

10 STEPS TO REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN



1

SAFETY FIRST

- **Do:** Ensure that you report on the issue in a way that **doesn't compromise the survivor's safety**. The risk of identifying survivor/s may arise from including specific details about the survivor/s, the perpetrator, what occurred and where (e.g. number of children, household or pet details, force or weapons used, injuries sustained, etc.)
- **Do:** Be mindful that it may be easy to identify a person even when measures are taken to de-identify them, for example in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, migrant communities (particularly, smaller communities), or **rural and regional areas**.

2

NAME IT

- **Do:** When legally possible, use the terms 'violence against women/and their children', 'family violence', 'assault', 'sexual assault', 'elder abuse', 'child abuse', 'child exploitation material', 'rape' or 'murder' if/when charges have been laid and when they apply. **This helps the audience understand that violence against women and their children is widespread rather than as 'random acts of violence' that no one could see coming.**



- **Don't:** Use terms that minimise or trivialise violence (e.g. 'domestic dispute', 'volatile relationship', or 'child porn').

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KEEP PERPETRATOR IN VIEW

- **Do:** Use active language to emphasise that someone perpetrated this violence against a victim. For example, instead of using passive headlines such as 'woman punched', instead consider 'man punches woman' or 'man punches ex-wife'. Otherwise, **it can seem like violence is something that 'just happens' to women, when, in fact, there is always a perpetrator.**
- **Do:** Name the current or previous relationship between the survivor and perpetrator (if there is one and you are legally able to). **Remind your audience that most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody known to them** (such as a current or ex-partner, an adult child or other family member, or a carer) and that attacks from strangers are less common (e.g. physical or sexual assault by a stranger).
- **Don't:** Reinforce the idea that women should police or modify their own behaviour in order to avoid men's violence. While it is important that women and girls are safe, accountability for violence should always sit with the person who has perpetrated it.

4

USE A RESPECTFUL AND APPROPRIATE TONE

- **Do:** Use language and headlines to articulate the seriousness of the violence.
- **Do:** Seek to uphold the dignity of victims, survivors and their families.
- **Do:** Plan for how to support the respectful treatment of the story once it goes live, including social media commentary.
- **Don't: Sensationalise or trivialise violence, including through the use of overly dramatic language,** unnecessary details, gratuitous or disempowering
- **Don't:** Identify people by race, ethnicity or other status unless pertinent to the story. **Including identifiers unnecessarily can reinforce myths about the causes of violence** and may be perceived as blaming a person's victimhood or perpetration on their race, religion or sexuality, for instance.

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USE EVIDENCE BASED LANGUAGE

- **Do:** Use language and framing that helps the audience understand the evidence that, globally, most violence against women and their children is driven by gender inequality, including through:
 1. Excusing or condoning violence against women
 2. Restrictive gender stereotypes (for men and women)
 3. Men's control of decision-making and women having less power in public and private lives
 4. Men's peer groups encouraging disrespect toward women
- **Don't:** Describe violence as being driven or 'fueled' by alcohol or drugs, or connected to mental health, stress, finances, culture, the 'burden' of caring for someone with a disability, or a perpetrator 'just snapping.' This does not align with the evidence. While these issues may exacerbate violence, they do not drive it.
- **Don't:** Use language that justifies violence or inadvertently blames the victim for what happened to them, including whether they were drunk, out late at night, walking alone, seeing other people, etc

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USE APPROPRIATE IMAGES AND FOOTAGE

- **Do:** Remember that images and vision are vital to telling a story but can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about gender, race, disability, sexuality and age. Examples include imagery portraying that 'she was drunk', cowering from her abuser, 'promiscuous' and 'irresponsible', or that 'he was a wholesome family man'.
- **Do:** When you're generating imagery or selecting stock images, ask yourself what story the chosen imagery tells about a person and consider the impact the image may have on the victim-survivor, their family, or on other survivors of violence.
- **Do:** Use images that present survivors in a stronger light or that keep the perpetrator in view.
- **Don't:** Take photos of survivors or victims from a height to make them appear small, ask them to 'look sad' or 'helpless' or fall into the trap of using bikini-clad images from social media – if that's all you can find, crop it.

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USE APPROPRIATE IMAGES AND FOOTAGE

- **Don't:** Use imagery that disempowers, victimises or infantilises women, or that reinforces the idea that only physical violence is serious.
- **Avoid:** 'clenched fists' and 'cowering women' imagery.

7

CALL ON EXPERTS FOR COMMENT

- **Do:** Refer to experts on violence against women to put the issue in context.
- **Do:** Be cautious about including a character assessment of the perpetrator from neighbours or friends, such as "He was an 'amazing husband' and 'loving dad.'" Doing so is fraught because family violence most often occurs in secret and over a long period of time.
- **Don't:** Only rely on the police or judiciary for comment when reporting on violence against women. Keep in mind that while police can provide a history of reported crime, most violence against women is non-criminal, not an "incident", and most violence against women goes unreported.

- **Also,** be mindful that the police or judiciary may use language that is victim-blaming, excuses violence or perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

8

ALWAYS INCLUDE SUPPORT OPTIONS AVAILABLE

- **Do:** Always use the opportunity to help men, women and children in your audience who may be looking for help. Routinely include information about specialist support options for people who have experienced family violence, such as: "If you or someone you know is experiencing family violence, phone **1800 RESPECT**." Also include a referral for men, such as: "For counseling, advice and support for men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues, call the **Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491**."
- **Don't:** Only provide information about specialist suicide or mental health services. This inadvertently overlooks the impact of violence perpetrated against women and their children and misses an opportunity to alert those currently experiencing violence about where to go for specialist help

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KNOW THE LAW

- **Do:** Be aware that there are certain legal parameters in each state that outline what you can and can't report regarding certain sexual offenses, protection orders that have been issued, or where there are children involved. Journalists and media outlets are required to know their obligations in these cases and should not solely rely on these guidelines.
- **Do:** Understand that there are many forms of violence, including emotional or psychological abuse, elder abuse, financial abuse, and coercive control that may not currently be criminalised, but remember that all forms are serious and can become life-threatening.
- **Do:** Respect private grief and personal privacy when approaching the family or friends of victims, survivors, or perpetrators. Avoid harassing or intruding on their right to privacy. Don't: Cover only the 'sensational' aspects of court and police reports.

10

CONTEXTUALISE THE STORY

- **Do:** When you can, use state, national, and (if appropriate) global statistics on violence against women to frame the story. Keep in mind that many women do not report violence and that the way statistics are or are not collected and understood may be an important part of the story.

1 in 2

Women has experienced **sexual harassment** in their lifetime.

1 in 3

Women has experienced **physical violence** by a partner, other known person or a stranger since the age of 15.

1 in 4

Women has experienced **emotional abuse** by a current or former partner since the age of 15.

1 in 5

Women has experienced **sexual violence** since the age of 15.