section 2 for more on the negative impacts that rigid gender norms and stereotypes can have for men).

While all practitioners need to understand and be aware of how gendered power and privilege plays out across multiple levels of our society, male practitioners need to be particularly sensitive about how being a man benefits them in their work and their daily life. This awareness is particularly important for male practitioners directly interacting with participants, such as when facilitating a group. They need to be mindful of the potential for such conversations to reinforce male power and privilege in unintended ways. The low numbers of men working as prevention practitioners means male practitioners often ‘stand out from the crowd’ simply for being men. Maintaining a reflective practice and encouraging feedback from colleagues and peers are useful ways for male practitioners to improve their practice.

All prevention work must model gender equality and inclusivity in practice. Male practitioners need to consider how they hold a privileged position over female colleagues and the community they are working with. It is important not to unintentionally replicate gender inequality and power imbalances, and to maintain and acknowledge women’s leadership in the sector.

Men who are interested in becoming part of the prevention workforce are encouraged to think about ways in which they can be accountable to women and to ensure that their commitment to reflective practice is strong.

Practitioner self-care

Self-care is important for prevention practitioners and all work should include ways to promote self-care. Being constantly exposed to stories of violence against women and discussing its impacts and costs can be overwhelming and draining, particularly if practitioners have experienced violence in their own lives.

Prevention work also requires you to question and challenge the systems, structures and beliefs that support gender inequality. Contesting the gender status quo can be met by others with resistance and disbelief. Responding to and managing opposition and resistance to naming and challenging gender inequality can and does take its toll.

Practitioner self-care includes planning and budgeting for training on vicarious trauma, fatigue and burn-out as well as providing opportunities to meet and debrief with others undertaking prevention work through debriefing sessions, communities of practice, learning circles or peer support networks.



While all practitioners need to understand and be aware of how gendered power and privilege plays out across multiple levels of our society, male practitioners need to be particularly sensitive about how being a man benefits them in their work and their daily life.

Endnotes

Endnotes

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