

FIVE THINGS MEN CAN DO TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

All men have a role to play in ending rape and violence against women, because we all live in a culture that allows such violence to continue. You can help by adopting the following strategies.

Listen

The path starts with listening. Who knows better about harassment and violence against women than the women who experience it? Ask women how the threat of being raped affects their daily lives. Ask how they think men can prevent sexual violence. Listen to men, too, and find out how sexual violence touches their lives. Read articles, essays, and books about masculinity, gender inequality, other forms of inequality, and the root causes of men's sexual violence. Understand how homophobia and other forms of discrimination contribute to the ongoing oppression of women by reinforcing rigid gender roles and stereotypes. Turn to local women's organizations for more information.

Think

Violence against women is a learned behaviour. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity, and most individual acts of men's violence are an attempt to assert control over others. The result is that women are denied basic rights that most men enjoy — the right to safety in their own homes, the ability to go out at night, a job that is free of harassment. When a woman faces the threat of violence, it usually comes from a man she knows — her boyfriend, husband, father, employer...

We live in a society in which words are often used to put women down, where calling a girl or woman a "bitch," "freak," "whore," "baby," or "dog" is common. Such language sends a message that females are less than fully human. When we see women as inferior, it becomes easier to treat them with less respect, disregard their rights, and ignore their well-being. Pop culture perpetuates our ways of thinking and reinforces our gender behaviours.

Examine your own attitudes and actions, and think about how they may perpetuate sexism and violence. Then work towards changing them. Don't be complacent because you feel you are different than men who feel they have a right to control women. Whether you like it or not, simply by being a man, you benefit from the safety that comes with male privilege.

Examples of typical sexist and abusive behavior include:

- pressuring or forcing a woman to have sex (rape, date rape)
- physically assaulting women
- taunting or whistling at women, following women around, embarrassing women in public (sexual harassment)
- controlling women by using threatening gestures, speaking over women, blocking doorways, driving recklessly (intimidation)
- verbally assaulting women by name-calling, swearing, mocking, criticizing, accusing, and trivializing them (psychological abuse)

Learn to identify violence and harassment in your school, workplace, and family so that you can oppose it. Consider whether messages about manhood like “don’t take no for an answer” play a role in creating unhealthy and unsafe relationships. Define your own manhood and become a positive role model.

Speak

Sexist jokes and language create a climate in which forms of violence and abuse are acceptable. Words that degrade women reflect a society that has historically placed women in a second-class position. When a friend makes a joke about sexual violence, say you don’t find it funny. Intervene with men who engage in such violence. When you read an article that blames a rape survivor for being assaulted, write a letter to the editor. Choose your words carefully, and give priority to women’s voices. But never remain silent on the subject of violence and harassment.

Sexual violence sometimes goes hand in hand with false assumptions and a lack of communication. Learn effective and respectful sexual communication — state your desires clearly, listen to your partner, and ask when the situation is unclear. Understand the importance of mutual consent, and how the ability to consent to sex can be impaired by drugs and alcohol. If someone with whom you’re intimate is unable to give consent, wait until you are both ready to say yes.

Support

Around the world, dedicated women have created support services for survivors of men’s violence: safe houses, rape crisis centres, counselling services, legal aid clinics, advocacy groups. Women escaping violent situations depend on these services. They deserve men’s support and financial backing.

Support political candidates and parties that are committed to full social, economic, and political equality for women. Support increased funding for women’s organizations and anti-violence initiatives. Support curriculum change at every level of the educational system to address sexism and sexual violence. Volunteer in outreach centres and advocacy groups, wherever men are needed to help create change. Support feminists.

Don’t fund sexism. Protest media representations of women that perpetuate violence and sexual degradation.

Participate

Organize or join a group of men in your school, workplace, or community. Work together to address sexism and violence against women.

The White Ribbon Campaign is a grassroots effort of men working to end men’s violence against women. The ribbon is a catalyst for discussion and change. It’s a visible symbol and statement that our future has no violence against women. It relies mainly on volunteers, and has spread from Canada to more than 50 countries. Visit www.whiteribbon.com for more information.

Ending violence against women is a long-term goal. Real solutions will require redressing deep-rooted and persistent inequalities between men and women, and teaching men to stop exercising power through coercion, abuse, and violence.

Prepared by:



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