

Engaging Men in the North: Using the Men's Help Cards Forum Summary

On 23 June 2015, over 70 participants from agencies across the northern metropolitan region explored how they could use the Men's Family Violence Help Cards in their responses to men who may use or be at risk of using violence against their partners and families.

The Men's Help Cards are for perpetrators of family violence and are available in 15 community languages. A specialised Aboriginal Men's Help Card is also available.

The Help Cards contribute to women's safety and increase perpetrator accountability. They inform community members, victims and perpetrators about what family violence is and about what services are available.



Principles for using the cards: ensuring a shared understanding

- Prioritise the safety of women and children.
- Prevent ourselves from colluding with the man.
- Refuse invitations to mutualise and blame the victims.
- Ensure a consistent response, no matter where the men enters the service system.
- Believe that violence is a choice made in context.
- Maintain hope for change.

"Try not to do it all yourself. You're not the 'answer' for the men you engage with. Offer other services and means of engagement—the cards provide a starting point."
(Alfie Bamblett, Indigenous Men's Resource and Advisory Service)

What not to do

- Don't say that his behaviour doesn't matter.
- Don't assume that the abuse is trivial or minor.
- Don't accept excuses or allow him to blame others.
- Don't focus on trying to understand why he's abusive.
- Don't try to make him feel better about his behaviour.

For a secondary consultation when working with men who use violence, call the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491



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Through a panel discussion and small group activities, the forum provided an opportunity to discuss how to use the cards as a starting point for engaging men who use or are at risk of using violence against their partners and families.

Suggestions for working with men from different population groups included:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men

- Family violence is not part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
- The Aboriginal Help Cards begin by naming family violence as being against Aboriginal lore, rather than first labelling it a crime. This is to reduce shame and invite and support Aboriginal men to consider changing their behaviour.

New fathers

- Ensure fathers are aware of the impacts of violence on a child's development.
- A lot of men will say "I just want to be a good dad". This can be an effective way in to a conversation about changing his violent behaviour.
- Rather than suggesting that dad 'helps his partner out' when the baby is born, encourage him to take on responsibilities as a parent in a more equal and respectful way. This is important role modelling for children and young people.

CALD men

- Some CALD men may have been through trauma, including war and displacement. Consider talking to men about not using his trauma to justify his use of violence by saying, "you've been through a lot, but your family has been through a lot as well".

Below are considerations when responding to men who use different 'smoke screens' to justify or excuse their violence.

I was drunk/angry/ stressed

- These things may be risk factors, even contributing factors, but they are not the cause.
- Family violence is not just a one-off violent outburst—it is the patterned use of coercive control. There are other times when he might be angry or stressed when he doesn't act violently—such as at work.
- Violence is a choice. The issue isn't a loss of control. People didn't 'just snap'.

"Your problem is not that you lose control of yourself, it's that you take control of your partner. In order to change, you don't need to gain control over yourself, you need to let go of control of her."
(Lundy Bancroft, 2003)

It's part of my culture

- One person's understanding of a culture may differ to the next. Understandings of culture even differ within and between families.
- Family violence occurs in ALL cultures.
- We all have a basic human right to safety, which overrides any ideas of what is appropriate, culturally.

References

Bancroft, L. (2003) Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men. New York: Berkley Books.