

insights

Encouraging healthy attitudes towards women

by Dr Rosina McAlpine



Recent events and current statistics highlight that as a nation we have a serious problem when it comes to domestic violence. While there's no easy solution, together, we can do our part to stop violence against women. If you're a parent or guardian, you can play an important role. Disrespect towards girls can begin in childhood, and we can break the cycle when we teach our children to be respectful and caring right from the start.

As parents, we have three main jobs:

- First, to love our children and build a strong lifetime bond
- Second, to keep them safe from harm until they can do that for themselves
- Third, to teach them all the skills they need to thrive in life and to make a positive difference in the world

Life skills approach to raising children

So what life skills do children need to learn when it comes to the issue of preventing violence against girls and women? As parents, we can talk with our kids about:

- Behaving respectfully towards others
- Communicating their needs using words and without the need to hit, snatch or shout
- Managing their emotions and their behaviours so as not to 'fly off the handle'

Start the conversation about respect early

Start by responding to your child calmly when they are disrespectful to others. The following three-step communication approach can be used from early childhood through to teen years. Let's put it into practice.

If a boy is making fun of his sister or a female friend:

1. STOP: Respond calmly rather than react asking him to stop the teasing.
2. EMPATHISE: Invite your son to see the behaviour through the eyes of his sister. 'How do you think your sister/friend feels right now?'

3. EDUCATE: Provide options such as ignoring his sister or friend if she's annoying him or providing an appropriate social script he can use to communicate his thoughts such as, "I find it annoying when you don't share the computer"

It's a marathon, not a sprint

When it comes to gaining academic knowledge and learning skills, parents know it takes years of consistent effort from childhood through to adolescence. In the same way, parents can take a long-term approach to teaching life skills beginning right from toddler to teen.

Parents lead the way

Parents are powerful teachers and role models for the next generation. We can teach our children how to be respectful and kind to each other. By stopping disrespect and violence at the start we can play a crucial role in putting an end to violence against girls and women.

Resources you can use

The Stop it at the Start campaign provides parents, family members and others with information and practical resources to self-reflect, and talk to boys and girls aged 10-17 about being respectful and caring. You can find videos, guides and other resources to help you have conversations with your children at www.respect.gov.au/resources/talking-about-respect.

There is so much we can do in families to develop healthy attitudes toward women. Through modelling and teaching we can change entrenched attitudes and behaviours that will put an end to the cycle of violence against women.



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