

# but he's a good dad, right?

## Responding to fathers who perpetrate family violence NIFVS Forum Summary

On 22 March 2017, 100 participants explored how to improve responses to fathers who perpetrate family violence in order to prioritise the safety of women and children. Participants heard about recent University of Melbourne research and from a panel of regional specialists working with fathers who perpetrate family violence. Participants also had an opportunity to reflect on their own practice.



Panel of regional specialists

### Digital Stories

Digital stories, created by young people living with a violent father, were presented by Kristin Diemer.

Two of the videos are [available here](#).

### What current research tells us

Dr Kristin Diemer, Senior Research Fellow at University of Melbourne, spoke about the 'Fathering Challenges in the Context of Domestic & Family Violence' research. She highlighted that, while there is increasing recognition of men's violence towards intimate partners, their role as parents and the impact of their behaviour on their children is rarely acknowledged. Dr Diemer stated that:

**'Fathers are generally constructed as either good or absent, rarely are they portrayed as abusive.'**

She also noted that fathers often focus on their 'right to access their children' rather than children's well-being.

Research shows that family violence is an issue of direct concern for children. Post separation, children are often used by the perpetrator as a means to continue the abuse. In addition he can often have greater access, including unsupervised access, to the children at this time. Dr Diemer discussed the need to 'Pivot to the Perpetrator' as promoted in the 'Safe and Together Model'.



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Participants heard from a panel of regional specialists including Fiona Edwards from Children's Protection Society, Lili Filar from Anglicare, Shau Teo from Kildonan, and Ron Briggs who is a Senior Aboriginal Cultural Adviser across a number of organisations. The panel offered the following practical suggestions about how to improve responses to fathers who perpetrate family violence.

**'The best thing you can do is to respect the children's mother'**

## Explore impact of violence

Get him to consider 'the flow on effect of his behaviour on the children and their mother.'

## Challenge sexist stereotypes

Ask him, 'What sort of "maleness" are you role modelling?'

## Connect Aboriginal men to culture

'Working with Aboriginal men to connect with culture and identity is critical.'

## Use being a father as a hook

'Men want to be "good dads", it is a strong part of their identity.'

'Focussing on being a "role model" for his children, provides a platform for talking about his violence and its impact on children.'

## Work with shame, encourage empathy

'Look for a man's shame. This is the most powerful motivator. If you can get to shame, don't rescue him. Encourage him to sit with the shame and use that as a platform to learn from.'

## Bring women and children 'into the room'

'Humanise women and children by bringing their identity into the sentence. Name women and children. Bring in photos of the children.'



Utilising a case study, participants discussed collusion, asking direct questions, challenging gender norms and utilising a family violence lens that incorporates children.

## Further Resources

For further information visit NIFVS website page: [Men who use violence, Resources for practitioners.](#)