

# What Every Man Can Do

## *Our Future Has No Violence Against Women*

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### **1. LISTEN TO WOMEN... LEARN FROM WOMEN**

The path starts with listening.

Who knows better about violence against women than women who experience it? Around the world, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way. Huge numbers experience sexual harassment in the workplace, at home or at school.

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. Your role isn't to challenge her on the details, nor debate whether something really should have bothered her or not. It is to listen. Simply trust that if she tells you something hurt her, then it did hurt her.

Turn to your local women's organizations. They have a wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge. Talk to them. Read their publications. Contribute financially. Learn from them.

### **2. LEARN ABOUT THE PROBLEM**

Violence against women includes physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse. Not all violence leaves visible scars. Emotional violence includes regular subjection to demeaning jokes, domineering forms of behaviour, and sexual harassment.

Some forms of violence have a greater physical or emotional impact than others. But all forms of violence contribute to the very real fear and suffering that women in our society endure. 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.

Sometimes the fear is greatest in women's own homes. A common myth is that most violence is committed by strangers. The fact is, when a woman faces violence it is usually by a man she knows – her husband, boyfriend, father, or employer.

Most men love and care about women. Yet a frightening number commit acts of violence against the women they say they love. It occurs throughout the world, among the rich, poor, and middle class, and among those of every nationality, religion, and ethnicity. While not all men use violence - we believe all men have a role and responsibility in ending it!

### **3. LEARN WHY SOME MEN ARE VIOLENT**

Men are not naturally violent. Historically there have been societies with little or no violence. Even today, in many countries, the majority of men do not use sexual or physical violence.



**WHITE RIBBON  
CAMPAIGN**

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. Many men learn to think of power as the ability to dominate and control the people and the world around them. This way of thinking makes the use of violence acceptable to many men.

Most individual acts of men's violence are an attempt to assert control over others. Paradoxically, most violent acts by men are a sign of weakness, insecurity, and lack of self-esteem combined with a capacity for physical or verbal domination and feeling that they should be superior and in control.

Some violent incidents by men can be linked to substance abuse. Using alcohol or drugs may unleash feelings, fears, rage, and insecurities that some men, cut off from their feelings cannot handle.

But substances don't cause violence. Genes don't cause violence. Ultimately, it is the attempt by some men to dominate women, or adults' attempts to dominate children, or some men's attempts to dominate other men or groups of men. Violence is a way of asserting power, privilege, and control. Violence is a way for compensating for feelings that you're not a "real man."

### **4. SUPPORT WHITE RIBBON EVENTS**

Change will occur if we each accept personal responsibility to make sure change happens. As men who care about the women in our lives, we can take steps to help ensure that women live free from fear and violence.

Each year, men around the world wear a white ribbon or take part in the events of White Ribbon Days. In many countries this is from November 25, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, until around December 10. In Canada, we wear the ribbon until December 6, the day of the 1989 massacre of 14 women in Montreal.

Wearing a white ribbon is your personal pledge to never commit violence against women. It is a personal pledge to not condone acts of violence, to not make excuses for those who use violence, and to not think that any woman "asks for it." It is a pledge to not remain silent. It is a pledge to challenge the men around us to act to end violence.

Wearing a ribbon encourages discussion, debate, and soul-searching among the men and boys around us. The ribbon is a catalyst for discussion. It is a catalyst for change.

Most importantly, the white ribbon is a positive statement that our future has no 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. By reflecting this reality they once again put women “in their place” even if that isn’t the intention.

One of the most difficult things for men is to learn to engage with other men on this issue. To question sexist language. To speak up when men talk lightly of violence against women. To intervene with men who engage in violence.

## **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 behaviours that are unwelcome by another person. Flirting and joking can be fine but only if they are consensual and wanted. Sexual harassment poisons the work or school environment. Men can join women in opposing sexual harassment by learning to spot it and learning to say something to stop it.

## **7. SUPPORT LOCAL WOMEN'S PROGRAMMES**

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, counselling services, and legal aid clinics. Women escaping violent situations depend on these services. They deserve men’s support and our financial backing. That’s why we encourage 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 forced or pushed a woman to do something sexual she didn’t want to do; if you’ve hit, pushed, threatened, kicked your spouse or girlfriend, then you’ve been part of the problem.

If this happened in the past, 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.

Most men will never be physically or sexually violent. But we all need to examine ways we might try to control women. Do we dominate conversations? Do we put them down? Do we limit their activities? Do we make the decisions?

We all must think about the choices we make. Real change starts from within.

## **9. WORK TOWARDS LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS**

Ending violence against women won’t happen overnight. Real solutions are truly long-term solutions. This is because men’s

violence against women is rooted in inequalities between men and women, and in the way men learn to be men.

Legal changes to combat men’s violence against women (such as laws against rape and battering) are very important. The police and courts must diligently enforce such laws.

But this is not enough. Let’s work together to change our attitudes and behaviour. Let’s help men be better men by getting rid of our suits of armour, that is, the attitudes which equate masculinity with the power to control. Let’s make positive changes in our relationships with women, children, and other men. Let’s involve men as caregivers and nurturers of the young.

Changes in attitude, behaviour, and institutions take time. And so we must look at how we raise future generations. We must teach our children by example so they know that using violence in personal relationships is 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 (WRC) is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men’s violence against women. The WRC is a grass-roots effort, relying mainly on volunteers. It has spread from Canada to more than fifty countries. Each country sets its own direction within the overall policies of the WRC.

The focus of the campaign in Canada is on boys and young men. But it’s also aimed at older men who need to think about what examples they are setting for their sons and daughters.

Although primarily a men’s campaign, women have been active in promoting and supporting the WRC in many communities and countries.

Aside from organizing the annual White Ribbon Days, supporters can do other things throughout the year. They can hold activities in schools, communities, and workplaces; raise money for women’s groups; organize special events to support positive roles for men, including as fathers; talk to young people about building healthy relationships; start a local White Ribbon Campaign; and financially support the work of the WRC.

We encourage you to contact us or visit [www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com) to receive information on starting up a White Ribbon effort in your community, school, workplace, or place of worship.

Please don’t hesitate. Get involved today.

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