



## Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Discussion Guide on Messaging

*This discussion guide was developed to promote thinking about initiatives and messaging on primary prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG). It summarizes current thinking and action on prevention and invites suggestions on public communication in the Canadian context. The Communicating Equality Project is clarifying promising practices and working to create national prevention messaging.*

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.

### WHAT IS PRIMARY PREVENTION?

Primary prevention of violence against women and girls aims to prevent violence before it happens. It is very challenging as it requires changing the social conditions that produce, drive, and reinforce VAWG. This means addressing the harmful, sexist attitudes and gender norms that drive VAWG as well as structural sexism and racism and discriminatory structural practices and policies.



*"Primary prevention aims to shift the underlying drivers of violence against women- the systems, structures, norms, attitudes, practices, and power imbalances that drive the violence" - Our Watch, 2021*

## WHAT ARE THESE DRIVERS OF VAWG?

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

- Condoning of violence against women and girls
- 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.

Violence and gender inequality reflect intersecting systems of sexism, racism, ageism, ableism, and their corresponding processes of discrimination. Thus intersectional, gender-transformative messages, that address both VAWG and inequalities, are needed in prevention efforts.

### What are gender-transformative approaches?

Gender-transformative approaches in primary prevention change the harmful norms, beliefs and systems that drive VAWG [3, 4] and promote gender equity, at the same time. Intersectional gender-transformative approaches aims to change the dynamics of many intersecting forms of power and privilege along with improving gender equity [3]. Primary prevention can therefore require different kinds of gender-transformative messages and initiatives to address a range of issues and audiences.

## EXAMPLES OF GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PREVENTION MESSAGES

*"Effective messages are simple, strong and consistent, with tailored messages for specific target audiences and channels, and a clear call to action"- Our Watch, 2021*

Raising awareness and promoting changes in attitudes and behaviour are key elements of prevention messaging, that also need to be reinforced by broader social and structural changes. Public awareness and discourse on the problem is foundational to all other levels of prevention. Messages are necessary, but not sufficient, to create the overall change we need. It is important for messages to be supported by programs, curricula and initiatives that reinforce long term shifts in attitudes and practices about VAWG.

Some prevention messaging for VAWG has been created that is tailored to address gendered beliefs, norms, behaviours, and practices held by, or affecting, both specific and general populations.

Here are some examples from around the world:

Population and Intent	Prevention Messages
<p>Society or communities at large</p> <p><i>Awareness raising, community mobilization, bystander attitudes and practices</i></p>	<p>“There’s no excuse for abuse” (<a href="#">There’s No Excuse for Abuse</a>, Australia)</p> <p>“Use your voice to stop violence against women” (<a href="#">Use Your Voice campaign</a>, Papua New Guinea)</p> <p>“I have a sister” (<a href="#">Minna Dada campaign</a>, Tanzania)</p> <p>“When you see women being disrespected, show it’s not ok” (<a href="#">Do Something campaign</a>, Australia)</p>
<p>Men and boys</p> <p><i>Healthy masculinities, fatherhood, bystander attitudes and practices, men as allies and role models</i></p>	<p>“There’s no one way to be a man” (<a href="#">The Line</a>, Australia)</p> <p>“My strength is not for hurting” (<a href="#">MyStrength campaign</a>, USA)</p> <p>“Strong men don’t bash women” (<a href="#">Use Your Voice campaign</a>, Papua New Guinea)</p> <p>“You aren’t afraid to hold me close. You are my father” (<a href="#">You Are My Father poster campaign</a>, MenCare, Global)</p> <p>“You don’t need to be a BC Lion to be more than a bystander!” (<a href="#">Be More Than a Bystander</a>, EVA BC, Canada)</p> <p>“It’s important to walk away from a cycle of violence” (<a href="#">Pilimmaksarniq: Engaging Men and Boys in Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls</a>, Pauktuutit, Canada)</p> <p>Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin (<a href="#">I am a Kind Man</a>, Canada)</p> <p>Chuppi todo hinsa roko (“Break the silence, stop violence”) and Ab to jaago (“Wake up now!”) (<a href="#">Men’s Action to Stop Violence Against Women</a>, India)</p>

<p>Adolescents and youth</p> <p><i>Promoting healthy relationships</i></p>	<p>“Where's The Line when it comes to sex, dating and relationships? We talk all that plus masculinity, gender equality, consent, staying safe online, and more.” (<a href="#">The Line</a>, Australia)</p> <p>“Healthy relationships, safe choices, connected youth” (<a href="#">The Fourth R: Strategies for Healthy Youth Relationships</a>, Canada)</p> <p>The 4th R program addresses the following themes: 1) violence/bullying, 2) unsafe sexual behaviour, 3) substance use</p> <p><a href="#">Reducing Sexism and Violence Program</a> (RSVP; United States)</p> <p>This program includes messages for boys about gender role assumptions</p>
<p>Parents, guardians</p> <p><i>Transforming gender stereotypes</i></p>	<p>“Because why should gender stereotypes limit our children?”</p> <p>“Boys must be more than just boys” (Because Why campaign, <a href="#">Our Watch</a>, Australia)</p>

## CURRENT THINKING ABOUT DEVELOPING PREVENTION MESSAGES

Creating gender-transformative prevention messages on VAWG for a range of audiences is complex, requiring creativity and clarity. It is important to try and reach audiences of all kinds with simple messages that may change attitudes and behaviours, preventing VAWG from happening. As we continue to work on creating messages with partners and communications experts, we are following some of these suggestions. We invite your reflections and ideas.

What works well	What to avoid
<p><u>Approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making the wellbeing and safety of all women individually, and collectively, the first priority [5].</li> <li>• Promoting protective factors, such as positive behaviours and relationships, and providing solutions that result in healthy relationships, positive sexuality and bystander empowerment [5, 6].</li> <li>• Addressing root causes and intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination in the content of your message and with the spokespersons [6].</li> <li>• Demonstrating how non-violence benefits the entire community and society as a whole [5]</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing solely on raising awareness of the issue of violence against women [3].</li> <li>• Devising communications and campaigns that reinforce gender stereotypes, rape myths and blaming attitudes (such as by targeting potential victims) [3].</li> <li>• Simplistic analyses of VAWG (e.g. that poverty, low-economic status, etc. leads to violence) [5].</li> </ul>
<p><u>Creative process:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing key messages that are simple, strong and consistent, with tailored messages for specific target audiences and channels, with a clear call to action [3, 6, 7].</li> <li>• Developing messages in consultation with an expert advisory group and conducting tests with potential audiences [6].</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to anticipate and mitigate potential backlash and resistance to the message [3].</li> <li>• Failing to consider how a worded message is presented to different audiences (a message might, for example, use language that resonates with a young audience, yet offends an older one) [7].</li> </ul>

What works well	What to avoid
<p><u>Creative process continued:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the message can be conveyed within 20 seconds, as longer messages are less effective) [7].</li> <li>• Adding an element that appeals to people’s emotions is an effective way to engage them [7].</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Strategy:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivating opportunities for communicating the message, taking a multipronged approach and facilitating multiple points of connection on a wide range of platforms (e.g., traditional media, social media, peer mentors, etc.) [3, 6].</li> <li>• Recognizing intended and unintended consequences, including preparing for the likelihood that survivors will come forward seeking assistance, even if this was not intended by the strategy [5].</li> <li>• Developing an evaluation framework that outlines how the reach, effectiveness and impact of the activity will be tracked and measured over time [3].</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering single-component communication campaigns that rely on only one ‘platform’ to reach the target audience [3, 6].</li> <li>• Failing to engage relevant stakeholders at the scoping stage of the project [3].</li> <li>• Failing to advise relevant support services about the potential for increased demand as a result of the campaign [3, 5].</li> <li>• Failing to effectively evaluate the strategy, or limiting the evaluation to reach, rather than short- and long-term impact [3].</li> </ul>

## Reflection Questions

We would like to hear your ideas. Given the current context in Canada:

- 1.1. What populations and subpopulations are a priority to reach and engage when creating and sharing prevention messages that raise awareness, promote public discourse and prompt changes in attitudes, behaviours, and practices?
  - a. General public?
  - b. Boys and men?
    - i. In sport contexts?
    - ii. In workplaces?
    - iii. In health contexts focussing on reproductive health?
    - iv. Other settings?
  - c. Young people?
    - i. In schools?
    - ii. Online?
    - iii. Other settings?
    - iv. In and by anti-violence organizations?
    - v. In other provincial and community organizations?
  - d. Other groups and populations?
2. What messages do you think might be relevant, for any of these groups?
3. Might any of the examples listed in the table be adaptable for the Canadian context?
4. What are some barriers that you see in communicating with any of these audiences?
5. What are some facilitators for communicating with these audiences?
6. What experiences have you had in delivering gender-transformative messaging - that communicates both the need for gender equity and the prevention of violence against women and girls, at the same time?

## Helpful Resources for Creating and Framing Messaging in Prevention Work

[Questions to Consider When Crafting Messaging](#) (UN Women)

[Key Elements of Campaign Messaging](#) (UN Women)

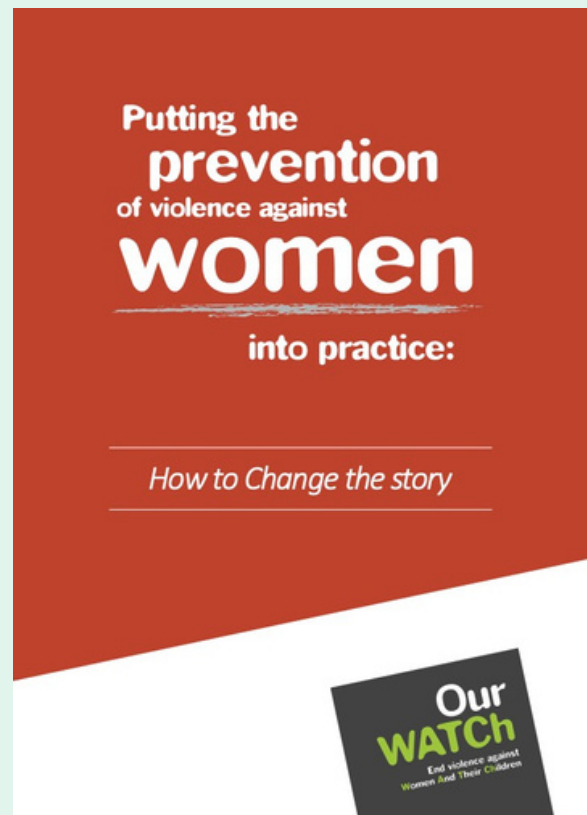
How to Respond to Resistance:  
[Facing resistance in your work](#) (Safe + Equal)

Framing Messaging:

- [Framing Masculinity: Message Guide](#) (Vic Health)
- [Framing Gender Equality: Message Guide](#) (Vic Health)

[Ethical Considerations in Messaging](#) (UN Women)

[Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice](#) (Our Watch)





## References

1. UN Women. *Facts and figures: Ending violence against women*. February 2022 [cited 2023 July 7]; Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.
2. Assaulted Women's Helpline. *Violence Against Women Stats*. n.d. [cited 2023 July 7]; Available from: <https://www.awhl.org/violence-against-women-stats>.
3. Our Watch, *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. 2021, Our Watch: Melbourne, Australia.
4. *Being intentional about gender-transformative strategies: Reflections and Lessons for UNICEF's Gender and Policy Action Plan (2022-2025): A compendium of papers*. 2021, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti: Florence.
5. UN Women. *Ethical considerations in messages on VAW*. 2012 [cited 2022 June 8]; Available from: <https://endvawnow.org/en/articles/1240-ethical-considerations-in-messages-on-vaw.html>.
6. Ending Violence Association of BC. *Be More Than a Bystander - VAWG Prevention Program: Lessons Learned and Best Practices Identified*. 2014; Available from: [https://endingviolencecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/EVA\\_BMTAB\\_Prevention\\_Program\\_Web.pdf](https://endingviolencecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/EVA_BMTAB_Prevention_Program_Web.pdf).
7. UN Women. *Questions to consider when crafting the message*. 2012 [cited 2022 June 8]; Available from: <https://endvawnow.org/en/articles/1239-questions-to-consider-when-crafting-the-message.html>.



# Communicating Equality

Visit **Communicating Equality** to learn more or to share your ideas: [communicatingequality.ca](https://communicatingequality.ca)

This resource is part of the Communicating Equality Toolkit.

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