

# Engaging Men in the North:

A forum on using Men's Family Violence Help Cards



Presented by:



**WOMEN'S HEALTH  
IN THE NORTH**



# Overview

Understanding the integrated system

Sarah Johnson, Regional Integration Coordinator

Supporting men to use the Help Cards

Ada Conroy, Help Cards Project Worker and MBC Practitioner

Panel

Specialists from Aboriginal Services, Men's Behaviour Change Programs and Maternal and Child Health

[BREAK]

Learning Into Practice

Small group activities

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# Why are we here?

- Increase in national and state interest in perpetrator accountability
- Regional interest in understanding how to better engage with men
- Recommendations from the Help Cards evaluation

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# About NIFVS

Northern Integrated Family Violence Services (NIFVS) is the partnership that leads the integration of family violence and related services in Melbourne's northern metropolitan region (NMR).

## Our Vision

For women and children to live safe and free from family violence.

## Our Mission

To maintain and continually develop the integrated family violence service system in the north, in order to improve the safety of women and children.

The *NIFVS Regional Plan 2013-2017* sets out the priorities and key initiatives of the organisations involved in the partnership.

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# What is integration?

Integration brings together disparate parts into a unified whole.

An integrated approach to family violence would see all parts of the family violence service system working together to provide a better service to victims of family violence and reduce the incidence of family violence.

Integration in northern metropolitan Melbourne involves:

- a shared understanding of family violence and a shared vision for change
- all parties understanding and striving to improve the system
- strong structures and relationships across the system
- information-sharing and collaboration across a broad range of organisations
- opportunities to discuss and resolve issues
- ensuring a 'continuum of care' through smooth referral pathways and consistent service responses.





# The partnership

The NIFVS partnership formed in July 2006, following the reforms to the family violence service sector introduced by the Victorian Government.

The partnership is led by the 'Regional Integration Committee' which works to improve integration of family violence services and coordination with other key sectors.

The Committee includes representatives from: family violence specialist services, Victoria Police, courts and relevant government agencies, as well as CALD, disability, family services, housing, indigenous, legal, mental health, sexual assault and women's health services.



# NIFVS coordination team

The NIFVS coordination team includes the Regional Integration Coordinator (RIC) and two project workers. The team resources, coordinates and supports integration by:

- providing leadership for regional integration
- convening and supporting regional networks and groups
- disseminating key family violence information
- identifying and promoting good practice models
- delivering training and facilitating forums to the sector
- facilitating links between local, regional and statewide family violence structures.

The team is employed by Women's Health In the North and funded by the Department of Health and Human Services.



# Networks and groups

There are a number of family violence networks and groups in the NMR. Some are open to new membership or one-off attendance, including:

## NIFVS Network Forums

NIFVS Network Forums are open to anyone who works towards women's and children's safety in the northern metropolitan region. Meetings focus on improving integration in specific areas identified in the regional plan. The next forum will held on 24 November 2015.

## Local Family Violence Networks

Local family violence networks have been established for over 20 years. The current networks are based in Banyule/Nillumbik, Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Sunbury and Yarra. Details about upcoming meetings can be found at: [www.nifvs.org.au](http://www.nifvs.org.au)







# Background to the cards

The Family Violence Help Cards contribute to women's safety and increase perpetrator accountability.

They inform community members, victims and perpetrators about:

- what family violence is
- that it's a crime
- and provide information about support services that are available in the region

This business card-sized resource is filled with information to help a woman who is experiencing family violence (Women's Help Card) or a man who is perpetrating violence (Men's Help Card).



# Background to the cards

The Help Cards were developed by Darebin and Yarra Councils in 2006. In 2009 they were updated to include 12 community languages and Help Cards for Aboriginal women and men were created.

The Help Cards were then adopted by NIFVS in 2012.

More than 422,000 Help Cards have been distributed across the region since their development.

The Help Cards are now available in 15 community languages:

- Arabic
- Vietnamese
- Turkish
- Greek
- Chinese
- Hindi
- Dinka
- Somali
- Macedonian
- Farsi
- Swahili
- Croatian
- Italian
- Tagalog
- Tamil





# Updating the cards

In 2014 the Men's Help Cards were reviewed to include changes to the *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)* and current language about perpetrator accountability.

## 1. Family Violence is Against the Law

It is against the law to hurt any member of your family. In Victoria, the *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)* prohibits behaviour by a person towards a family member if that behaviour is:

- physically or sexually abusive
- emotionally or psychologically abusive
- economically abusive
- threatening
- coercive
- or in any other way controls or dominates or causes the family member to feel fear

Victoria Police hold perpetrators of family violence accountable for their actions.

They can remove perpetrators from their home and issue a Safety Notice (a temporary intervention order) to protect the victims from abuse.

## 2. What is Family Violence?

Family violence is defined as a pattern of abusive behaviour through which a person seeks to control and dominate another person. While physical violence may be the most visible form, other forms of abuse can be equally harmful.

- Restricting someone's access to work or school.
- Controlling contact from people outside the family.
- Controlling the family finances, denying someone access to money.
- Making or carrying out threats to harm or kill family members, pets or yourself.
- Forcing someone to perform sexual acts, or not allowing them to say 'no'.
- Abusing children, or exposing them to abuse or the effects of abuse.

## 3. Family Violence Hurts Kids Too

It is against the law to expose children to family violence and its effects.

Exposure to violence can cause significant long term harm to children. It is important to remember that children have the right to be safe.

Referrals for Dads:

[Parentline: 13 22 89](tel:132289)

[Men's Referral Service: 9428 2899](tel:94282899)

## 4. What Can I Do?

You can choose to behave in a way that ensures your family's safety.

**Help is available** for men who want to stop using violence in their intimate relationships.

If you are considering seeking help, it is important to get the right information. The Men's Referral Service can provide you with support, information and referral.

If you know someone who is abusing their family, speak up. You can call the Men's Referral Service for advice on how to intervene safely.

Remember, family violence is a crime.

[Men's Referral Service: 99428 2899](tel:994282899)





# Updating the cards

In 2015 the Aboriginal Help Cards were updated in partnership with members of the Northern Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Group (NIFVRAG).

These Cards provide specific information about family violence support services that are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region. The Aboriginal Help Cards differ from the non-Aboriginal Cards in that they:

- State family violence is against Aboriginal lore and is disrespectful to ancestors
- State that family violence is not a part of Aboriginal culture
- Broaden the definition to include lateral abuse.

We would like to acknowledge the important contribution of Elders, community members and staff from Aboriginal Services to the Aboriginal Help Cards.





# Evaluation of the cards

In 2012, an evaluation of the Help Cards found that throughout the region, the Women's Help Cards were used at much higher rates than the Men's.

Many services were running out of Women's Help Cards, but reported that they had the Men's Help Cards "just sitting there".

Several noted they were "...hazy on [using the] Men's Cards", going on to explain that they were unclear as to their use and usefulness.

If men aren't picking them up, how can we ensure they are being used? What do we and our organisations need to do to ensure we're holding men accountable for their use of violence, and what role do the help cards have in this? And where do we start?



# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Prioritise the safety of women and children:** We can do this by holding their right to safety at the forefront of all our interventions.
- Ellen Pence, co-founder of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in the US, suggested that we imagine his partner and children standing behind him during our interventions. This is a way to keep them in the room, focus on the importance of their safety, and ensure our own accountability.

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# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Prevent ourselves from colluding:** by understanding perpetrator tactics and declining men's invitations to collude.
- Can be aware of the subtle ways men attempt to groom or engage us, and so prioritise the *impact of the violence* rather than the type of violence.
- Ask “what might that have been like for your partner [use her name] or your children to experience that?” or “Let's focus on your behaviour, rather than hers”.

Examples of collusion include:

- Laughing or smiling at men's jokes about women or violence
- Telling men how great it is that they are 'changing' or 'being honest'
- Allowing men's disclosures, justifications and blaming to pass without comment.
- Buying into male stereotypes
- Using objectifying, sexist language like 'your Mrs.' or 'the wife'



# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Refuse invitations to mutualise and blame the victims:** He may attempt to draw us into stories he tells about his partner (eg *she's crazy, she pushes my buttons, she gives as good as she gets*), but when we deflect this tactic, we invite him to take responsibility for his own behaviour.
- Can ideally get to a point where, no matter how other people behave around him, he remains safe and chooses to use non violent behaviour.





# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Ensure a consistent response no matter where he lands in the service system:** In Victoria, we work within a set of fundamental principles when responding to family violence, from the Family Violence Risk Assessment Management Framework.
- These principles include that:
  - Family violence is not acceptable in any community or culture
  - Responses to family violence are most effective when they are integrated and designed to enhance the safety of women and children
  - The whole community is responsible for preventing family violence, so there needs to be a community-wide understanding that family violence is unacceptable.



# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Believe that violence is a choice made in context:** The context is one of gender inequality and male privilege. Family violence is a patterned use of coercive control, a gendered crime and a global epidemic.
- Family violence occurs behind closed doors, within a society that is willing to excuse it away with statements like: “why doesn’t she just leave?”; “she pushes his buttons”; “he just loses control”; “it’s the drink”; “it’s just a part of their culture”.
- He is not using violence because he’s drunk, mentally ill, unemployed or stressed (these are risk factors or perhaps contributing factors). He is using violence because he holds sexist and violence supportive attitudes and believes that he’s entitled to control his family, because he’s ‘the man of the house’ or ‘the master of the castle’.





# Shared understanding

When we have a shared understanding of family violence, and work within a gendered framework, we:

- **Maintain hope for change:** If we believe that violence is a choice, we can take the next step to believe that non-violence can be a choice too.
- Non-violence is no easy ask, given how deeply embedded patriarchal structures are, but our individual interventions are just one part of a broad spectrum of interventions.
- From prevention and early intervention, to crisis response and long term support, men who use violence must be held accountable. Our interventions can be invitational, they can *separate the man from the behaviour*, and they can support him to make choices that keep his family safe. Our interventions must name the violence and ensure perpetrator accountability. This is crucial to ensure the safety of women and children.



# What not to do

No To Violence, the peak organisation of individuals and agencies working for the prevention of male family violence, advise that there are few things that are important to avoid:

- 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



# Why use the cards?

The Men's Help Cards:

- are a tool to enable conversation
- ensure consistent language and practice across the northern region
- name family violence as a crime
- highlight that violence is a choice
- believe in men's capacity for change
- provide information about how and where to get support
- are evidence based

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# Barriers to using the cards

Why are the Cards 'just sitting there'?

- Fear
- Feeling unskilled
- Worry about making it worse

How do we address these barriers?

- Secondary consultation
- Reflective practice
- Training



# Men's services

- Men's Referral Service
- No To Violence
- Aboriginal Centre for Males Referral Service (VACSAL)
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Men's Unit
- Men's Active Referral Service (Plenty Valley Community Health)
- Kildonan UnitingCare Family Violence Intervention Program
- Plenty Valley Community Health
- Sunbury Community Health Service
- Vietnamese Men's Behaviour Change Group (InTouch and Relationships Australia)

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# Panel discussion

**Alfie Bamblett**

Indigenous Men's Resource and Advisory Service

**Farah Faiq**

Arabic Speaking Men Behaviour Change Program,  
InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence;  
and South Asian Men's Group, Kildonan

**Helen Thomason**

Maternal and Child Health, City of Moreland

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# Small group activity

- How can we build rapport with men who use violence whilst ensuring their accountability? (e.g. separate the man from the behaviour)
- What are some of the common justifications for abuse and how do we challenge them without colluding? (e.g. focus on the impact of the violence)
- Which suggestions from panellists did you found useful?



# Practice session

Mark comes in for his appointment and says 'I've got some problems at home'.

You ask him what he means, and he states 'it's my wife (Jane), I'm pretty sure she's cheating on me with a bloke from work'. He goes onto say 'I'm over it. She's driving me crazy'.

You acknowledge that this must be a difficult time, and ask him to outline the ways it is impacting his behaviour. What does he mean by 'over it'?

He tells you that he is very angry and is looking for proof that she's cheating on him, and that he checked her phone and found texts from someone he doesn't know. He says: 'You know what women are like?! You can't trust them. She'll mess up eventually. I'll find out'.

You later learn that he has pushed her against a door when she was attempting to leave for work.



# Practice session

Discuss in pairs:

- Identify invitations to collude
- What are your safety concerns and why do you have these concerns?
- Do you think Jane is at risk? Identify the evidence for risk i.e. – seeking proof that she's cheating: does this involve stalking? Checking her phone? Checking in on her at work? Attending her work? Are her colleagues unsafe?
- What are some of the problematic attitudes and behaviours you've identified?
- How can you address his use of violence?
- What might you say to Mark to let him know you are concerned?
- How is his behaviour being impacted and what might this be like for Jane?



# Next steps

There are a number of ways to stay connected with the work of integration in the family violence sector.

Visit our new website at [www.nifvs.org.au](http://www.nifvs.org.au) to:

- Access notes and presentations from today's forum
- Find resources on men who use violence
- Stay in touch via the monthly NIFVS eNews
- Join a regional network or group
- Order Women's and Men's Family Violence Help Cards
- RSVP to Identifying Family Violence Training (19 Aug or 21 Oct)
- RSVP to Regional Family Violence Sector Induction (21 Oct)
- Host a Week Without Violence event (3<sup>rd</sup> week of October)

# Contact Details

Northern Integrated Family Violence Services

Women's Health In the North

680 High Street  
Thornbury 3071  
Tel. 9484 1666

[www.nifvs.org.au](http://www.nifvs.org.au)

[info@whin.org.au](mailto:info@whin.org.au)



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