



## 4. What men can do

### Ten Practical Things

The following is a list of practical things men can do<sup>1</sup>.

#### 1. Listen to women...learn from women

The path starts with listening. Who knows better about violence against women than women who experience it? Learn about violence by asking a woman who trusts you how violence has affected her life. Then, if she feels comfortable to talk, sit back and listen.

#### 2. Learn about the problem

The basic rights that most men enjoy—safety in their homes, ability to go out at night, a job free of harassment—are a source of fear for women in much of the world. The fear is greatest in women's own homes. A common myth is that most violence is committed by strangers. In fact, women are most at risk from men they know—husbands, boyfriends, fathers, relatives, employers, and caregivers

#### 3. Learn why some men are violent

Men are not naturally violent. There have been societies with little or no violence. Studies over the past century have found that half of the tribal societies studied had little or no violence against women, against children, or among men. Furthermore, even today, in many countries the majority of men are not physically violent. Violence is something that *some* men learn. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity in relationships with women, children, and other men.

#### 4. Wear A White Ribbon

Change will occur if we each accept personal responsibility to make sure it happens. As men who care about the women in our lives, we can take responsibility to help ensure that women live free from fear and violence. Each year men around the world are wearing a white ribbon from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, for one or two weeks. Wearing a white ribbon is your personal pledge never to commit violence against women.

#### 5. Challenge sexist language and jokes that degrade women

Sexist jokes and language help create a climate where forms of violence and abuse have too long been accepted. Words that degrade women reflect a society that has historically placed women in a second class position. One of the most difficult things for men is to learn to challenge other men.

#### 6. Learn to identify and oppose sexual harassment and violence in your workplace, school, and family

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual advances or sexually oriented remarks or behaviour that are unwelcome by another person. Flirting and joking are fine if they are both consensual and wanted.

#### 7. Support local women's programs

Around the world, dedicated women have created support services for women who are survivors of men's violence: safe houses for battered women, rape crisis centres, counseling services, and legal aid clinics. Women escaping violent situations depend on these services. These and other women's organisations deserve men's support and our financial backing. That's why we encourage local White Ribbon Campaigns to raise money for local women's programs.

#### 8. Examine how your own behaviour might contribute to the problem

If you've ever been physically violent against a woman, if you've committed sexual assault, if you've hit, pushed, threatened, kicked your spouse or girlfriend, then you have been part of the problem. If this happened long ago, admit what you did was wrong and make amends if possible. But if such behaviour has any chance of continuing, then you urgently need to get help getting to the root of your problem. Don't wait until it happens again. Please act today.

#### 9. Work Towards Long-Term Solutions

Ending violence against women won't happen overnight. Real solutions are truly long-term solutions. Changes in attitude, behaviour, and institutions take time. We must look at how we raise future generations. We must teach our

children, by example, that all forms of violence are unacceptable, and that for boys to become men, they do not need to control or dominate women, men, or children.

#### 10. Get involved with the White Ribbon Campaign's educational efforts

The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men's violence against women. It is a grass-roots effort, relying mainly on volunteers. Because the purpose of the campaign is for men to take responsibility for working to end men's violence against women, it is an organisation of men.

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#### Thirteen Steps Men Can Take to Prevent Sexual Violence

1. Think about the sex you have with your partner, or in one-night stands. Make sure you always have consenting sex. Don't pressure a woman into having sex. Realise that your strength, size, social role, and age are all factors that can contribute to a woman's feeling of powerlessness against your pressure for sex. Don't guilt-trip your partner, expect sex in return for buying dinner, or blackmail your partner with threats about leaving the relationship.

2. Take no for an answer. The assumption that women say "no" when they really mean "maybe" or "yes" is just that, an assumption. Do not ignore a woman if she says "no" or seems resistant in any way. If she really means "yes" then it's up to her to communicate her consent. Your partner should always have the right to say no, regardless of your previous sexual relations. And silence doesn't mean consent.

3. Talk about sex. If you are unsure what a partner wants, ask. Say what you want to do and make sure your partner wants to do it too. Discussing mutual expectations and clarifying mixed messages eliminates confusion and greatly reduces the risk of sexual assault. If you are unsure about how your partner is feeling, you could ask, "Is this comfortable?" or "Are you feeling OK about this?"

4. It's never OK to use force or coercion. Don't assume that because a woman wears a sexy dress or flirts, she wants to engage in sexual activity. Realise that women don't provoke rape by their appearance or by agreeing to go to a man's room or house. The person responsible for the rape is the person who uses force or pressure.

5. Take responsibility for your sexuality. Don't assume that if you are being sexual with a person on one level, you can automatically start being sexual on other levels. Kissing doesn't mean that intercourse comes next.

6. Avoid excessive use of alcohol or other drugs. These substances may make you aggressive and

impair your ability to think clearly or communicate effectively. Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not a defence against criminal behaviour, and rape is a criminal act.

7. Understand how sexual stereotypes influence attitudes and behaviours. Social roles and expectations may affect a man's decisions about sex. Some men feel pressured by their peers to have sexual intercourse. Men are also taught that expressing feelings is not why you want to have sex. Learning how to express your feelings directly and in non-violent ways can help you create deeper and more meaningful relationships. You don't have to prove yourself.

8. Don't engage in any form of sexual harassment, such as wolf-whistling or unwanted touching. Women aren't public property, available for our intrusions. Neither are men.

9. Develop an awareness of the cultural supports for violence against women. Inform yourself and develop the ability to recognise the myths. When you see sex without consent on TV or in a film, remind yourself that it is rape.

10. Talk to other men about sexual assault. Start by mentioning something you read, a conversation you had or something you've been thinking about.

11. Believe people when they tell you they've been raped or harassed or that they know someone who's been raped or harassed. Support what they say about it. Don't ask, "What were you wearing?"

12. Don't assume that women want or need your 'protection.' But support them if they ask, with actions such as walking a woman to her car. If a woman is walking in front of you along a dark street, give her a lot of room or cross to the other side of the road.

13. Take action if you see violence happening. Intervene or call the police—do something to stop the incident. Get involved in local efforts to end sexual assault. Wherever you work and live, on the street and in your community, do what you can to end sexual assault and harassment.

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<sup>1</sup> From *The White Ribbon Campaign: Breaking Men's Silence To End Men's Violence Statement of Principles* [www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com) viewed September 2004