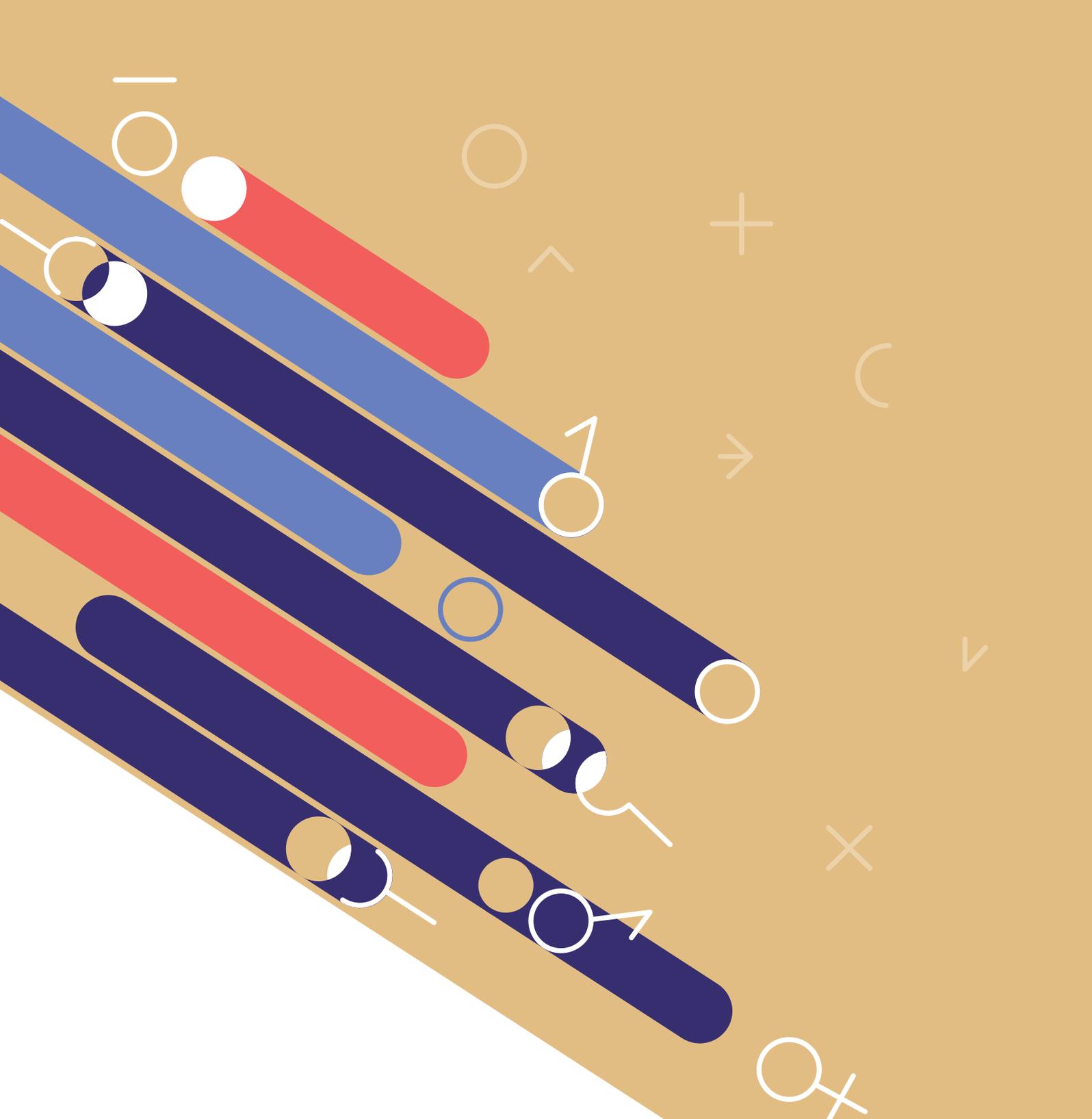


ENGAGING MEN

reducing resistance
and building support



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1: INTRODUCTION

Resistance and backlash are an inevitable part of the work of reducing men's violence against women and building gender equality. While our efforts often receive support and make change, they also often meet resistance. People push back, whether because change is threatening, they have a socialised investment in ignoring or defending the problem, or they are simply expressing sexist and violence-supportive social norms.

How can we reduce and prevent resistance and backlash, particularly in engaging men? This guide provides practical strategies for practitioners, advocates, and educators.

The guide identifies tools and tips at four levels:



Working strategically to build support



Planning an event, training, or initiative



Running an event



Taking care of ourselves and others

The guide begins by outlining what it means to work with men, emphasising a spirit of compassionate support for change. It notes that facing resistance can be personally challenging, even traumatising. It outlines key features of resistance, the typical forms it takes, and its sources. The guide then explores the strategies that practitioners and advocates can use to prevent, reduce, and respond to resistance. Practitioners' stories are used to illustrate both the challenges and the successes of working with resistance.

This guide builds on earlier work examining resistance and backlash ⁽¹⁻³⁾. The guide extends this by providing a very practical account of how practitioners and advocates can reduce and prevent resistance in our work.

2: WORKING WITH MEN

Engaging with men and boys is fundamental to preventing violence against women. Despite a rich history of academic and public advocacy, the practice of engaging with men and boys for violence prevention has only recently gained significant momentum in Australia. Men are no longer being engaged solely as perpetrators of violence but as partners for the prevention of violence against women ⁽⁴⁾.

As a result there has been a significant increase in the number of new approaches employed to engage with men in the prevention of violence. There is a growing appetite to work with men within their respective communities for violence prevention in order to leverage and access the spheres of power that men are engaged with that have been produced through patriarchy.

If prevention efforts more effectively engage with men, our programs and initiatives will achieve more effective mobilisation that will lead to greater community and attitudinal change.

A spectrum of strategies

Work engaging men in violence prevention is continuing to grow and there has been an increase in attention given to and the evidence on 'how' we engage men and 'what' we can do ⁽⁵⁻⁸⁾.

A broad spectrum of interventions can be implemented to engage with men and boys, including:



Face-to-face education



Social marketing and media interventions



Whole of school or organisation approaches



Gender equality and respectful relationships initiatives in workplaces



Work with fathers or male caregivers



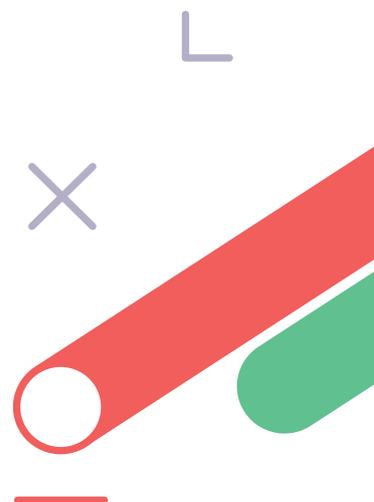
Mobilising men within communities as allies



Law and policy reforms addressing men and gender

Just as important as the 'what' is 'how' this work should be done. Recent publications have outlined a range of guiding principles and promising practices for engaging with men ^(5, 9-11).

Best practice is oriented towards transforming gender inequalities, has an intersectional lens, and works in partnership with women's and feminist organisations ⁽¹¹⁾.



Building relationships with men

One of the common pieces of advice in the 'engaging men' literature is to 'meet men where they are', being responsive to their experiences and situations, while also encouraging personal and collective change ⁽⁵⁾. We must recognise that men in the room may have witnessed or suffered violence. They may have encountered violence prevention campaigns before, for better or worse. And they may have experienced discrimination or injustice.

It is harder to engage men than women in the prevention of violence against women. Men typically have poorer understandings of domestic and sexual violence than women. They are more likely to define these narrowly, excuse the perpetrator, and blame the victim ⁽¹²⁾.

Many men agree to some extent with sexist and violence-supportive norms, overestimate other men's violence-supportive attitudes, and some have negative understandings of feminism and violence prevention ⁽⁵⁾.

So our work with men must be informed by a realistic assessment of the barriers to male engagement. At the same time, it is vital that we start from a strengths-based approach that encourages the possibility that men can be allies in this work for change (Cohen, 2005). Our work should be guided by a fundamental hope and compassion for men.

As educators we can never presume to have a full or complete understanding about our participants' journeys. Some men in the room may have grown up with violence by adults or others in their families. Some may have come to accept the experience of violence as normal, given that violence, overwhelmingly by other males, is part of the life histories of large numbers of Australian men ⁽¹³⁾.

“

MY FATHER WAS THE MOST BRUTAL MAN I HAVE EVER KNOWN

We had decided to open our project launch with a speech from a man whose sister had been subject to extreme violence by her ex-partner. He gave an impassioned speech to 20 leaders from the sporting community in the room. At the end of the evening, an elderly man approached me. He was heavy set and walked with a swagger, enveloping the space around him.

He said, *“You know, I know what he is talking about, this violence in men. My father was the most brutal man I have ever known. When I was nine, he smashed a brick into my head for not helping him out properly.”*

It was a shock to have this story shared with me so briefly and quickly on the way out after the launch. I responded with empathy about how awful that must have been, the violence in that generation. I thought to offer some further support, referral for counselling perhaps. However, before I got to say another word he shook my hand and left.

”



Men in the room may have encountered other violence prevention efforts, whether communication campaigns like the “Respect Women – Call it out” public transport initiative or widespread social movements such as #MeToo. They may have taken on new knowledge or greater sympathies to the issue in response, or they may feel blamed and defensive ^(5, 14, 15).

In any group or community, there may be men (and women) who have been subject to multiple forms of discrimination or injustice, based on social class, ethnicity, sexuality, political preference, or familial or institutional abuse. It can be difficult to promote preventing violence against women to participants that have also experienced many injustices. An intersectional approach is vital, based on recognition of the intersecting forms of injustice and privilege that shape men’s lives ⁽⁵⁾.

It can be useful to position oneself in this complexity, using a strengths based framework where we commit to working with everyone in the community, for our common right to safety and equality. Adopting a strengths based approach as well as a human rights approach ⁽¹⁶⁾ enables us to articulate that our work is for the benefit of everyone.

Pro-social norms that support everyone’s equality and safety can be encouraged. Actively and consciously positioning men as allies in this way allows us to think beyond the “us and them” lens which can often be unintentionally created by data-focused presentations that deliver statistics only on the harm experienced by women and perpetrated by men (as though we are saying “this should convince you!”).

Creating and building inclusion and respect in an education environment is vital to demonstrating the kind of culture we would like men, women and people of any gender to be able to feel comfortable in.

Supporting and enabling men as allies is also aided by an understanding of the complex environments in which men navigate their masculinity. First, on any given day, men may enact gender differently in different contexts. They may behave differently with their peers, online, at work, and with their families. That is in part because the gender norms in each context vary, shaped by institutional structures and norms, giving men different expectations and different resources to draw on demonstrating masculinity in each setting ^(17, 18).

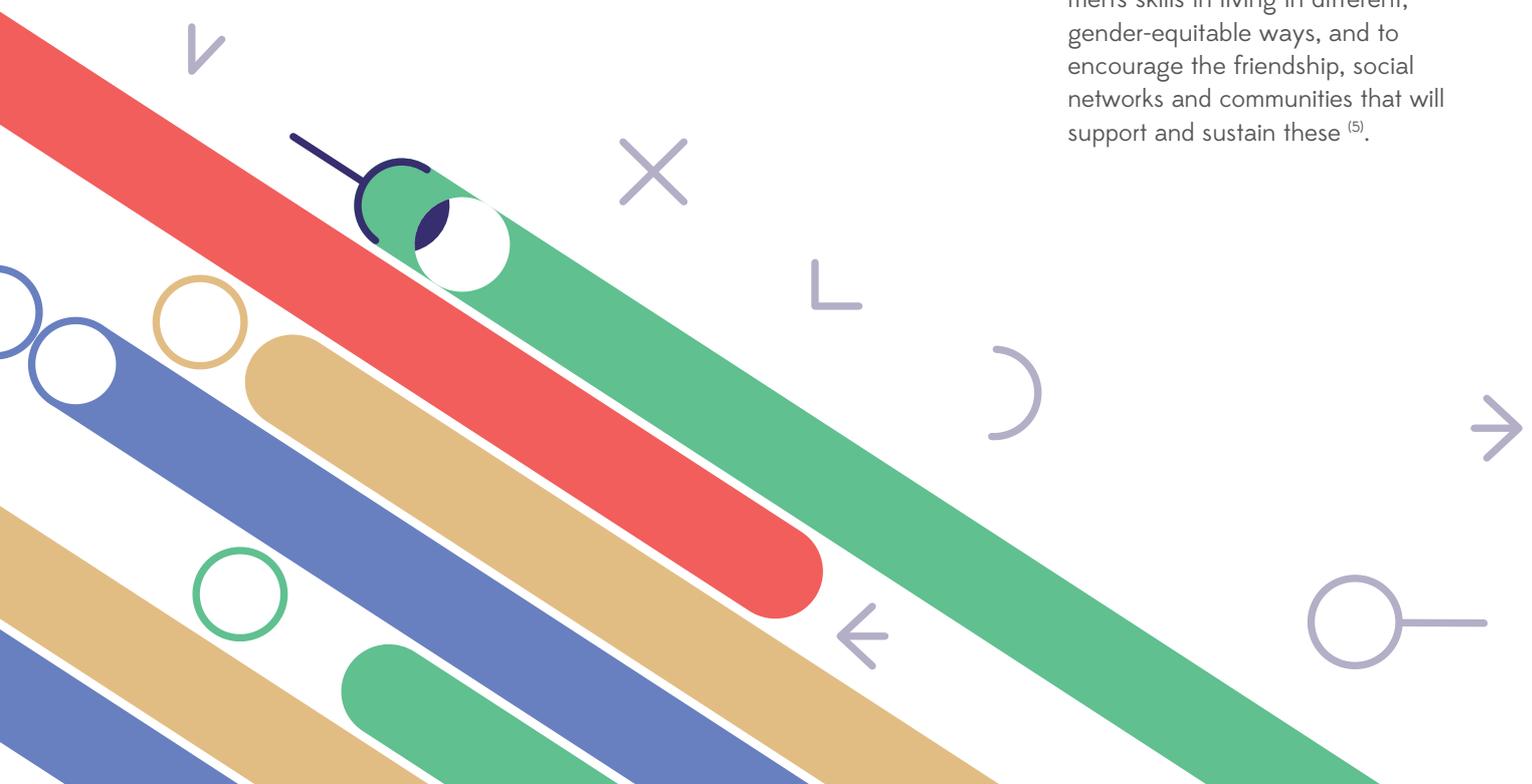
When we work with men we are inviting them to become participants in challenging social norms, to which they may not subscribe in all circumstances, e.g. “I would never say that in front of my manager at work but what does it matter if I let it go when I hear my mates say it?”

Challenging sexist peer cultures can be difficult for men because they may suffer, or be concerned about, loss of social status among male peers, intensified policing or questioning of their gender and sexualities, and criticism and mockery ⁽¹⁹⁾. They may also fear being judged for past choices they have made that do not show alignment with a new set of values prescribing respect and gender equality.

Practitioners can afford to offer a degree of understanding towards men in this circumstance. We need to urgently listen to and develop material and techniques that can enable men to more deeply and comfortably challenge sexist or misogynistic behaviours in everyday life.

To support this transition, practitioners must hold and emanate a deeply held belief within themselves that this transition is possible.

Practitioners also can strive to build men’s skills in living in different, gender-equitable ways, and to encourage the friendship, social networks and communities that will support and sustain these ⁽⁵⁾.



3: FACING RESISTANCE

What does it mean personally for practitioners to face resistance and backlash? This section explores the experience of facing resistance. The final section of the guide comes back to the personal, in exploring strategies for taking care of ourselves and each other.

It is important for practitioners to reflect on their own positions, concerns, and fears. Practitioners can undertake an internal check regarding their confidence to deliver work that engages with men and gain a sense of their own ability to respond calmly and professionally in the face of resistance, aggression or backlash.

Practitioners can use the case studies in this guide to imagine their own responses, reflecting on the following questions:

- > How would you feel if you were in the same situation? What would your first reaction be? What do you think the best way to respond is?
- > What would give you confidence to respond effectively to this situation? Could you manage it through dialogue and facilitation, or would you need further support?
- > What situations might make you feel uncomfortable and might you need support with?



NO ONE MAKES A HOME THE WAY A WOMAN DOES

Our Health Promotion team has been exploring and piloting different ways to engage men, using participatory based approaches in our local community. A men's network had been established, as a safe place for men to practice genuine and authentic relatedness, focus on wellbeing, and build gender equality and respect. I attended one of the network meetings, focused on respectful relationships with women, after it had been meeting for almost 12 months.

Right at the end of the session among the 25 or so men, an influential older man said, *“Well this all well and good but we know the fact of the matter is, no one makes a home the way a woman does.”* There seemed to be general agreement with this in the room, and the two male presenters struggled with how to respond. There was more discussion in the room emphasising that men and women are fundamentally different and therefore, fit for fundamentally different purposes. I felt it would be negligent of me not to say anything.

I stood up and talked about my experience. I introduced myself again and where I am situated in the community. I said something like, *“While I agree that there may be wonderful things we have noted about the contribution that women or men have made to our lives, for example, like your wife or partner creating a sense of homeliness in your house, stereotyping women also has negative consequences.”*

In a group centered on authentic sharing, I felt that I needed to be highly authentic myself and use the power of story in order for the audience to truly listen. I talked about how as a young girl I first was criticised for my body. I recalled the first time I was treated as truly an object. I shared how even though my parents taught me that I could do whatever I wanted, follow whatever career path I wanted, this didn't change how I was treated out in the world. I described the first time I experienced abusive behaviours in my first relationships. I tried to connect the dots for the group: using the commonness of my own lived experience as a girl and young woman to explain how constraining women or men to a stereotype is dangerous and a way of reducing women.

My sharing in this way seemed to create a real turning point in the room. A lot of the men fell silent, and later the presenters thanked me. Afterwards two men from the community did come up to me. One particularly elderly gentlemen thanked for me for sharing my story, and the other shared his story about the abuse that his sister had experienced. I felt that I was representing many other women's experiences and it was an important learning opportunity – both to challenge the prevalent view that was appearing and also to invite the men in the room to think more deeply about their own behaviour and how they may have treated women in their relationships.



4: EVERYDAY RESISTANCE: WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AND WHERE IT COMES FROM

Advocates, educators, and practitioners often encounter resistance and backlash in our violence prevention and gender equality work. Whenever there is change, whether at a micro level in people's lives or at a macro level in social systems and culture, there is pushback, an effort to keep things the way they were. When patterns of inequality and injustice shift or are challenged, individuals and groups, particularly those advantaged by the status quo, resist. So how do we define 'resistance', what forms does it take, and where does it come from?

Resistance: Key features

The term 'resistance' is used here to refer to any form of resistance towards progressive social change. Resistance is resistance to: an active pushing back against progressive programs, policies, and perspectives.

Resistance is defined by opposition, by some kind of refusal to accept or comply and by efforts to prevent or slow something. There are a range of forms of resistance, and 'backlash' refers to more aggressive and politicised forms.



Features of resistance

1

Resistance is an inevitable response to social change.

2

Resistance can be individual or collective.

3

Resistance can be informal or formal.

4

Resistance comes in part from organised backlash.

5

Resistance is diverse, contextual, and historically specific.

6

Resistance is more likely to come from the people who are advantaged by the status quo.

7

Resistance contributes to the maintenance of inequality.

“

I DON'T BELIEVE THE STATISTICS

I was invited to provide an education session on men's violence against women, to an all-male group. In the first 5 minutes of my presentation, after I had highlighted some statistics about the rates of family violence, a member of the group who introduced himself as a doctor raised his hand and stated, *"I don't believe the statistics. If these stats are real why aren't I seeing these women come into my hospital?"*

A number of other men in the room smirked and nodded in agreement. The member who had invited me asked if he could share a few words with the group. He explained that the statistics were most likely an underestimate of the problem of men's violence against women and highlighted the seriousness of this problem. This seemed to create a sense of validation within the group. I continued with the rest of the presentation and the men in the room didn't raise an objection for the remainder of the session.

– Paul Zappa, Jesuit Social Services

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Seven features of resistance are important.

Resistance is an inevitable response to social change

Wherever there is progressive social change, there will also be resistance. In particular, members of privileged groups are likely to push back against change and defend the status quo.

In a sense then, resistance can be a sign of progress, indicating that change is happening. As the activist saying goes, "If you don't catch sh*t, you ain't doing sh*t." But that doesn't mean that resistance is to be welcomed. Backlash may be successful, with progress towards gender equality halted or reversed.

Resistance can be individual or collective

At the individual level, men in an organisation may voice opposition to or undermine gender equality initiatives.

They may sit sullenly through a workshop, tear down a poster, criticise a program coordinator behind her back, or vote against a gender equality initiative at a board meeting.

Resistance may be collective too. That is the case when, for example, a group of friends or peers in a workplace or sporting club resist gender equality, an anti-feminist men's group starts a social media campaign, or a state government shuts down a diversity and inclusion initiative.

Resistance can be informal or formal

As these examples suggest, resistance may be informal, involving everyday actions by individuals or informal groups. It may be formal, involving the use of official channels and processes such as voting, complaints mechanisms, legal action, or institutional decision-making.

Resistance comes in part from organised backlash

One form of resistance is organised and self-consciously political, coming from anti-feminist "men's rights" groups and networks ⁽²²⁾. These focus on such areas as family law, domestic violence, and men's health, promoting backlash through online communities, social media, and small-scale local groups.

"Men's rights" perspectives have been adopted to some extent in some areas of mainstream service provision such as men's health ⁽²³⁾, so some seemingly mainstream men's advocates or groups also may offer anti-feminist claims.



Resistance is diverse, contextual, and historically specific

Across history, every effort at progressive social change has met resistance, whether opposition to efforts to end slavery, hold companies accountable for environmental pollution, or gain legal rights for women.

But the forms this resistance takes differ, across history, culture, and context. Resistance always is situated within, and shaped by, the character and dynamics of the context – of the particular workplace, community, or country where it is under way.

Resistance against progressive social change is more likely to come from the people who are advantaged by the status quo

People advantaged by the status quo, the existing state of affairs, tend to be the most supportive of it and the most blind to its inequities. When it comes to gender inequalities then, men are more likely than women to resist progress towards gender equality. Women too may resist progress towards gender equality, albeit less frequently than men.

Resistance contributes to the maintenance of inequality

If resistance is successful, then efforts to make progress are blocked or reversed. Patterns and structures of inequality remain in place. Voices of change are silenced. And the unfair status quo stays in place or even worsens. Gender inequality – systemic patterns of men's unfair privilege and women's disadvantage in society – is kept in place by a variety of processes, but one of these is resistance to change.



Forms of resistance

There are some typical forms that resistance takes:

Denial:

“There is no problem here.”
Denial of the problem or the legitimacy of the case for change.

Disavowal:

“It’s not my job to do something about it.” Refusal to recognise responsibility.

Inaction:

“It’s not a priority right now.”
Refusal to implement a change initiative.

Appeasement:

“Yes. Yes. We must do something (one day).” Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact.

Appropriation:

“Of course we’d appoint more women, if only they were more experienced.” Simulating change while covertly undermining it.

Co-option:

“What about men’s rights? Men are victims too, you know.” Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals for reactionary ends.

Repression:

“We tried that once and women didn’t want to take it up.” Reversing or dismantling a change initiative.

Attack:

“These feminists deserve all the abuse they get.” Aggressive, attacking responses.

Resistance thus ranges from passive blocking techniques which seek to maintain the status quo, to strategies which seek to minimise or co-opt change efforts, to active, aggressive opposition in order to restore the old order ⁽²⁴⁾. More detail on forms of resistance can be found elsewhere ⁽¹⁾.



Sources of resistance

So what are the sources of resistance and backlash?

1

Inertia and fear of change and fear of change

2

Sexist and violence-supportive attitudes – socialised sexism

> Particularly among men, but also women

3

The defence of privilege

> Men’s aggrieved entitlement

4

The denial of privilege

5

‘Post-feminist’ and neoliberal norms

“

NO WOMEN HAVE ASKED ME ABOUT STARTING A FOOTBALL CLUB

Our Health Promotion program had started working intensively with football clubs to encourage them to support senior female football teams. We encountered a wide range of attitudes, from encouragement to avoidance. I was engaging directly with club leadership: the presidents and committees. In a phone conversation with one president, although he was initially friendly, when I asked him if his club was keen to have a female football team he replied, *“Are you threatening me?”*

I was taken aback, but recognised that this was a form of resistance and actually manipulative, as he was trying to deflect the issue onto me (with an accusation of a threat) instead of addressing my question.

I took a deep breath. *“Of course I’m not threatening you, we have been talking with all the clubs and running workshops to invite them to consider starting a female football team.”*

He responded, *“No women have asked me about starting a football club.”* I knew several women from the community who had gone elsewhere to play football. I suggested that if a club doesn’t advertise and demonstrate that they are supportive of women’s football, sometimes women won’t come forward.

I emphasised this, saying *“If your club had already tried to set up a team and tried to advertise it and hadn’t got the numbers or the interest, then that would be a different story.”*

The male club leader paused, and replied, *“Well starting a female football team is a big commitment.”* I then asked if I could meet with his committee to continue the conversation and he agreed. After, feeling somewhat shaken, I debriefed with a team member and my team leader, and I resolved to seek further support if I needed it.

”

Inertia and fear of change

Any effort at change within an organisation or workplace will encounter resistance. Both individuals and organisations have inertia and habits, and any change threatens this. Social justice initiatives may bring fears of change, challenge belief systems, and threaten people’s sense that they are good and caring and competent.

Sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and norms

A key source of resistance is sexist and violence-supportive attitudes, and these are fairly common in Australian

society, particularly among men. Men’s attitudes towards gender are more conservative than women’s, their recognition of sexism is poorer, and they often overestimate the extent to which their male peers agree with sexism ^(12, 25-29).

Boys and men are socialised – in families, among peers, through media, and so on – to adopt sexist understandings of gender and to take certain forms of privilege for granted. Also, masculine social scripts inhibit men’s development of social justice attitudes and actions, because they

encourage fear and hostility towards femininity and the suppression of empathy, nurturing, and compassion ⁽³⁰⁾.

Both men and women may take on sexist social norms. Indeed, three Australian surveys find that anti-feminist beliefs are supported by substantial minorities of men and women ⁽²⁹⁾.

Resistance is more likely in contexts characterised by sexism, gender segregation, and male dominance, although practitioners can encounter resistance anywhere, including in seemingly progressive settings.

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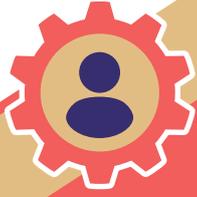
WOMEN MAKE UP RAPE STORIES

I was co-facilitating a respectful relationships education session to male students in years 9-10 as part of the Junior Top Blokes program. At one point a boy commented, *“Women make up accounts of rape to get attention. That is why no one believes rape stories because so many of them are made up.”* I saw this as a valuable teaching moment, inviting a discussion from the young man to help unpack where his ideas had come from. I had a back and forth conversation with the young man. He initially continued to repeat similar sentiments and rebut the counter points I was making.

I continued to hold the space in the room and focus on empathy and questioning during my interaction with the young man and broader group, using stories of women who had experienced a form of men’s violence to connect with him.

Eventually we moved the conversation on and continued with the rest of the session. The young man sought out both myself and my colleague after the session had ended. He sat with us and engaged in an open and honest conversation demonstrating some critical reflection on his comment and how his experiences had led to the forming of his views.

– Bianca Elmir, Top Blokes Foundation



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The defence of privilege

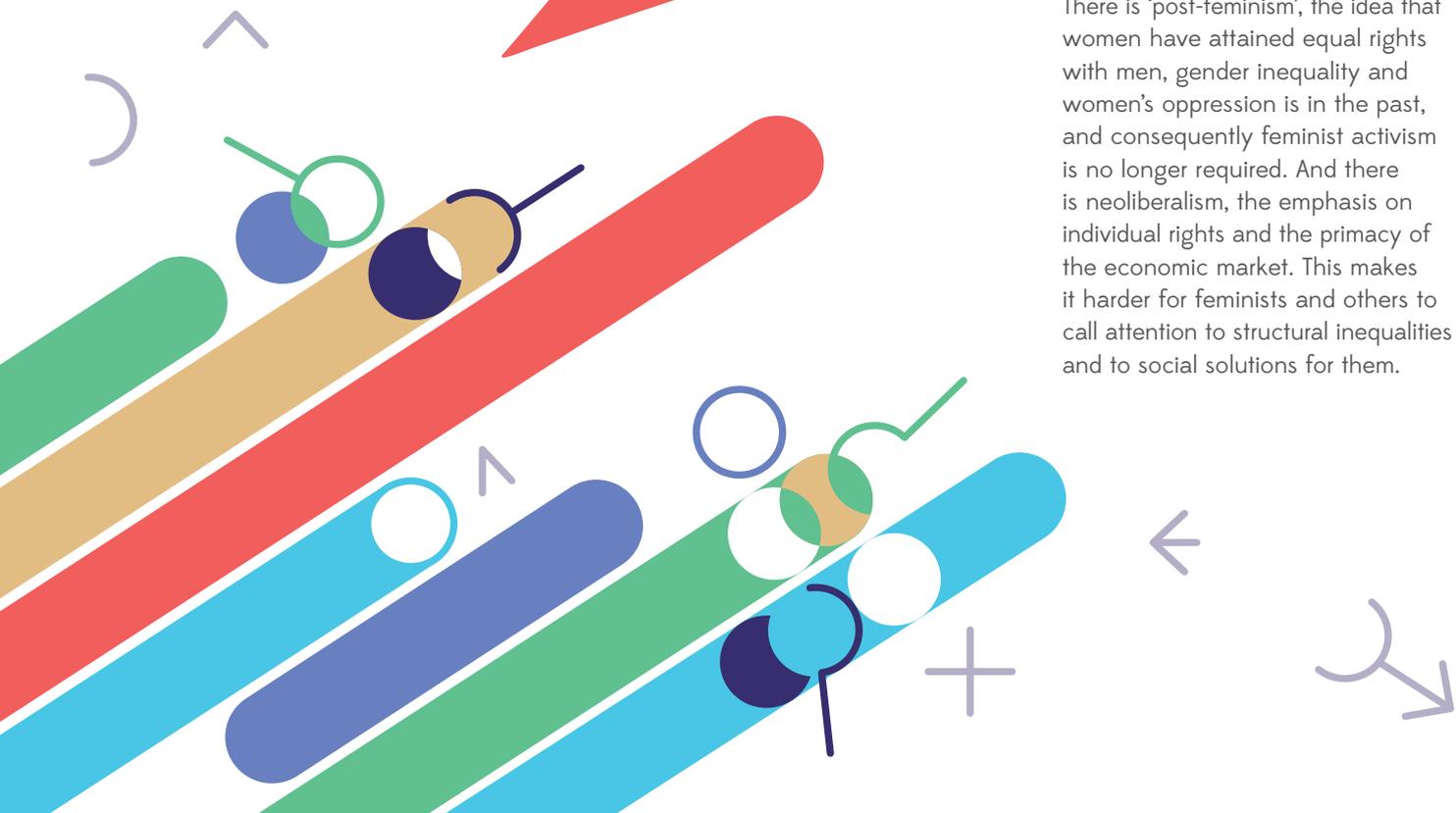
Resistance also represents a response by dominant groups who feel threatened by challenges to their privilege. Some men feel that they are losing access to things to which they feel entitled (power, jobs, deference, admiration, and so on), that loss threatens their sense of self or identity, and they seek to restore more traditional and patriarchal forms of manhood ⁽³¹⁾.

Also, when men feel that masculinity has been threatened, whether at a personal level or a social level, some react with ‘overcompensation’, demonstrating more exaggerated and stereotyped versions of masculinity ^(32, 33).

‘Post-feminist’ and neoliberal norms

Some increasingly common norms also enable resistance. There is the common idea that women and men are equally limited or oppressed by ‘gender roles’. This represents a watering down and twisting of feminism, in which attention to patriarchal inequalities is replaced by a concern with women and men as equally limited.

There is ‘post-feminism’, the idea that women have attained equal rights with men, gender inequality and women’s oppression is in the past, and consequently feminist activism is no longer required. And there is neoliberalism, the emphasis on individual rights and the primacy of the economic market. This makes it harder for feminists and others to call attention to structural inequalities and to social solutions for them.



5: PREVENTING AND REDUCING RESISTANCE

How can we prevent and reduce resistance? We have identified three groups of strategies, to do with:



a:

working
strategically



b:

planning
events, training,
or initiatives



c:

running
events



The section after then focuses on a fourth group of strategies to do with minimising the impact of resistance by taking care of ourselves and others

Make strategic use of men's settings and groups

There are many ways that prevention practitioners can work strategically to engage men in their communities.

It is ideal to engage people in prevention activities in the settings in which they live, work and play⁽³⁴⁾, and settings-based approaches are a foundation of integrated health promotion planning⁽³⁵⁾. This enables us to identify priority settings and to determine which settings may enable us to have the greatest return for our efforts or influence.

For example:

- > Where do men in your region or setting of interest play, work, live or gather? Where and how do they interact online?
- > Are there local councillors or local government staff that have shown interest and initiative in promoting gender equality? Are there male leaders that could be brought on board to consult with around how best to engage with other men in the community?
- > Are there local community groups (church, philanthropic, etc.) that have an interest in preventing family violence and have men on their boards or committees?
- > Which key settings across the community could you engage with to understand more about how different groups of men and boys are interacting, e.g. adolescents, young men, middle aged men, fathers, CALD men, GBTIQ people, men that are working, men that are retired, men who play sport?
- > What are the local sporting codes in the area? Do the local leagues or sporting clubs have a commitment to gender equality or support female inclusion? Are there existing allies there?
- > Which schools have taken a leadership role in the implementation of respectful relationships? Are there male teaching staff, community partners or leaders that have taken part in supporting conversations or projects about healthier masculinities, challenging gender stereotypes or promoting respectful relationships at the school?
- > Are there organisations or services in neighbouring towns and regions who are working with men in the prevention of violence against women space? Could you tap into their networks and learn from their experiences?

Understanding the networks, movement, preferences and demographics of men (e.g. their interests, pursuits, and membership of particular groups) is essentially a form of systems thinking that will aid in your design of strategic and effective action ⁽³⁶⁾.

Peer, family and work relationships have a significant influence on men's lives and shape the attitudes and behaviours that contribute towards violence towards women.

This understanding will also deepen your knowledge of the peer and community norms and cultures that influence patterns of masculinities in your area. A more nuanced understanding can assist practitioners to create more intuitive strategies which may have a higher likelihood of engaging men effectively and reduce backlash through co-design with male allies in the community.

Build relationships and networks with men in the community

Practitioners can immediately begin building their own network and relationships with men in the community, that could become allies in their efforts to prevent violence against women, whether local football coaches that helped set up the first girls' football team, local councillors that are advocates of gender equality in local representation, or others.

Take time with people, one to one, to share an understanding of why you are promoting respectful relationships and the impacts for both men and women, and invest in building the relationship.

Many men in our community know of women who have been affected by family violence, potentially a sister, daughter, mother or friend. These men can become allies in a public sense, as they are more deeply aware of the impacts of violence from witnessing the impact on their loved ones.

Once developed, a practitioners' professional network of men that are allies within your region can be called upon for co-design of new initiatives, advice regarding the acceptability of campaigns, and potentially as guest speakers or leaders who endorse and promote community initiatives directed towards men.



Some helpful tips for strategic action to engage men are to:

- **Leverage relationships and networks with confidence.** Every practitioner has their own history and experiences with men. Gain evidence from your own networks about how to most effectively engage with men in that sector. As you build your network, promote this network to other settings (e.g. a successful initiative engaging with male football clubs can be a useful example to how to engage with cricket or rugby clubs).
- **Use public opportunities to create a public social norm** (through media such as newspapers, radio and Facebook) endorsing men's involvement in action for gender equality, challenging violence and promoting respect.
- **Build alliances *within* and *across* settings** by identifying those actors (groups, organisations or networks) that are leading the way (through policy, commitment or initiatives). Utilise the networks, platforms or capacities that you can access through your networks (e.g. the local council) to highlight the advocates that are behaving or supporting proactive strategies within your settings (e.g. at an annual event such as White Ribbon Day, invite a local business that has actively supported women to share their story in media).

Remember that we are working in complex systems. Multi-component health promotion strategies enable us to deliver multiple approaches in one area or setting at once. The impacts of these strategies can multiply and reinforce each other, opening up new doorways and possibilities of engaging with men to prevent violence against women. As practitioners we can practice emergent, opportunistic and appreciative inquiry ⁽³⁷⁾.

For example we can ask: how could this new relationship support our work in engaging men in this region? How could this organisation work with other organisations in a mutually beneficial way? How can I celebrate the efforts of men in this group or setting to support each other and link it to work that supports healthy family relationships or challenges attitudes that degrade women?

Secure strong community buy-in and representation

These efforts will allow you to secure strong community buy-in and representation before events and campaigns ⁽³⁸⁾. Find and work with diverse allies, and bring other community leaders in as role models ⁽³⁹⁾.

Also try to secure senior community members' or leaders' support for the event. Participants will be more likely to support the initiative when there is normative support for them – when they see that their leaders and managers support it ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Having people in the community or setting who have 'got your back' makes a difference. Strive to build relationships and alliances with men in the community, as protection against backlash from other men.





Planning and framing

Do your homework on what kinds of resistance may be out there. Gather information on the character, history, and sources of resistance in the communities and contexts where you will be working ⁽³⁸⁾. You may wish to sit in on other events or training where resistance may occur, to see it in action and learn about it.

Include risk assessment in your planning, including attention to your own safety. Practitioners and supervisors can put simple strategies in place to increase workers' comfort and confidence.

These may include, for example, having two facilitators deliver community-based trainings, and when running a focus group or meeting at night, arranging for someone in your team to 'check in' and ensure you have arrived home safely.

If you know that you will be working in a setting or organisation where resistance is likely, see if you can meet with participants beforehand. Do an informal needs assessment and gather data. Talk to the people who will be involved – so that they know you, they know you're reasonable, and you have some sense of the issues involved ⁽⁴¹⁾.

You can even design and plan the sessions with some of the participants, so that they are more likely to set a positive tone, encourage engagement, and model to others that the training is relevant and collaborative ⁽⁴¹⁾.

How the event is described or framed is influential too: "Framing strategies – effective ways of articulating or communicating programs and initiatives aimed at change – are vital in reducing and preventing resistance" ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Approaches are more likely to generate resistance if they use messages that position the target community as having a particularly bad problem of domestic violence or suggesting that all members of the target audience are to blame for the problem.

Instead, efforts may use messages such as "All Australian communities have violence and we are all learning from each other," and may also seek to involve and affirm both men and women as allies and advocates ⁽³⁹⁾.

More widely, frame the issues in terms of shared principles and goals. There will be less resistance and greater buy-in if people see the work as consistent with their values and goals, appealing to commitments common among people such as democracy, fairness and equality (Goodman, 2001).

This could also include aligning with their workplace or organisations goals and values. Encourage expectations of positive outcomes from gender equality and violence prevention efforts, whether healthier interpersonal relations, improved productivity, community wellbeing, or other positive outcomes ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

“

I KNEW THIS WOULD JUST BE MAN-BASHING

We were running an evening community forum event on promoting respectful relationships, with 25 or so people. After my introductory presentation, a man at the back of the room stood up. He commented loudly to his teenage son, “*See... I told you so... I knew this would just be man-bashing,*” and then he and his son abruptly walked out. The rest of the evening went quite smoothly.

I wondered after if there was anything I could have done to engage with him – I would have preferred that he had stayed in the room and we had been able to talk.

”

Approaches are more likely to generate resistance among men if they suggest that all men are perpetrators of violence or that all men contribute to a violence-supportive culture ⁽⁵⁾. Instead, work in the men's anti-violence field suggests that efforts to engage men should begin with the positive, drawing on men's existing commitments to and involvements in non-violence ⁽⁵⁾ and highlighting their and other men's pro-social and respectful behaviour that has supported and enabled girls or women and challenged sexist norms.

This does not mean, however, neglecting men's perpetration of violence or complicity with violence or condoning sexist and violence-supportive comments and behaviour.

There are various ways to 'make the case' to men that are more likely to generate men's support and involvement and, in turn, less likely to foster resistance and defensiveness.

Detailed accounts of these can be found elsewhere ⁽⁵⁾, but one worth mentioning is to emphasise that men themselves will benefit from progress in building gender equality and ending violence against women. People from dominant groups often see social change as a win-lose situation, in which they will lose.

To diminish this, explore their self-interest in social justice and alternatives to systems of domination. Foster awareness of how men have been limited or constrained by systemic gender inequalities – while not pretending that men and women are equally oppressed – and of how it is in men's self-interest to foster progressive social change ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Highlight the harmful impacts of traditional forms of masculinity on male mental health and suicide, using these to bring wider attention to the general harms that outdated notions of masculinity have on men as well as women.

How we frame our messages about men, gender, and violence matters. Recent Australian survey research commissioned by VicHealth finds that when messages about gender are framed in anti-feminist terms, substantial proportions of the population will endorse them, and people with pre-existing conservative views will endorse them much more than others.

This is the case even if the message is intended to reject or rebut the anti-feminist content it includes. For example, messages like "Some people say there is a feminist war on men, but that's a myth" can in fact reinforce the idea of a war on men.

On the other hand, when messages about gender are framed in progressive terms, those people with pre-existing conservative views then support them as much as people with more average views on gender ⁽²⁹⁾.

Similarly, stating that "Men are not naturally violent. They have been taught to use violence" is more likely to reinforce that essentialist notion of men's natural violent dispositions.

On the other hand, simply referring to some men having been taught to use violence is unlikely to reinforce that essentialism. In short, making direct reference to anti-feminist beliefs, even if trying to rebut them, inadvertently can reinforce them. It is better, therefore, to focus on telling the progressive story, offering the feminist facts, and framing the message in desirable terms ⁽¹⁴⁾.

In working with men on issues of gender and violence, educators should be familiar with typical resistant arguments and practised at responding to them. Educators and trainers ideally are familiar with common claims such as the denial of unearned privilege, individuating (questioning being grouped into a particular cohort), and the denial of any present responsibility for ongoing discrimination ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In doing violence prevention work among men, educators ideally are familiar with typical forms of pushback: denial of the extent or seriousness of the problem of men's violence against women, emphases on women's violence against men, and so on.



In the room: Running an event



Running an event



Build a safe educational climate



Build rapport



Provide well organised training



Give opportunities for feedback



Discuss common resistant reactions



Affirm dominant group members' positive self-concepts and values



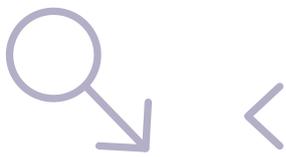
Acknowledge feelings, experiences, and views



Foster privileged group members' critical awareness of their privilege and their role in challenging it



Respond well to resistance in the room



Creating a safe, supportive, and respectful environment is key in preventing and reducing resistance during events and training⁽⁴¹⁾. We focus first on general strategies for building respect during events, before exploring how to respond to resistant behaviour.

Build a safe educational climate. Group or workshop rules are valuable here⁽⁴²⁾, and perhaps especially if developed by the group. Exploring participants' suggestions that the session be 'respectful' or 'non-judgemental' can be useful to foster more robust understandings of how to deal with disagreement. It is valuable to use exercises that acknowledge participants' feelings, such as a 'hopes and fears' exercise or other icebreakers⁽⁴¹⁾.

Building rapport is valuable. You may get to know and talk with participants before or during the event or training. If participants like or trust the educator to some degree, they are less likely to be defensive or disruptive⁽⁴¹⁾.

Poorly organised training is more likely to generate resistance. There is greater pushback when the training conditions involve unclear tasks or agenda, large groups, and inadequate facilitation e.g. of 'in the moment' interactions during the training. Resistance is reduced if the training has small groups; clarity of agenda, time, task, and space; and clear interactive norms and ongoing support⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Some people may enter the event with concerns about what will happen and what will be expected of them, including having to reveal personal matters or participate in embarrassing activities, so it is sensible to provide clear structure and expectations⁽⁴¹⁾.

Resistance often takes place when people feel that they do not have a voice. Providing opportunities for frequent feedback can help, whether through written or verbal feedback or frequent check-ins during the session⁽⁴¹⁾. And it is important too to acknowledge and respond to this feedback.



HE NEEDED TO GET A BETTER GIRLFRIEND

I was delivering a respectful relationships education session to adolescent boys at a high school. I was using the story of a young man who felt jealous of his girlfriend's social contact with other men and would control and interrupt her conversations with them.

As I was going through the story one of the boys yelled out, "*He needed to get a better girlfriend.*" I asked what he meant, and he remarked that she should not have been going around talking to other men. This provided me with an opportunity to discuss with the group what a respectful relationship looks like and what behaviours each partner has the right to engage in including speaking to whoever they like.

I reflected back to him and the group that the problem was with the boyfriend, who did not know how to process his jealousy and instead acted in controlling ways. I moved into a conversation with the whole group about the value of trust in relationships as an antidote to jealousy and how this is a form of emotional intelligence.

- Paul Zappa, Jesuit Social Services



When members of a dominant group are involved in addressing that domination - when, for example, men participate in education and training on sexism and gender inequalities - there are typical reactions they experience. These include anger, guilt, defensiveness, and sadness.

Explicitly discussing common reactions and feelings can help participants understand their responses, pre-empt resistance, and foster critical self-reflection⁽⁴¹⁾.

Positive, affirming approaches are important not only in framing the event or inviting people to attend, but in the event's content and processes. Education and training

among dominant group members at times has worsened their attitudes and behaviours. Some interventions have made men's attitudes to sexual harassment worse, increased their victim-blaming, or entrenched their pre-existing negative attitudes⁽⁴³⁾. These negative effects are more likely when training prompts a sense of threat and vulnerability⁽⁴³⁾.

Affirmation-based strategies, used carefully, can instead increase the openness of dominant group members to recognising and challenging injustice. When people's positive self-concept is supported, they are more able to sustain threats to their worldviews without becoming defensive⁽⁴¹⁾.



There are various ways to do this:

- > Highlight people from their dominant social group who have worked for social justice;
- > Invite reflection on how participants have supported equity or acted against injustice ⁽⁴¹⁾;
- > Use exercises in which people describe their (positive) core values, e.g. by writing or speaking them, doing this before more threatening processes in the session, to then challenge their own questionable attitudes or behaviours with less defensiveness ⁽⁴³⁾
- > Appeal to participants as bystanders to others' sexist or violent comments or behaviours and as allies to women.

Acknowledge feelings, experiences, and views. Ensure that participants feel heard and respected, including acknowledging their perceived experiences of mistreatment or injustice, without necessarily accepting their views or experiences as valid or real. People focused on their own pain and needs will find it harder to attend to or care about the misfortune of others ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Various teaching and learning strategies can help members of privileged groups to come to a critical awareness of this privilege and their role in challenging it. While this is not a general guide to prevention and social justice education, it is worth mentioning that these strategies also can assist in preventing and reducing resistance in particular.

Working with men on gender issues, for example, these include strategies for men to acknowledge and explore their own privilege, document gender inequalities, imagine walking in women's shoes, and listen directly to women ⁽⁵⁾.

Responding to resistance in the room

So what should we do when this resistance does occur?

First, assess the reason for resistance. Does the person behaving resistantly feel blamed, overwhelmed, are they trying to protect their self-concept, or is something else going on? You may wish then to adjust the process: "Often, we need to reestablish safety and connection, acknowledge people's feelings, affirm their sense of self, and slow the pace" ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Do not put so much energy into resistant individuals that you compromise your overall teaching or purpose. Remember too that resistant behaviour may trigger our own feelings, and particular types of resistant individuals or resistant behaviours are more likely to "hook" us ⁽⁴¹⁾.

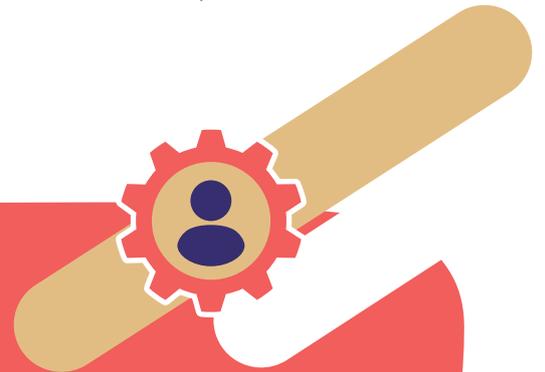


I'M ONLY HERE BECAUSE I HAVE TO BE

I was co-facilitating a 2-hour education-based bystander workshop in a workplace. As the participants entered the room, one man sat down promptly, crossed his arms and stared down towards the floor. In the introductions session, he did not introduce himself and instead remarked, *"I'm only here because I have to be."*

Later in the workshop, we invited all the participants to stand and situate themselves in the room based on whether or not they agreed or disagreed with statements read out. Every participant except this one man stood up and took part, while he remained seated looking towards the floor. My colleague invited him to participate in the activity, to which he replied *"No."*

My colleague suggested that the rest of the group would like to hear his contribution, but he responded, *"You wouldn't like what I have to say."* The man did not complete the evaluation form, and instead wrote the word "PROPAGANDA" across it.



We can acknowledge the resistant person's feelings or perspective, asking what has led them to feel this way, and move the conversation into a broader exploration. Invite other participants' views and experiences. If a person seems to be making intentionally adversarial comments, rather than debating their personal views we can explore them as commonly held viewpoints: "Some people feel that [problematic view], let's look at this issue more closely" ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Educators and trainers on violence against women inevitably receive 'curly' or challenging questions during our work.



A helpful four-part response is to:

1

Acknowledge the person's question or statement

2

Clarify their concern

3

Correct and communicate your response statement

4

Support your statement ⁽⁴⁴⁾

First, acknowledge that you have heard their question or statement, e.g. by repeating it to them. Ask open-ended questions about the nature of their concern. Respond with a strong, clear and concise statement, doing so respectfully. And reference a particular piece of supporting evidence (data, research, etc.) ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

There are various ways to contain and manage resistant and conflictual behaviour, and the choice of which to use depends in part on the level of disruption or aggression involved. When individuals persist in being disruptive or contrary, this can derail the session.



Three ways to contain the behaviour are to:

- > Acknowledge and summarise their perspective and move on;
- > Give them a time limit (e.g. two minutes) to address the issue before you move on to other topics;
- > Invite them to discuss it further outside the session ⁽⁴¹⁾.

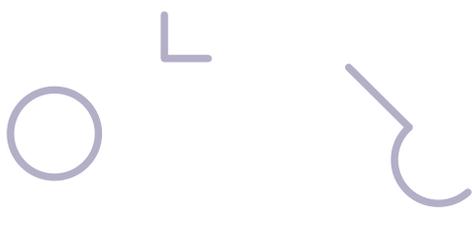
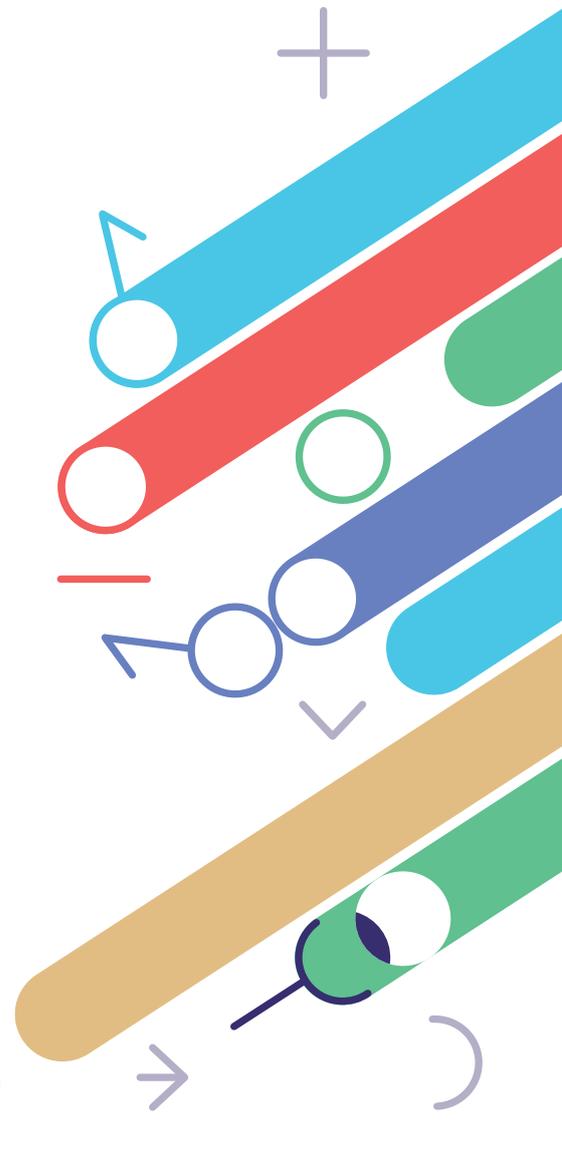
Match your responses to the resister's level of aggression. Focus on ensuring that behaviour remains reasonable, rather than telling them they are wrong or trying to shut them down ⁽⁴²⁾. As the INAR Project's videos show, there are respectful ways to manage conflict.

If a participant is angry, you can deflect this with a calm response, and use group discussion to change their viewpoint or at least show that others disagree. Do not engage with a participant's hostility, and pay less attention to them, literally turning your back to engage others.

In instances of direct hostility, remain calm, consider offering for the person to remove themselves from the session, and consider inviting the person(s) to a private meeting to hear more about their concerns ^(41, 42).

Where the whole group or most of the participants are resistant, do not try to confront them head on. 'Go with the flow', allowing the group to discuss their issues or vent their feelings and seeing if you can connect these to the intended material ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Adequate pre-intervention assessment of existing levels of resistance also makes this situation less likely. You can call a time-out: time to cool off, to breathe, or for people to reflect on how they would like to proceed ⁽⁴¹⁾.



6: SELF-CARE: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER



Building sustainable and healthy forms of advocacy is a broader way to deal with resistance. Although encounters with resistant and oppositional individuals and groups are not necessarily a key driver of burnout, having healthy practitioner lives and organisations makes it easier to weather these.

If our advocacy work is to make change, it must be sustainable. Too often, however, individuals and organisations practice social change work in ways that cause burnout: they take a physical, emotional, and interpersonal toll and cause people to abandon or reduce their advocacy ⁽⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷⁾.

Self-care is a vital part of our advocacy work: developing personal habits that nurture and sustain us and our loved ones ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Burnout-prone activists may deny their personal needs, constantly pushing themselves, putting their lives on hold until the campaign is done, and neither honouring nor respecting their selves and bodies ⁽⁴⁶⁾. They may be too attached to the success of their campaign, rather than committing themselves to the values that guide that work and having perspective on their roles ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Instead, sustainable advocacy requires self-care. Take time out, put the work aside at times, and nurture relationships. Have boundaries around your personal life, such that the demands of advocacy are neither unceasing nor ever-present ⁽⁴⁶⁾. Be honest about your values and needs and the forms of involvement that are compatible with these ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Celebrate every success. Be realistic about what you can achieve in a year and evaluate your impact based on the effort you have injected into this work. Include fun and pleasure in your activism, as this makes activism more sustainable and successful ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

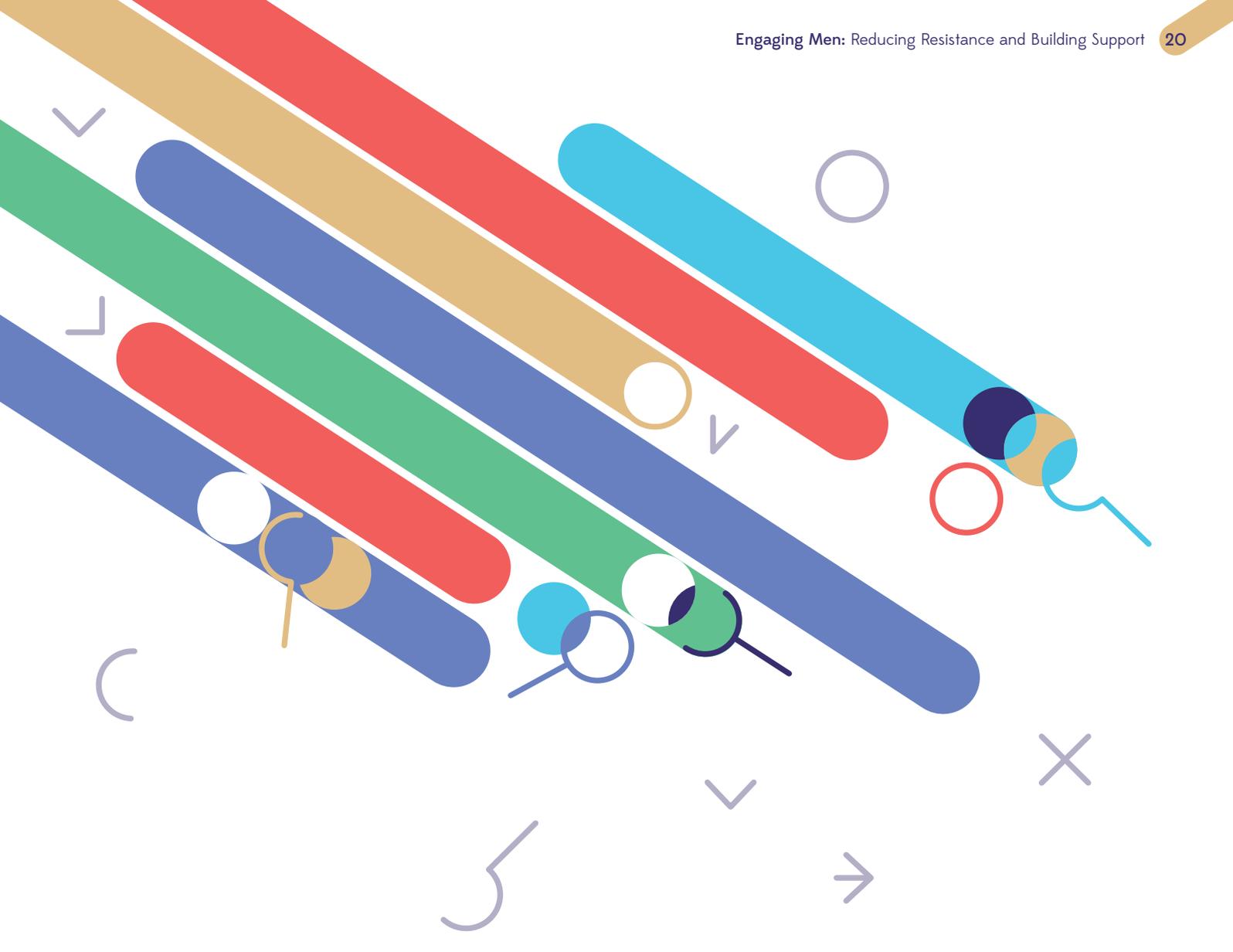
For advocates to participate over the long term in social change work, and to thrive despite individual and collective opposition to our efforts, certain attitudes or orientations are valuable. We can cultivate a measured optimism about the ability of advocacy and movement work to make social change.

Sustainable advocacy requires a vision of the world for which we strive, a realist and pragmatic but also positive worldview, and patience, courage, and humility ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Building sustainable advocacy requires organisational solutions too. Burnout is less likely if our work involves well-functioning groups that are empowering, inclusive, and nurture a sense of belonging ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Sustainable organisations have clear goals and priorities, clear expectations about people's roles, and regular review ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Like individuals, organisations should address personal needs rather than thinking that the cause is everything. Organisations should pay attention to the process, not just the tasks, cultivating healthy and equitable processes in pay and compensation, meetings, and workers' self-care ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Supportive networks and communities that foster solidarity, play, and belonging are vital.



Care and safety at work also is a legal obligation of employers. All workers regardless of their occupation have the right to a healthy and safe working environment ⁽⁴⁸⁾. This means that employers (organisations) are required to design and develop work systems that allow workers to lead productive working lives.

Before undertaking work in this space of engaging men, practitioners should be aware of their organisation's occupational health and safety policies and practices. If a practitioner feels that their organisation does not have the safety measures in place to deliver this work effectively, they should voice their concerns and enlist support from their human resource team or from other PVAW organisations who undertake similar work.

Practitioners should have access to effective supervision and emotional support whilst undertaking prevention work. Many employers will provide access to a free employee assistance program where they can debrief on any critical incidents or simply debrief on their practice experiences.

Additional to this, it is useful to source supervisors who understand community engagement and health promotion and the demands and complexities of engaging men in violence prevention.

Employers must provide staff with the necessary information, training or supervision to enable them to do their work in a way that is safe and without risk to health ⁽⁴⁸⁾. This may include professional development on preventing and reducing backlash and resistance, and on managing challenging and disruptive behaviours.

7: FINAL THOUGHTS

Engaging men in violence prevention can be a successful endeavour that is an essential component of a practitioner's violence prevention strategies. Taking a strategic approach, involving a nuanced understanding of the context, settings or community you are working with, will aid in building your effectiveness over time.

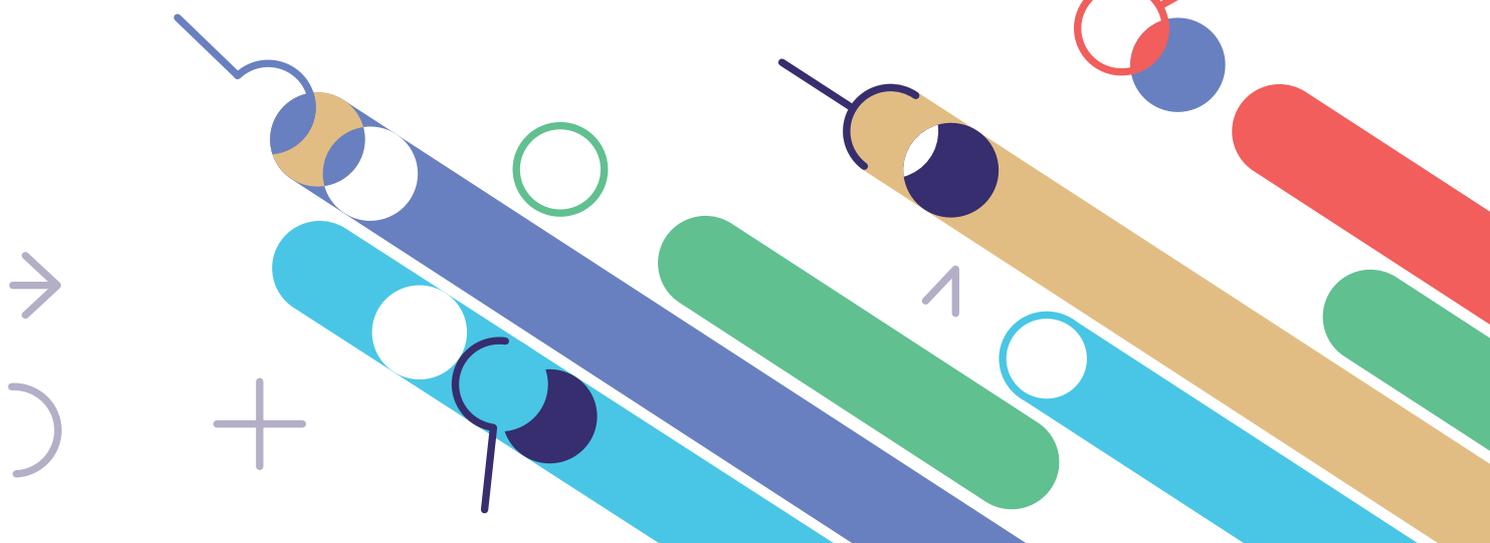
Practitioners and organisations should ensure that their workforce is appropriately supported and prepared for negotiating the terrain of resistance, providing critical opportunities for debrief, reflection and recovery. An outcome of productive work engaging with men is the opportunity to further co-design initiatives, with an alliance of men as partners in the process.

Any education event with a focus on men will have a potential for disruption and disengagement. Men in any room are likely to have a recollection or experience of either witnessing or being part of the continuation of sexist norms, attitudes or behaviours that underlie violence against women.

Prevention practitioners are faced with the creative challenge to support inclusive spaces, with relevant and engaging material that builds trust, reflection and the motivation to act. We will get nowhere if we cannot have these conversations.

We want to encourage men that are using violence to seek help. We want to prevent men that have not used violence to never use it. We want to increase men's awareness of all types of violence – not just physical, but emotional, financial, sexual, and spiritual – so that they can invest in their own commitment to practice respect. We want to challenge and support men to engage in respectful relationships throughout their lives.

Engaging men is as challenging as it is rewarding, and we hope that this guide may assist you in your professional journey to embrace resistance and address it with increasing confidence.





8: RESOURCES



Guidance in engaging men

- > Flood, M. (2018). *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention>
- > Our Watch. (2019). *Men in Focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*. Melbourne: Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/men-in-focus-unpacking-masculinities-and-engaging-men-in-the-prevention-of-violence-against-women/>
- > VicHealth. (2019). *Healthier Masculinities Framework for Gender Equality: A framework to guide health promotion action when working with men and boys*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/healthiermasculinities>
- > Wells, L., Flood, M., Boutilier, S., Goulet, S., & Dozois, E. (2020). *Supporting Best Practices: Guidelines For Funding Programs that Engage and Mobilize Men and Boys in Violence Prevention*. Alberta, Canada: Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence and Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. <https://preventdomesticviolence.ca/supporting-best-practices-guidelines-for-funding-programs-that-engage-and-mobilize-men-boys-in-violence-prevention/>

Self-care for PVAW practitioners

- > Humanity and Health in Unprecedented Times: Activities for self-care, play, and community, by the Equality Institute. <http://www.equalityinstitute.org/blog/2020/3/18/health-and-humanity-during-this-crisis>
- > Practical strategies for what you and your workplace can do to prevent and manage vicarious trauma and burnout. <https://www.thelookout.org.au/family-violence-workers/self-care-family-violence-workers/vicarious-trauma-burnout>

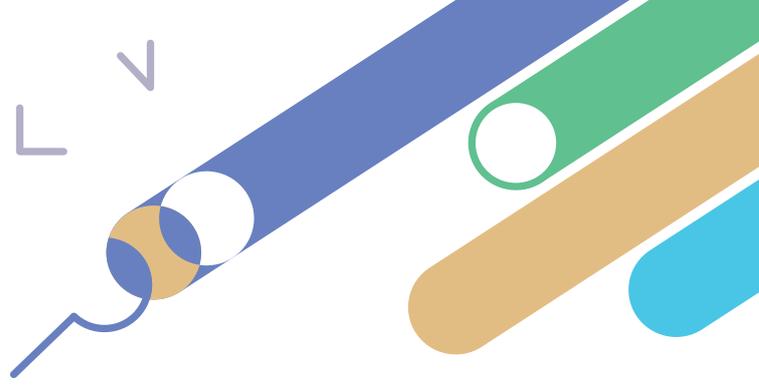
Self-care for advocates

- > A self-care guide for change-makers and peacebuilders during COVID-19: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d0d32005d7640000177b27d/t/5e9ca44339f0f40fc872e522/1587323971950/Self-Care+Guide_Change-makers+and+Peacebuilders.pdf
- > Feminist ethics of mental health care for women human rights defenders, by Lepa Mladjenovic. See pp. 67-71 of the Resource Book on Women Human Rights Defenders (2005): <http://olddoc.ishr.ch/hrdo/activities/WHRD-Resource-English-press.pdf>
- > Politicizing Self-Care and Wellbeing in Our Activism as Women Human Rights Defenders. Article by Verónica Vidal and Susan Tolmay, AWID, 2015. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/politicizing-self-care-and-wellbeing-our-activism-women-human-rights-defenders>
- > Rettig, H. (2006). *The lifelong activist: How to change the world without losing your way*: Lantern Books.

- > Ricketts, A. (2012). *The activists' handbook: a step-by-step guide to participatory democracy*: Zed Books.
- > Self-Care and Self-Defense Manual for Feminist Activists. A 128-pp manual produced by the human rights and sexual rights organisation CREA: https://www.genderit.org/sites/default/files/self-care-brochure_O.pdf
- > Shields, K., & Somerville, P. (1994). *In the tiger's mouth: An empowerment guide for social action*: New Society Publishers.
- > What's the point of revolution if we can't dance? A book on self-care in feminist activism (2007), Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights. <https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/06/WTPR-Final-Book.pdf>

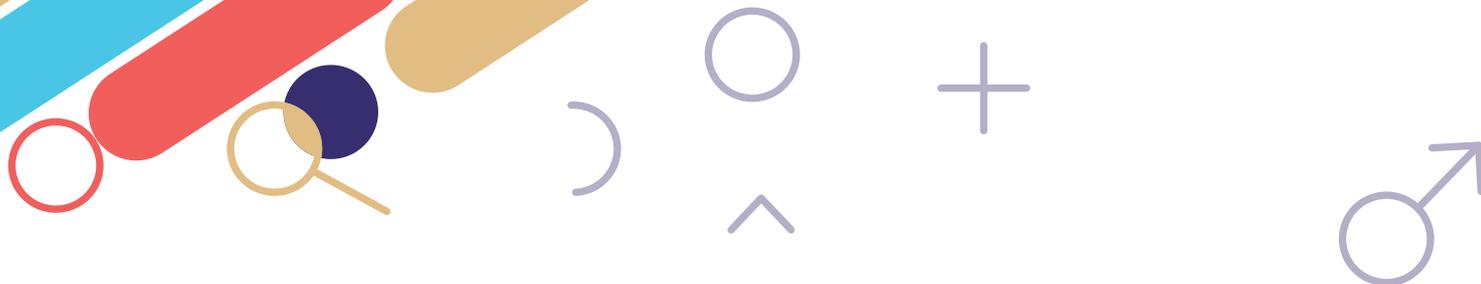
Anti-feminist backlash

- > Community Toolbox, Chapter 35: Responding to Counterattacks: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/respond-to-counterattacks>
- > Academic papers on men's rights and fathers' rights groups and networks: <https://xyonline.net/content/mens-rights-and-mras-mens-rights-activists-academic-critiques>
- > Media and accessible commentary on men's rights: <http://xyonline.net/content/mens-rights-collection-accessible-critiques>



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