



Engaging Men and Boys in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Discussion Guide on Messaging

This discussion guide is for organizations working with men and boys that are addressing the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) or are interested in beginning work in this area. We provide examples of approaches to developing gender-transformative messaging that organizations can refer to and utilize in their work.

Communicating Equality for Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a Canadian initiative to address root causes by focusing on primary prevention. Worldwide, one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life [1]. In Canada, more than 50% of women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16 [2]. This project links expertise in media and communication, gender-transformative thinking and violence prevention to highlight and address the drivers of VAWG and translate them into effective Canada-specific messages and actions for public consumption.

UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF VAWG

Primary prevention of violence against women and girls requires changing the drivers and social conditions that produce, drive, and reinforce it. This includes harmful, sexist attitudes and gender norms that drive VAWG as well as structural sexism and racism and discriminatory structural practices and policies.

Our Watch, a national violence prevention organization in Australia, has researched and articulated these gendered drivers of violence against women [3]. They include:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life
- Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity
- Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasize aggression, dominance, and control

These gendered drivers emphasize that both patriarchy (the social system that positions men as superior and dominant), and predominant social constructions of masculinity play a significant role in VAWG.

What is primary prevention of VAWG?

Primary prevention focuses on stopping VAWG before it happens by addressing the underlying drivers. This requires changing the social conditions that give rise to this violence; reforming the institutions and systems that excuse, justify or even promote such violence; and shifting the power imbalances and social norms, structures and practices that drive and normalize it [3].

A gender-transformative approach to prevention highlights harmful gender roles, practices and norms and unequal power relations between men and women, and also challenges and works to transform them [3].

How do the drivers affect men and boys?

Men and boys can feel pressure to conform to and support patterns of masculinity that include autonomy; dominance and control; aggression and toughness; risk-taking; stoicism and the suppression of emotion; hypersexuality; and compulsory heterosexuality, all of which work to maintain an overall system of gender inequality. This can reinforce the power men as a group have over women as a group, helping to drive VAWG [4].

What is the role of organizations working with men and boys?

To create systemic change, it is important to pursue a gender-transformative approach when working with men and boys as allies, stakeholders, beneficiaries and perpetrators. Gender-transformative approaches improve gender equality along with changing masculine norms.

There are programs and initiatives in several countries aimed at changing these drivers. Working with boys and men not only raises awareness about VAWG, but also focuses on how they might be involved in changing the story of VAWG. This is long term work that can reduce the rigidity of masculine roles, broaden men's and boys' experiences and challenge the culture surrounding VAWG.

EXAMPLES OF GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PREVENTION MESSAGES

Around the world, there are increasing numbers of initiatives, programs, and curricula addressing these deep drivers of VAWG, and how men and boys might engage with change. They include gender-transformative messaging to engage diverse groups of boys, young men, and men through multi-pronged dissemination in a range of various settings (social media, school, work, community, sports) and in various roles, such as allies, men, peers, brothers, fathers, spouses, or community members.

Gender-Transformative VAWG Prevention Initiatives that Engage Men

Initiative	Description and Messaging
<u>Use Your Voice Campaign</u> (Media Development Initiative, Papua New Guinea)	National campaign broadcasted on radio and television talk shows, press conferences, and public service announcements with prominent sports athletes to urge men to get involved in stopping violence against women. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Use your voice to stop violence against women.”• “Strong men don’t bash women.”
<u>Men Can Stop Rape</u> (Men Can Stop Rape, USA)	Grassroots network that mobilized messaging encouraging men to transform gender norms and stand up against violence. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “My strength is not for hurting.”• “Take a stand against sexual assault on campus. We’re the kind of guys who take a stand. Where do YOU stand?”
<u>Indashyikirwa</u> (CARE, Rwanda)	Community-based prevention program that worked with both men and women through couples training curriculum and community-based activism to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Gender differences randomly assign women and girls a lower status compared to men. This creates an imbalance of power between men and women, which is harmful to our relationships and communities.”• “The strict division of gender roles negatively influences women, men, and their relationship and household. Balancing gender roles would help to create healthier and more efficient households.”

<p><u>One Man Can</u> (Sonke Gender Justice, various African countries)</p>	<p>A campaign that supports boys and men to take action to end VAWG and promotes healthy equitable relationships through curriculum and community initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Love passionately, stop AIDS, end domestic violence, break the cycle, demand justice, stop rape.” • “One Man Can: Stop Rape” and “One Man Can: Be a Father Figure.”
<p><u>Responsible, Engaged, and Loving Father (REAL) Initiative</u> (Institute for Reproductive Health, Uganda)</p>	<p>A community program where young men learn to treat their children and partners well to reduce VAWG and improve family communication through community discussions and individual mentorship from other men in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Respect your child’s mother.” • “Be a role model to your children.” • “Train, Improve, and Score! Fatherhood is like football!”

Gender-Transformative VAWG Prevention Initiatives that Engage Boys & Young Men

Initiative	Description and Messaging
<p><u>The Line</u> (Our Watch, Australia)</p>	<p>A national campaign targeting adolescents and young men by demonstrating on websites, social media, billboards, ambassadors, and video advertising what is and is not okay when it comes to sex, dating, and relationships, with the long-term goal of reducing IPV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There’s no one way to be a man.” • “To show up and be seen – as who you really are – takes guts.” • “What if someone said that about your mum, sister or girlfriend?”
<p><u>Moosehide Campaign</u> (Moosehide Campaign Development Society, Canada)</p>	<p>Indigenous-led movement with resources and curriculum for grades K-12, post-secondary, workplaces, communities, and the government to get boys and men engaged in stopping violence against girls, women, and two-spirit people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We stand up against gender-based violence.” • “We stand up against violence.” • “Stand up against violence towards women and children.”
<p><u>Pilimmaksarniq</u> (Pauktuutit, Canada)</p>	<p>Inuit-led movement to increase awareness and strengthen coping skills among Inuit men and boys to reduce gender-based violence and VAWG in their communities through community role modeling initiatives, educational curriculum, and campaigns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Speak out about violence. Protect Children. Don’t be a bystander to bullying, gossip, and blaming the victim. Report dangerous situations.” • “If someone tells you about experiencing violence or abuse: Believe them – Ask what they want to do – Connect them to supports.”

WHAT ARE SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING PREVENTION MESSAGES WITH AND FOR MEN AND BOYS?

What works well	What to avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapting messaging to the specific context of boys and men’s social lives and local contexts so the material is relevant to their lives [8-17]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking messages from other programs and replicating them in a way that assumes a one-size-fits-all approach to masculinity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appealing to the humanity, emotions and values of men’s best selves [18-21]. Acknowledging the pressures placed on boys, young men, and men to live up to traditional masculine stereotypes, scripts, and norms [8, 12, 21-29]. Fostering a safe and non-judgmental environment for men to discuss and reflect on their privileges, limitations, and discomforts of gender stereotypes, roles, and scripts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making boys and men feel ashamed or responsible for their gender and VAWG. It is not being a boy or a man that is harmful, but the norms and scripts that have been attached to masculinity that can cause harm [18, 19, 30-34].
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training community men that boys and men respect, such as sport coaches or nurses, to facilitate gender-transformative discussions. Boys and men are more likely to engage meaningfully with gender-transformative messaging if they see people they respect engaging with it [8, 11, 12, 23, 35, 36]. Training facilitators to be open, use non-judgmental language, and mindful of their own assumptions [11, 35]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being judgmental or shutting down the ideas of boys and men as they process gender-transformative messages. They are more likely to engage in critical thinking when they feel respected and cared for [8, 22, 37].

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating space for conversations about their own oppressions, limitations, and experiences of violence may help them link preventing VAWG and doing gender-transformative work to their lives [9, 18, 19, 25, 29, 36, 38-40]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounting boy's or men's particular or intersectional struggles because of their privileges as men.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on boys and men who are engaging with the gender-transformative discussions, as they are more likely to enact change [17, 18]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing time or energy trying to change the minds of resistant boys and men who are holding onto harmful masculinities [20, 21].
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on tangible positive actions boys and young men can take to engage in gender equality [17, 18]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to boys and men about harmful masculinities and how they need to change in an abstract or theoretical manner.

Reflection Questions

1. What gender-transformative messages would be relevant to you in your setting/area of work for engaging men and boys in primary prevention of VAWG and gender equality?
2. What other messages could you imagine?
3. What other considerations (what works and what to avoid) are relevant in your setting for creating messages that engage men and boys in primary prevention of VAWG and gender equality?
4. What are some barriers to engagement that you have identified in your setting when communicating with men and boys?

Helpful Resources for Creating and Framing Messaging

- [Questions to Consider When Crafting Messaging](#) (UN Women)
- [Key Elements of Campaign Messaging](#) (UN Women)
- How to Respond to Resistance: [Facing resistance in your work](#) (Safe + Equal)
- Framing Messaging:
 - [Framing Masculinity: Message Guide](#) (Vic Health)
 - [Framing Gender Equality: Message Guide](#) (Vic Health)
- [Ethical Considerations in Messaging](#) (UN Women)

Helpful Resources for Engaging Men & Boys in Prevention & Gender Equality Work

- [Changing Contexts: A Framework for Engaging Male-Oriented Settings in Gender Equality and Violence Prevention - Practitioners' Guide](#) (Shift)
- A Practical Guide to Engaging Boys and Young Men to Prevent Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls: [Imagine Toolkit](#) (MenEngage Alliance)
- [Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Strengthening Civil Society Organizations and Government Partnerships To Scale Up Approaches](#) (Promundo)

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