

COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

How to plan for positive and respectful communications about gender equality



2026 EDITION



Desert Blue Connect respectfully acknowledges the Yamatji People as the Traditional Custodians and First People of the land on which we learn and play.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of the Yamatji Peoples.

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How to Use this Guide

In this guide you will find information and strategies to support you to communicate about gender equality clearly, respectfully and confidently. The guide includes information from evidence-based research, practical tools and examples to help you promote inclusion, challenge stereotypes, and model respectful, equitable relationships.

We hope this guide is informative as well as easy to read and absorb. You don't need to read this all at once! Dip in and out of the guide as you need to - return to sections as they become relevant to you. You may also choose to work through this guide with your team, completing the tasks together and developing a shared approach.

You might find that some of the advice in this guide opposes other advice. This is because we have shared a range of approaches for different situations and audiences. Please consider what is appropriate for you and your audience/context.

Although this guide focuses on communicating about gender equality strategies you are implementing in the workplace, the positive communication concepts and strategies included here can be applied to other aspects of your professional and personal life.

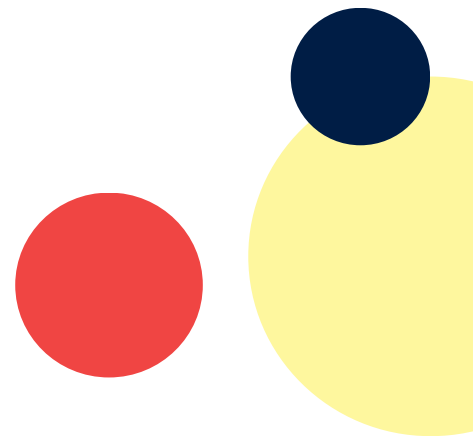
If you want to read more about any of the ideas discussed, you can find references and additional resources at the end of the guide.

Thank you for your efforts in promoting gender equality!

Gender equality is one of the most important primary prevention strategies for reducing violence against women.

This guide is intended for anyone seeking information on how to **positively and proactively communicate** gender equality actions to their staff, clientele or community members.

While this guide includes some limited information about gender equality, the main focus is **communication**. It is assumed readers already understand the gendered drivers of violence against women and the role of gender equality in primary prevention.



This resource was made possible with support from



**Desert Blue
Connect**



Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities

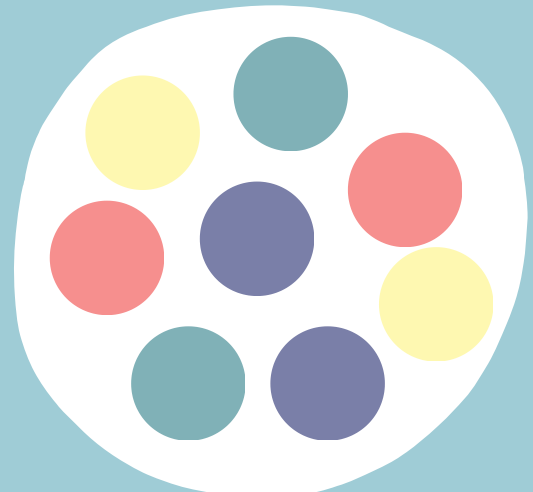
*We thank them for their ongoing commitment to
the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women.*

Introduction

1

“Primary prevention of family and gender-based violence is specifically focused on **social change**. It involves work done across communities, organisations and society in settings **where people live, learn, work, socialise and play**, to stop violence from happening in the first place.”

[Safe + Equal]



1.1 Key Messages

The goal is simple: to create workplaces and environments where every person can thrive, feel safe, and live without limitation — and where our communities take shared responsibility for building a **world free from violence**.

We can achieve this together, by sharing these five key messages:

- 01 Promoting gender equality is the responsibility of the whole community.
- 02 Gender equality is a fundamental human right.
- 03 Gender inequality sets the conditions for violence to occur.
- 04 Primary Prevention is about stopping violence before it happens.
- 05 Community has the power to make social change.



“Language is
a powerful tool
for building inclusion
and exclusion.”

(Diversity Council
Australia)

1.2 Glossary

Gender refers to the socially learned roles, behaviours and activities that any given society attributes to men and women. Gender defines masculinity and femininity.

Gender-based violence is any physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering that targets women, children or gender-diverse people. This includes threats, coercion or deprivation of liberty.

Gender diversity refers to the many different ways people experience, express or identify their gender. It recognises that gender is not the same for everyone and is not limited to the binary 'boy' and 'girl'.

Gender equality is the goal - a space or service that provides the same opportunities and experiences to everyone, regardless of their gender.

Gender equity acknowledges that women and men have different access to resources, power, responsibilities and life experiences, and different strategies are necessary to address disadvantages and achieve equal outcomes of women and men, boys and girls.

Gender expression refers to the ways people express their gendered identity, typically through choices about their appearance, mannerisms and clothing.

Gender inequity is the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity, and value afforded to men and women in society.

Gender roles are the functions and responsibilities expected to be fulfilled by women and men, girls and boys in a society.

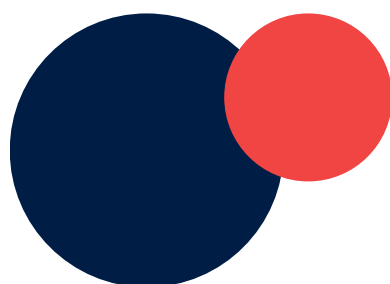
Gendered norms consist of a set of dominant beliefs and rules of conduct, which are determined by a society or group in relation to the types of roles, interests, behaviours and contributions expected from boys and girls, men and women.

Inclusion refers to the practice of taking specific actions to provide equal access to people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised.

Sex refers to biological and physiological differences between females and males.

Stereotype refers to a widely held but rigid and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Sexism refers to gender discrimination. It is prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.





“It’s critical that we
focus not just on
reacting to violence
but preventing it.”

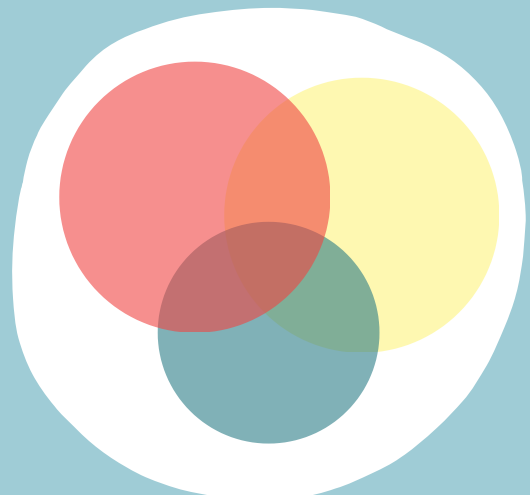
(Ged Kearney,
2025)

Communication for Change

2

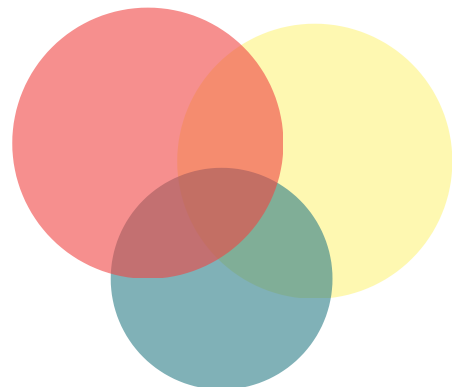
“Change happens at the speed of **trust**, and trust grows through honest communication.”

[Steven Covey]



2.0 Communication For Change

- 2.1 Internal & External
- 2.2 Building Trust
- 2.3 Systemic Inequality
- 2.4 Framing
- 2.5 The Myth of Myth-Busting
- 2.6 Priming
- 2.7 Proactive Messaging
- 2.8 In-Progress Messaging
- 2.9 Reflective Messaging



Communication is one of the most powerful ways to support change. The way we talk about new ideas — early, often and with care — helps people understand why the change matters, and feel confident to be involved. When we communicate well, change is more likely to last and make a real difference for staff, clients and our community.

2.1 Internal & External

Effective gender equality work relies on strong communication, both within your organisation, and with your broader community. Internal and external communications serve different purposes; together they help create a consistent, confident and supportive environment for staff, leaders, clients and community.

Internal communication is the way your team talks with one another — through staff meetings, planning documents, reflections, policies and everyday conversations.

Internal communication builds and maintains a **shared understanding** across your team. It helps everyone feel prepared and on the ‘same page’.

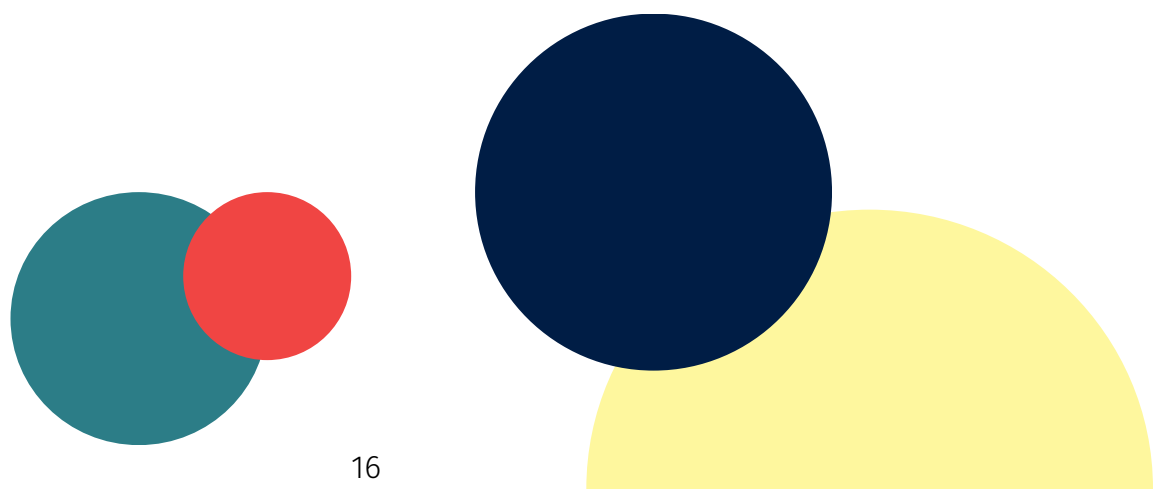
When your staff and clientele see the **consistent** use of language as well as clear and respectful messaging, changes become less confusing and your organisation becomes more **trustworthy**.

External communication is messages sent outwardly to your clients, the community and partner organisations. External communication may come through advertising, social media, displays visible throughout your workplace and daily interactions.

External communication influences how gender equality work is understood **beyond your setting**. It demonstrates your values to the community, builds trust, invites people along for the journey, and helps create a sense of **shared purpose**.

As most workplaces cater to people from diverse backgrounds, external messaging needs to be warm, inclusive, accessible and strengths-based.

Clear, positive communication builds trust and reduces uncertainty.



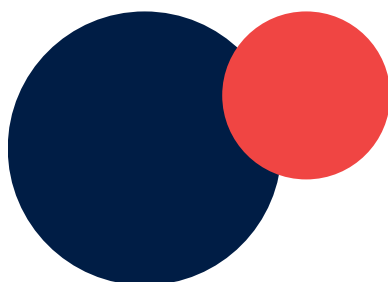
2.2 Building Trust

The value of building and maintaining trust with your community cannot be overestimated. This may take time, but investing in building trust is significantly more positive and effective than waiting to respond to the fallout from resistance and/or backlash.

Either personal or professional experience has likely shown you that the promotion of gender equality has faced challenges from people who are concerned about shifting social dynamics. Unfortunately, some opposition is loud and garners attention from community and media alike. For this reason, your messages should aim to always **build trust** rather than deplete it.

When people feel respected, heard and safe, they are more likely to take part, share their experiences and **support positive change**.

Research shows there are many reasons why people might distrust an organisation or service (AHMAC, 2016). If you feel that a staff member or part of your community does not trust you or your organisation, reflect on the specific behaviour you are seeing/ experiencing that gives you that impression. Check to see if you are making any assumptions about the meaning of the actions or the person's motivations.



Stop - Think - Discuss:

Building Trust

Sue runs a small playgroup each Thursday morning. Parents and carers must stay for the whole session with their children. Joey comes each week with her dad and seems to love coming to playgroup. Joey's dad gets involved in the activities with Joey and happily talks with the other parents. Whenever Sue tries to speak with him, he says very little and leaves. Sue feels like Joey's dad doesn't trust her.

What else could be causing this behaviour?

What could Sue do next?



2.3 Systemic Inequality

Barriers to gender equality exist at every level of society; in day-to-day attitudes, workplaces, services, as well as in the systems that shape people's opportunities and safety. Systemic inequality refers to unfair outcomes that are **built into the structures**, policies or everyday practices of institutions and cultures - even when individuals may not intend harm. It is about history, patterns and systems, not just individual behaviour (OurWatch, 2019).

Examples of gender inequality at a system level include:

- the gender pay gap
- the design of public spaces
- unequal representation in leadership and government positions
- medical research excluding females from studies
- superannuation impacts for part-time employment
- police reporting and court procedures, and much more.

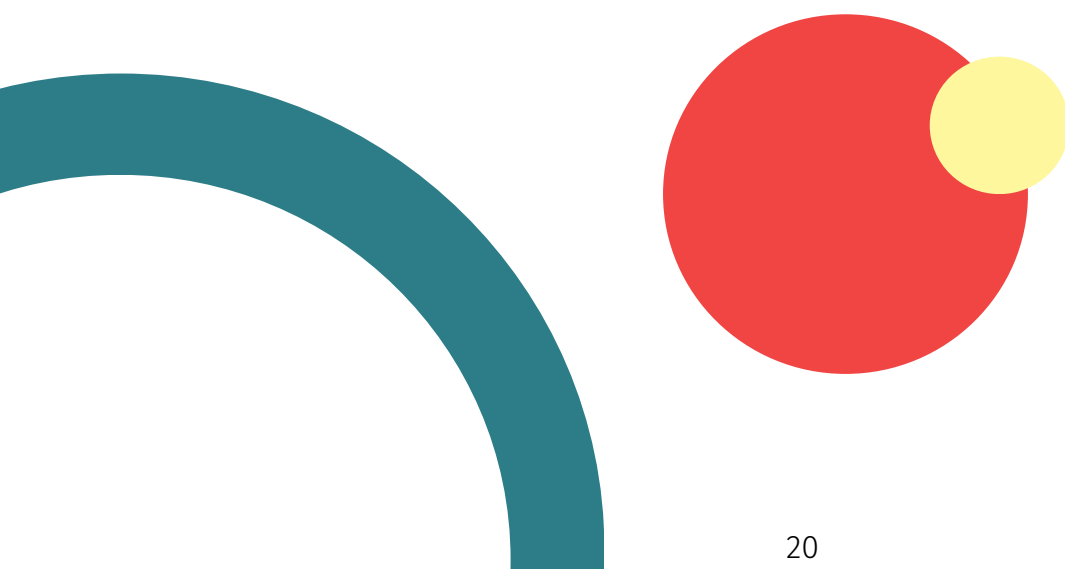


Many examples of systemic inequality have links to gender inequality, but there are also examples connected to racism and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, which need to be considered as they will also shape who feels safe accessing services, who is listened to, and **whose experiences are taken seriously**.

These power dynamics can lead to culturally unsafe service responses, reduced access to information and support, and unequal outcomes for different communities. Naming these barriers in our communication helps us be honest about what needs to change — and **strengthens our ability to work together** towards safer, fairer communities for everyone.

If we want lasting change, we need to be willing to name these barriers clearly, rather than trying to ignore them.

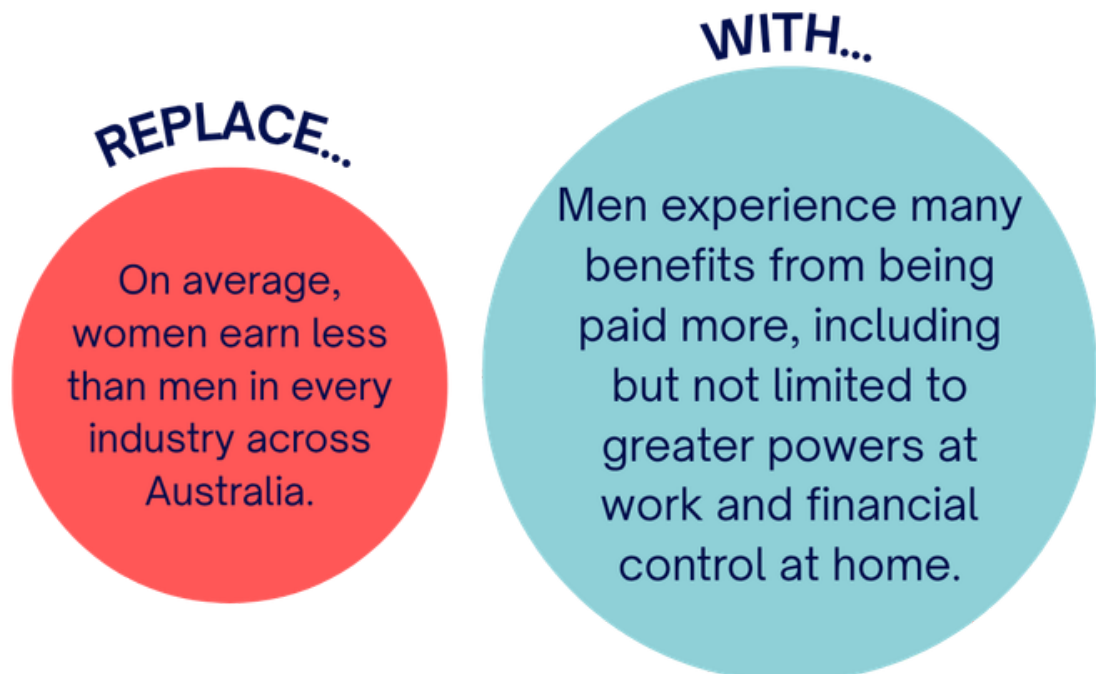
Identifying what is getting in the way helps us understand that gender inequality is not just the result of individual choices, but is also created and maintained by wider structures and social expectations.



2.4 Framing

Just like the way a picture frame guides an observer's attention, the way we frame issues influences how the messages are received – whether the audience is professional, personal or even ourselves! This is not always a conscious process, but it is always influential. Remaining conscious of how you are framing your important messages does not take much time and can make a big difference.

Reframing an already familiar message can help **change the way your audience thinks about information** they are already aware of (VicHealth, 2021). For example, if you describe the ways in which men benefit from the status quo instead of the more traditional messages that focus on the disadvantages women face, you have reframed gender inequality away from being only a women's issue.



By framing pay inequality in terms of **how men benefit**, the same message is told in a new way.

Stop - Think - Discuss:

Reframing

Try reframing the statements below so the focus of attention is on the perpetrators' actions.

What is the effect of reframing the focus to the perpetrators?

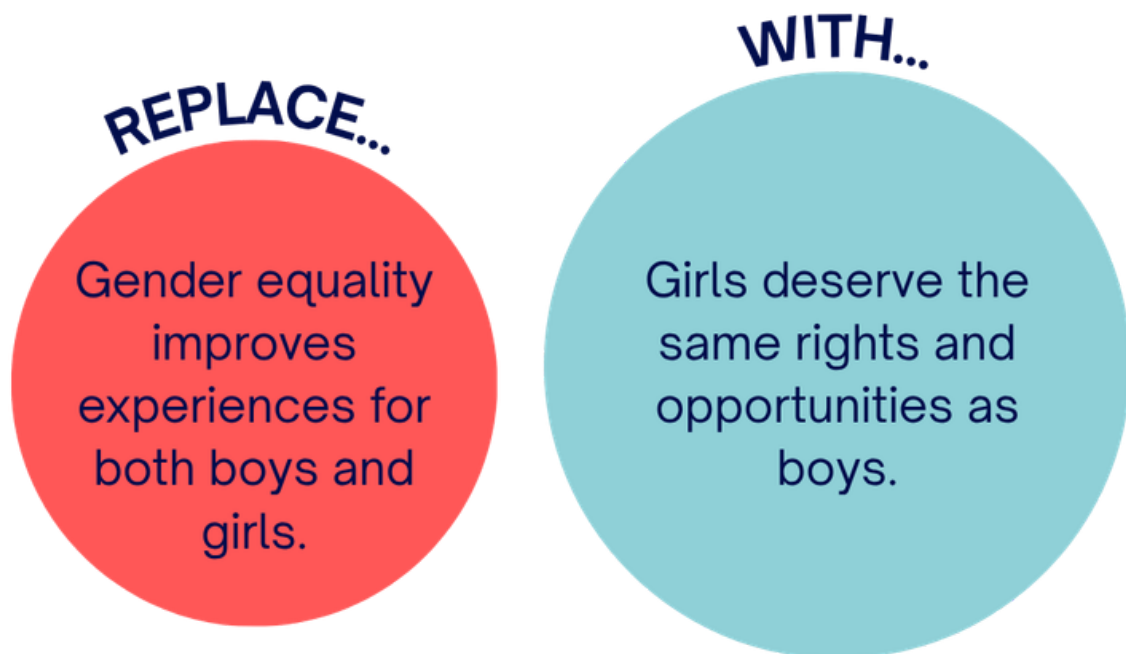
“Aboriginal women are five times more likely to be victims of gender-based homicide than non-Indigenous women.”

Headline: “Community rocked after mother of three is caught lying about paternity, resulting in suspected murder-suicide.”



Similarly, people often frame gender equality within the context of broader benefits for the whole community such as listing how it will boost the overall economy, or how equality ‘benefits everyone’. Framing gender equality only in this way implies that unless there are additional benefits for men and boys, community will not support the work.

Therefore, it is powerful to sometimes **focus the framing** of your gender equality message as creating equal opportunities for women and nothing more.



Reasoning for gender equality should not always centre on the potential benefits for boys and men.

Stop - Think - Discuss:

Tight Framing

Each of these statements are consciously or unconsciously shifting the focus away from the men who are perpetrating violence against women.

Try responding to one or both statements in a way that maintains a tight frame around the real issue.

I don't understand why there is all this talk about gender bending nowadays?

There's generally a clear reason why people commit violence.

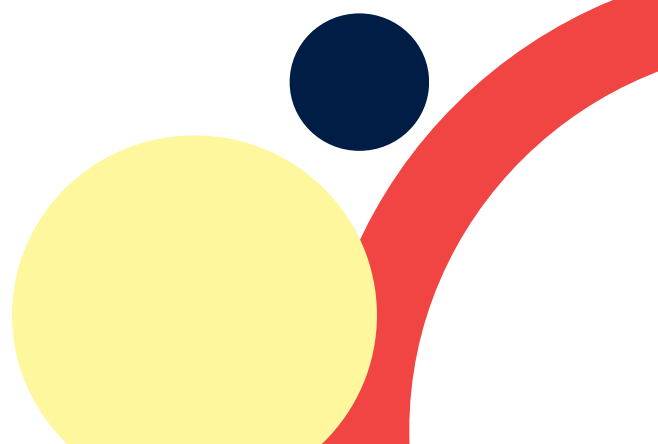
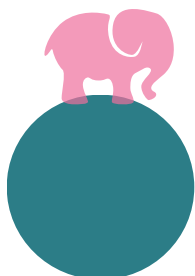


2.5 The Myth of Myth-Busting

The language we use when communicating is powerful; words have significant influence over our brains and can affect thought processes at an **unconscious level**. Knowing how brains make connections to language and motivation is especially important if you plan on myth-busting.

A well-known example of the power of language is to tell someone, “DO NOT think of a pink elephant!” Did an image or sense of a pink elephant come to mind? This ability language has to tap into our brains works with different senses, too. What happens for you after reading, “DO NOT think of the smell of coffee”?

Each time we hear about a concept, we become more familiar with the idea - unintentionally creating a sense that it is something common, **normal** or even unavoidable (VicHealth, 2020). The more often you are asked to think of a pink elephant, the less unusual the choice of colour will become.



This is important when trying to debunk myths because it is common practice to repeat myths when trying to provide the correct information.

This doesn't mean you have to let misinformation run wild, but it does require some careful thought and **word-choice**. Rather than naming the myth up front, instead aim to construct messages that do the job of providing correct information without re-stating the original myth.



Avoid **repeating** outdated or untrue information as this can reinforce the wrong message.
Keep your message focused.

Stop - Think - Discuss: Myth-Busting

Can you debunk these myths without re-stating untrue information?

What influence does this have on your response?

Women lack the confidence to progress to the next level in their career.

Gender inequality doesn't exist anymore - we've had a female PM!

Feminism is just women trying to feel superior to men.

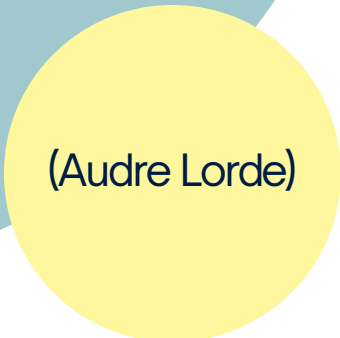




“When we speak, we are
afraid our words will not be
heard or welcomed.

But when we are silent, we
are still afraid.

So it is better to speak.”



(Audre Lorde)

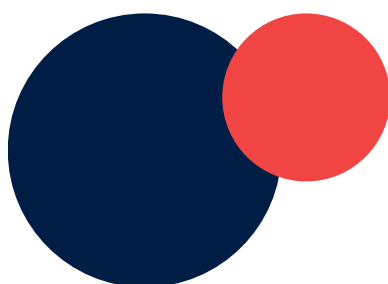
2.6 Priming

Priming is a technique that helps prepare people to receive a message in a positive way. It works by highlighting shared values, ideas or feelings before presenting new or sensitive information, which focuses attention on the **common ground** you share (FrameWorks Institute, 2020).

Priming works because when people feel connected from the start, they are more likely to listen and more generous in their understanding. Priming **reduces defensiveness** because it focuses on what you all care about. Effective priming helps your audience approach gender equality messages with curiosity rather than resistance.

Some examples of priming communication you, or your workplace, might use include:

- updating/sharing your workplace values
- highlighting different forms of inclusion your workplace is proud of
- sharing how gender rules/expectations have changed within your specific industry over time
- highlighting your workplace's commitment to meeting the needs of people throughout Geraldton.



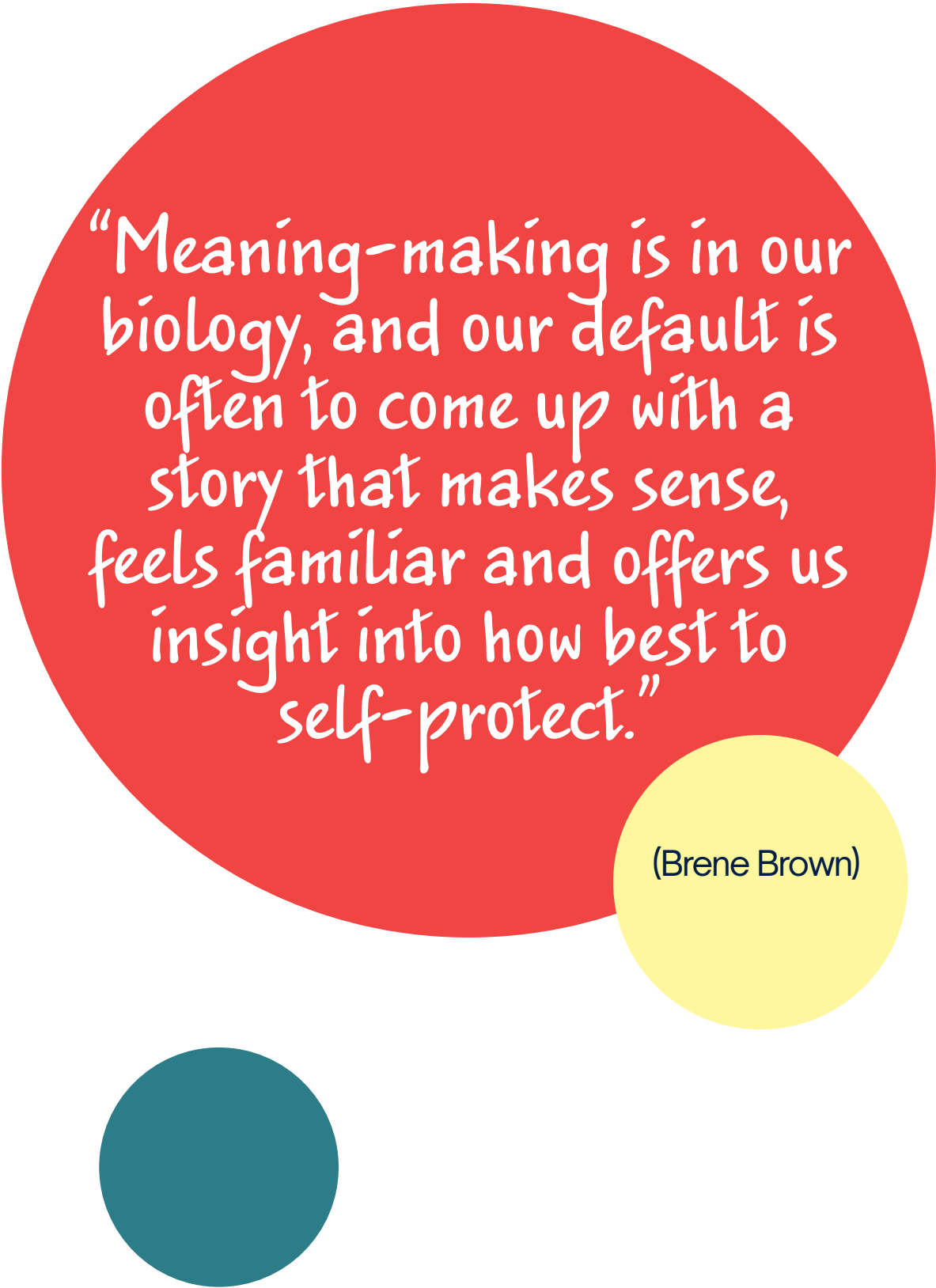
2.7 Proactive Messaging

Similar to Priming, Proactive Messaging is about starting conversations early and in a positive way, so your audience feels **informed and included** from the beginning. When we communicate early and often, we help people understand the values that guide gender equality work and normalise inclusion as part of daily life.

When we are promoting cultural change, it can be tempting to avoid certain topics for fear of negative reactions. However, creating a clear and **positive narrative** about why gender equality matters, builds trust and confidence. It helps remove any sense of discomfort or “taboo”.

Some examples of proactive messaging your setting might consider include:

- seeking input from staff or clientele
- training/information sessions
- staff newsletter/mail out
- daily, informal conversations



“Meaning-making is in our biology, and our default is often to come up with a story that makes sense, feels familiar and offers us insight into how best to self-protect.”

(Brene Brown)

2.8 In-Progress Messaging

In-Progress Messaging helps keep everyone **informed** and connected while changes are being implemented. As you introduce new resources or practices that support gender equality, it's important to share updates along the way — not just at the beginning or the end.

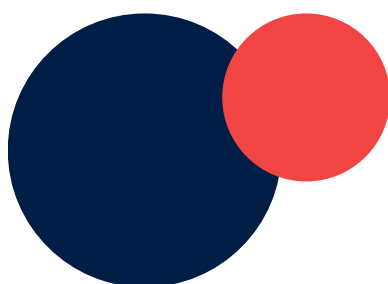
Ongoing communication reassures staff and clients that the work is purposeful - it is not a one-off initiative but a meaningful shift in how we work, connect and live. In-Progress Messaging celebrates small wins, explains what's next, and acknowledges any challenges with openness and care.

When people understand the steps being taken — and the reasons behind them — they feel **included** in the journey rather than surprised by it. This sense of partnership builds trust, reduces uncertainty and helps maintain momentum. You might even get a few early-adopters wondering how they can support the cause!

2.9 Reflective Messaging

Reflective messaging is an opportunity for people to **pause and notice** together. It involves looking back on everyday practices, conversations and changes to the environment, and noticing how they have influenced our ideas about gender, fairness and relationships. When we encourage reflection — through questions, shared conversations, storytelling and observation — we help people make sense of their experiences.

Reflective messaging is not about ending a project or ticking a box. Instead, it creates space to notice what is working well, celebrate progress and identify small opportunities for further change. When you regularly reflect on gender equality with your community, it is no longer seen as a separate program; it becomes part of **how your workplace operates**.





“Open your minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions.”

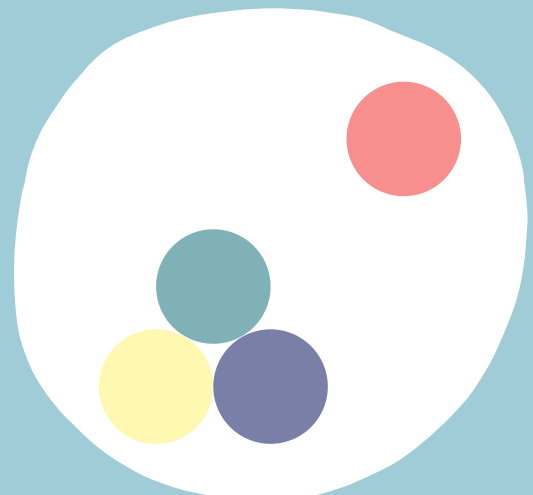
(bell hooks)

Resistance & Backlash

3

“The best way to understand resistance is as an **indicator of success**. Resistance occurs precisely when existing norms, structures and practices are effectively challenged and threatened.”

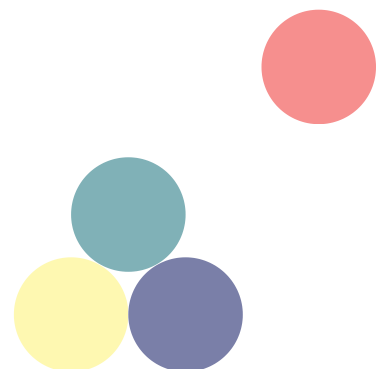
(Safe + Equal)



3.0 Resistance & Backlash

3.1 Active vs. Passive

3.2 Organised vs. Disorganised



Change rarely happens in a straight line. As you work to promote gender equality, there will be times of progress, moments of pause, and times when it may feel like things are moving backwards. This kind of **ebb and flow** is normal and expected. Sometimes, however, the challenge goes beyond the usual ups and downs.

Our beliefs are typically formed unconsciously over a lifetime of experiences, which means people hold a wide range of beliefs or perspectives about social issues that can sometimes contradict each other (FrameWorks, 2021). We often don't discover our personal contradictions until a complex issue challenges them, which can bring out emotions and assumptions at the same time. Some people may respond to this internal conflict with resistance or backlash, which is why people's reactions sometimes appear illogical.

Resistance can come from people of any gender or background; it is a common and expected part of meaningful social change that should not be feared.

By knowing how to identify the type of resistance you are facing, you can consider the type of response that will be most effective. Understanding the different types of resistance; what motivates resistance and who your audience is, will give you some idea about the personal beliefs, experiences and concerns that are driving the behaviour. This will help you to **listen with empathy and respond with confidence and care**.

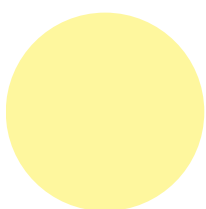
3.1 Active vs. Passive

Active resistance includes behaviours that openly challenge or undermine gender equality work. Examples include arguing against the evidence, disrupting conversations, or pushing back on proposed changes. This type of resistance is visible and can feel confronting, but it is usually easier to identify and address directly.

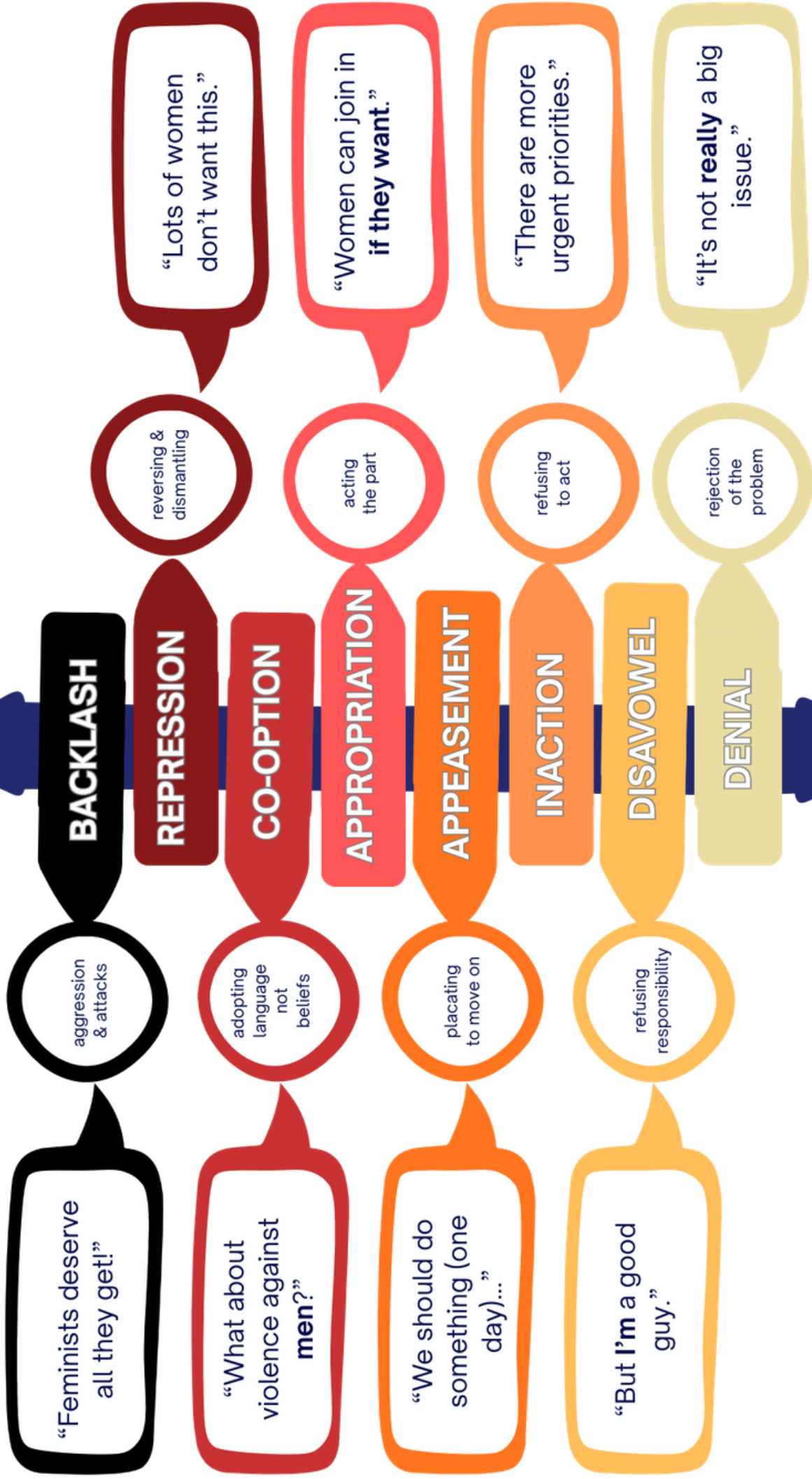
Passive resistance, on the other hand, is quieter, more commonly experienced, and can feel more challenging to identify or address. It can take the form of avoiding conversations, delaying actions, offering minimal engagement, or agreeing in principle while not changing practice. These responses may be due to a range of smaller reasons that don't necessarily relate to gender equality. Some examples include discomfort with change, uncertainty about the future, lack of confidence or competing priorities rather than strong opposition to gender equality (Safe + Equal, 2023)

Recognising where a statement sits on the active/passive scale helps those responding choose a **specific strategy** for the type of resistance they are facing.

Active resistance may require a faster response, clear boundaries and firm messaging, while passive resistance often benefits from reassurance, teaching and gentle support.



ACTIVE



(Adapted from Safe + Equal, 2023)

3.2 Organised vs. Disorganised

Another useful scale when facing resistance is: Organised to Disorganised (Safe + Equal, 2022).

Organised resistance comes from groups or individuals with political power, or social influence who actively work to undermine gender equality. Their messages may be openly misogynistic, but they can also be subtle and difficult to counter. The messaging is **carefully planned and shared**. Propaganda is an example of organised resistance.

Disorganised resistance comes from individuals who are either **repeating** propaganda they've heard without giving the message much thought, or those who are honestly unsure about the changes being introduced. While this type of resistance may still have influence over others in your community, the influence is **not intentional** and often, neither is the resistance.

Whether the resistance is organised or disorganised, they both provide the opportunity for gentle explanation and constructive conversation. However, being able to identify how organised the resistance is might help you know if/when you should stop engaging in the conversation.

Some people are not ready to see another perspective or are more interested in the debate than the cause. Directing energy toward these people can slow your momentum and drain motivation without any reward.

Stop - Think - Discuss:

Types of Resistance

Think of examples of resistance to gender equality that you have seen, heard or experienced in person or in the media.

Where would these examples fit in terms of **active** <---> **passive** and **organised** <---> **disorganised**?

If you are in a team or group, share your examples to see if there are patterns or differences in your answers.





"Peace cannot be kept
by force; it can only be
achieved by
understanding."

(Albert Einstein)

Responding to Resistance

4

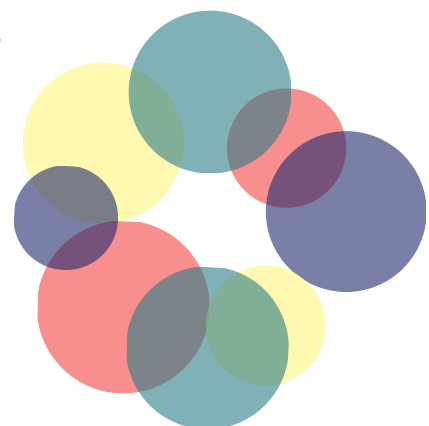
“Working within systems of power and trying to create **change is complex**, and sometimes we will get things wrong. It’s important for practitioners to know that every one of us will overstep, find a blind spot in ourselves, or accidentally collude with resistance.”

[Safe + Equal]



4.0 Responding to Resistance

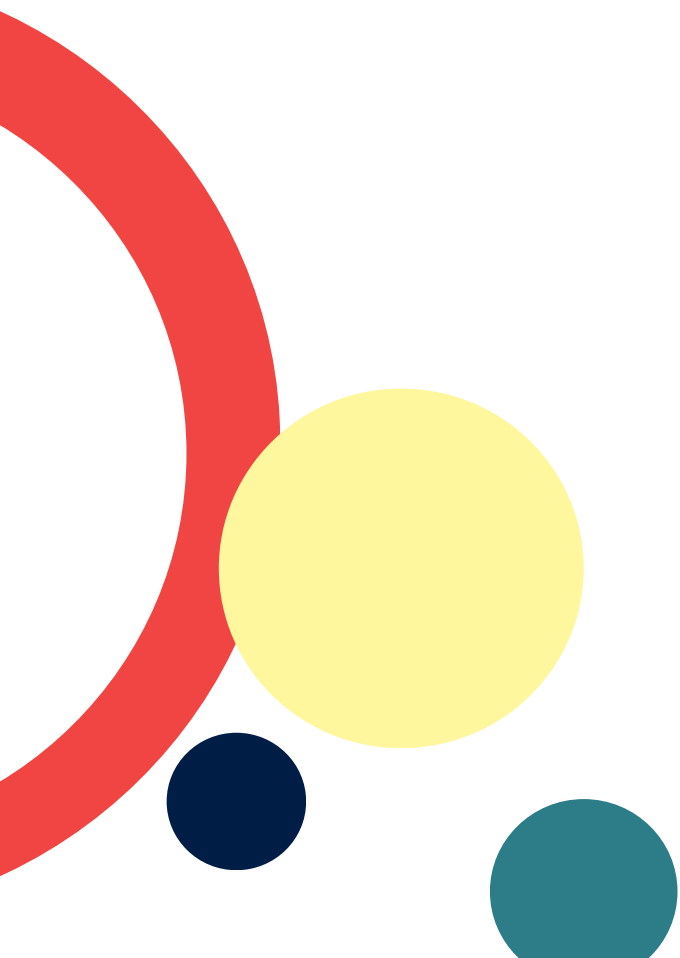
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- 4.11 Self-Care For Sustainability



There are many different models for communication and messaging; each with its own strengths and drawbacks. There is no one 'right way' to respond to resistance.

This section contains just a few of the models for communication and messaging that exist. These models have been identified as especially useful when **communicating about gender equality**.

You may already be familiar with some of the strategies, you might have a favourite strategy that you use that isn't included in this guide, you may not use a model until you come across a tricky piece of messaging that needs extra thought, or you may never use a model - it's about **what feels right for you** and what you feel will be effective and respectful for the person/people you are communicating with.



4.1 Be Prepared

Resistance should be **expected but not feared**. When you expect resistance, you can prepare for it.

Be Informed

Being informed means understanding the **content** of your message as well as your target **audience**.

Make sure you are informed about gender equality. This cause is worthy and just; there is a huge amount of evidence-based research supporting the need for gender equality. Have this evidence and information about the actions your setting is intending to take on hand. **Practise** sharing facts or have posters/fact sheets to hand out during the conversation.

Gather information or reflect on your community to determine their 'readiness' for this change:

- Will your planned changes be easy for everyone in the community?
- Will there be outliers that may feel differently?
- Will some actions or concepts be more familiar for your community than others?

Understanding your community means you can also better predict what their concerns or questions might be.

Know the Guidelines

Check the **Code of Conduct** for your workplace to make sure there are clear guidelines about what's expected of staff and your community / clientele. Ensure there is a statement about creating a safe and respectful work environment and refer to this document if any form of resistance or backlash feels unproductive or unsafe.

If your organisation uses open online forums or social media platforms, it is very helpful to have guidelines that specifically describe the expectations and responsibilities of anyone using the platform for work purposes.

Know Your Team

You are not alone in this important work – connect with other organisations, businesses and individuals committed to gender equality. One easy way to do this is to join a network (such as *Community, Respect & Equality*) to share ideas, approaches and resources. This not only supports the efforts at your workplace, but it also works towards embedding gender equality into policies and practices across Geraldton and beyond.



Be United

When the members of your organisation or community all hear the same, consistent message through written communications as well as face-to-face conversations, you show a level of unity that means there is less space for misinformation to spread.

If you have a lot of people in your team who are going to be engaging in conversations about gender equality, it can be helpful to develop a bank of expected questions and semi-scripted responses that staff members can refer to when communicating with the public. This document can then be routinely updated if staff members are approached with questions that aren't already in the bank.

Practising responses can also form part of your staff training and development; role plays can feel a bit embarrassing at the time, but practising phrases out loud can help increase communication confidence.

Be Ready

Only discuss concepts when you are ready. If a situation or conversation doesn't 'feel right' for any reason, you are entitled to end the conversation. **Time apart may help both of you.**

Practising a statement that respectfully pauses the conversation and provides an opportunity to return later is a useful strategy, especially if you or the person you are talking with is starting to become overly emotional. Some example statements include:



I need to get more information before I can answer that. Let's make a meeting time later this week to talk about it further.

We need to finish this now, but I would like to arrange a meeting with you, me and the Manager.

Let's take some time to think about this.

Can we come back together tomorrow?

It's important to find the balance between being ready and taking the leap to help lead change. If fear of making a mistake is what is holding you back, remember not to ever let the idea of a perfect response stand in the way of a good response.

When silence is read as acceptance, an imperfect advocate is better than no advocate at all.

Stop - Think - Discuss:

Be Prepared

If we expect your organisation to face resistance when promoting gender equality, how ready are you and your team to face this resistance?

Is there anything you need?

☐ Be Informed

☐ Be United

☐ Be Ready

☐ Know the Guidelines

☐ Know Your Team

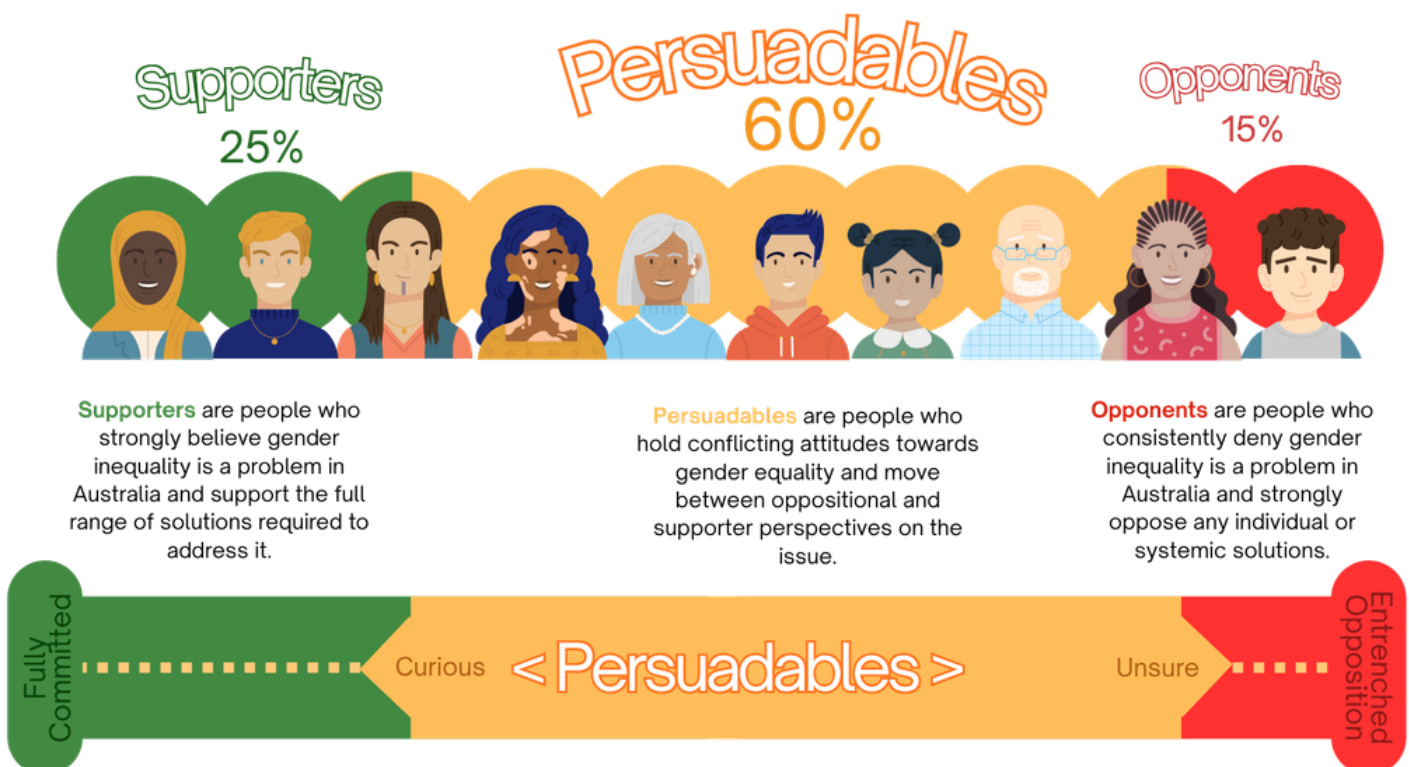


4.2 Focus On Supporters

When facing social change, people will typically fall into one of three categories: **supporters**, **persuadables** and **opponents** (VicHealth, 2021)

- Supporters help create an environment that **strengthens** your prevention work.
- Opponents often hold strong views that are **difficult to change**.
- Persuadables sit in between — they may be unsure and are often **waiting for more information** before deciding where they stand.

In 2021, it was found that around 15% of Australians were opposed to gender equality, while the remaining 85% were supportive, unsure, or held mixed views (Vic Health, 2021). Focusing your time and energy on supporters and persuadables is often most effective, as these groups can help build a community that not only supports gender equality, but comes to expect it as the norm.



4.3 The Power of Hope

Traditional messaging about gender equality and family violence has often focused on how big the problem is, expecting this to create a sense of urgency that drives action. Unfortunately, this approach is just as likely to also leave people feeling so overwhelmed they don't know where to start.

It's important for messages to tap into a sense of hope while avoiding negative emotions that diminish motivation and obstruct or delay action. Shame is an example of an emotion to avoid. Research shows that the experience of shame is so intensely negative that it can lead people to feel like total failures who shouldn't even try to change, because there is no hope (Brown, 2015).

Australia has a history of making improvements to the health of our population through education campaigns and shared commitments. Creating change takes time; especially when tackling long-held social practices and beliefs. Messages about gender equality that reflect the fact that **positive change is possible** have a much higher rate of influence.

By supporting your community to identify their strengths and guiding them to identify small opportunities for further improvements, you are enabling everyone to **practise hope, humanity, kindness and openness**.



4.4 Values Based Messaging

Humans hold values that influence their attitudes and behaviours, but different people are motivated by different values to different degrees at different times.

Our values can be **activated** by our **life experiences**, which means those values will have a strong influence over how messages are received or what is considered a priority (PIRC, 2011). For example, someone raised to value kindness or compassion is more likely to agree with messages about protective behaviours and helping others.

Context also influences the values we prioritise in that moment. For example, someone on an international holiday may value variation and excitement on the holiday but hope for routine and security while on the plane.

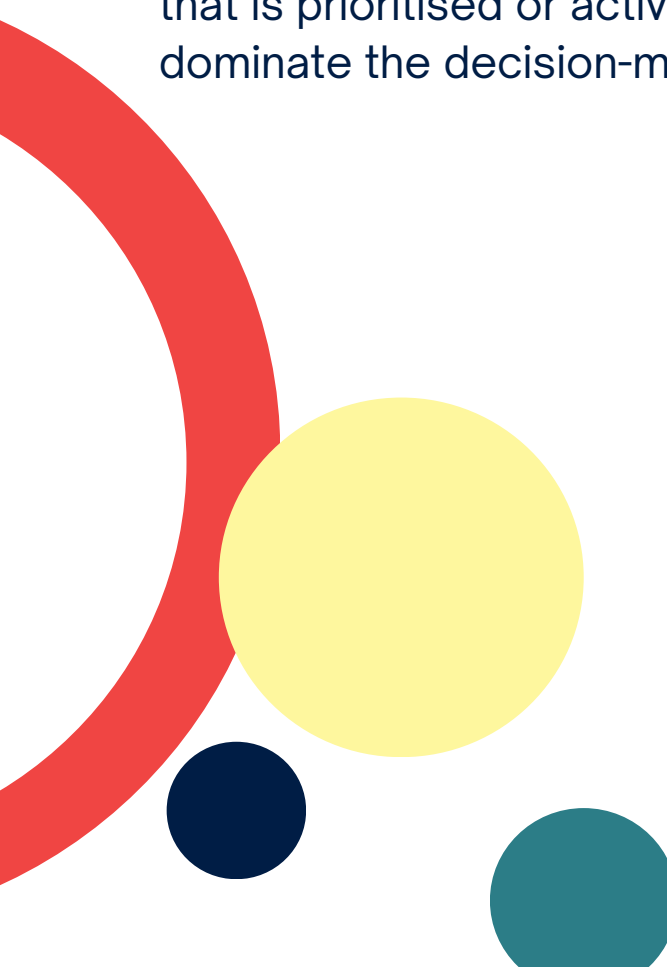
For a value to guide a behaviour or attitude, we must see that value as **relevant**. For example, someone may theoretically believe in equality for women, but they might not recognise the need for any changes in their own life.

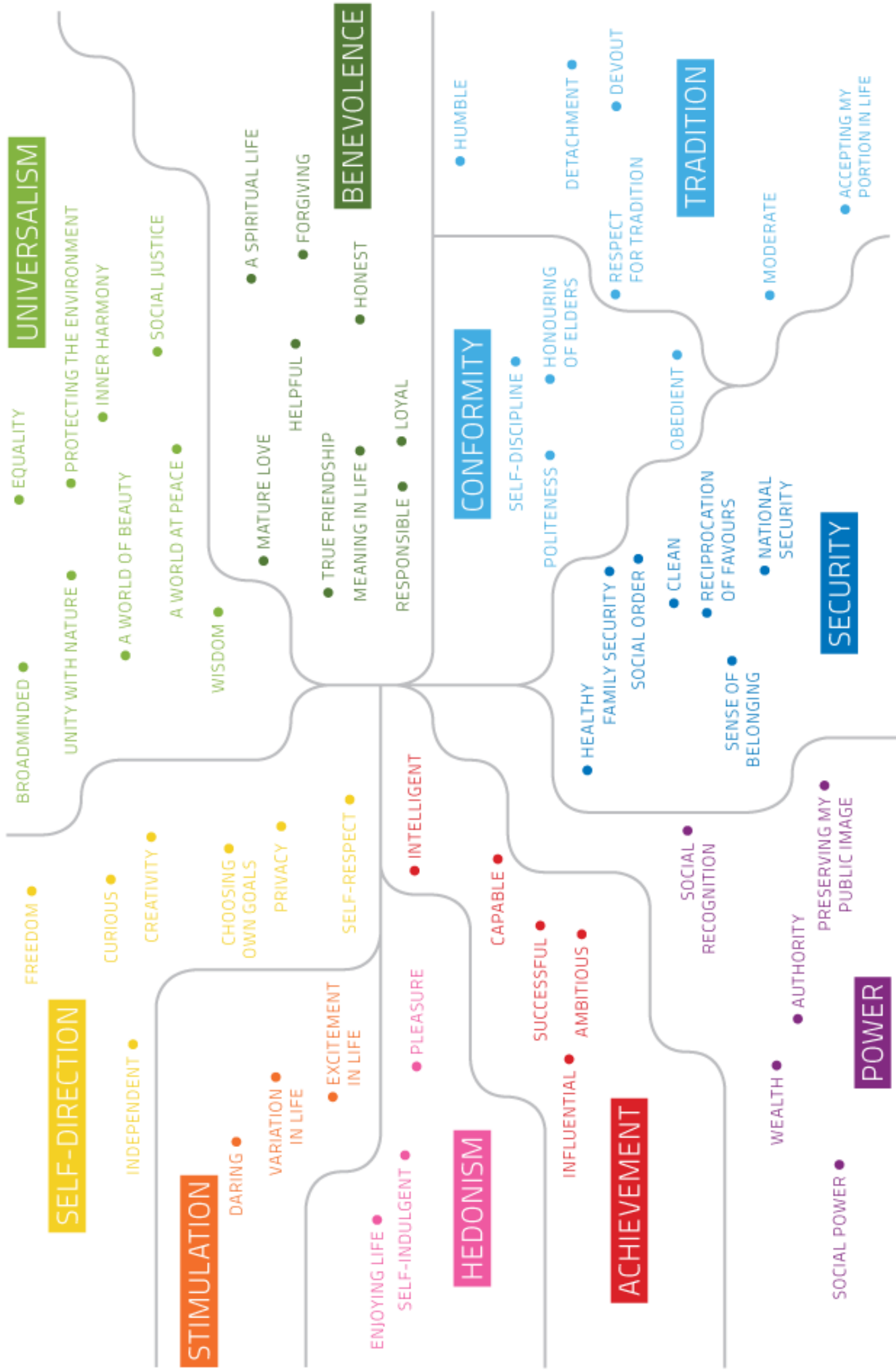
Our values (and the ways we act because of these values) can be influenced by those around us. If faced with the decision to stay true to one's own beliefs or follow the general consensus, most people will act in a way that aligns with their **peers** (Asch, 1951). This means that focusing on your supporters will often positively influence the larger team or community.

Values can be mapped out with similar values falling into groups. If someone values conformity, they may also value self-discipline, obedience, politeness and honouring elders. Values that are similar to each other tend to **reinforce** one another. For example, tapping into people's values of family connection or generosity can make them more inclined to support inclusive policies, even if you never actually mention inclusion.

As values can be grouped by similarity, those groups can also be mapped as opposing other groups. For example, the values of conformity mentioned earlier would sit opposite a group of values including stimulation, daring, variation and excitement.

Opposing values **compete** and rarely feel strong at the same time. One person may hold opposing values at the same time, but they will find that when one value is activated, the opposing value is usually dampened. In most cases the value that is prioritised or activated the most at the time will dominate the decision-making.





(The Common Cause Handbook, 2011)

Stop - Think - Discuss:

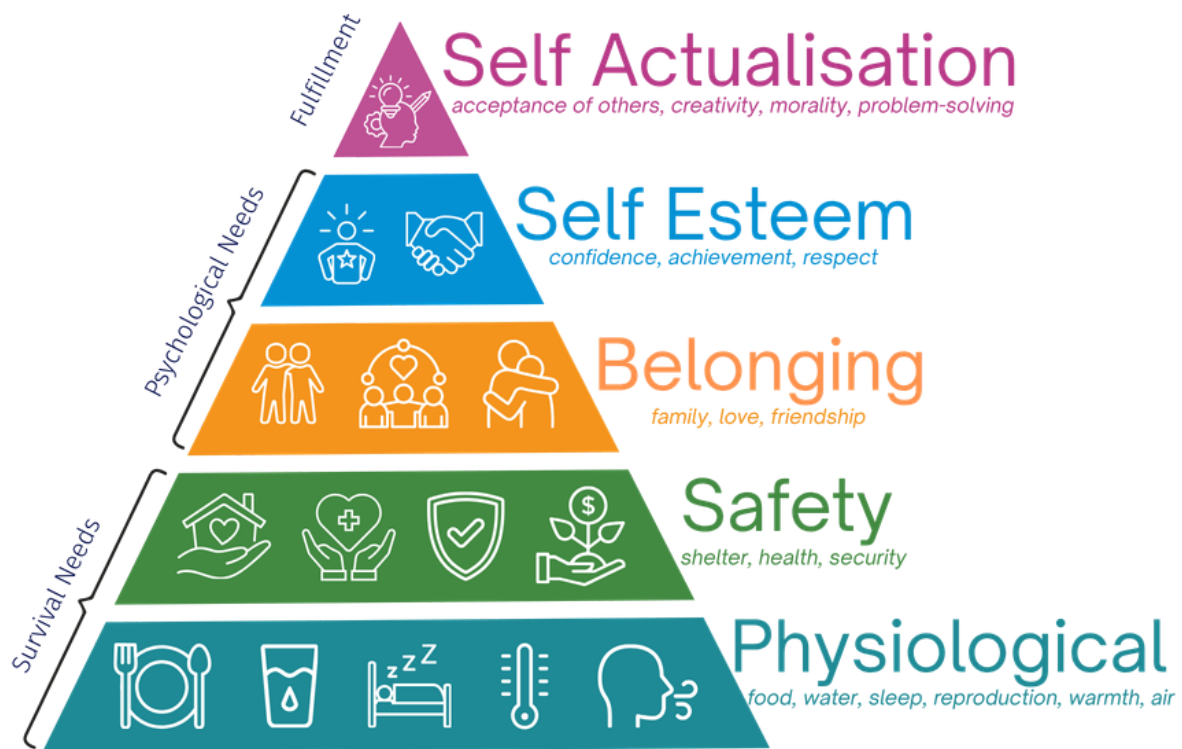
Values

Look at the Values Map from Common Cause on the previous page.

- *Which values do you prioritise in your personal or professional life? Does that ever change?*
- *Which values do you think your team prioritises? How can you find out?*



4.5 Hierarchy of Needs



adapted from
Project Maslow

Like our values, our needs strongly influence how we receive and respond to messages. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs describes five basic levels of need that are considered universal for all humans (Maslow, 1954). The needs at the base of the diagram must first be met before the levels above are considered needs; before that, they are 'wants' or 'nice to haves'. For example, if someone is routinely and significantly short on food and/or sleep, developing confidence or morality is not considered necessary, even if it would be nice. That's not to suggest that these elements are missing from the person's life, just that they are not considered *needs*.

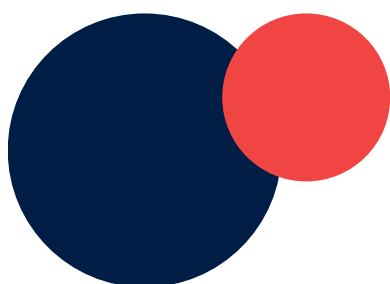
Similarly, if people feel their basic needs are not being met or are under threat by proposed change, it is much harder for them to be concerned with ideas that sit higher up the hierarchy.

When thinking about how we perceive threats to our needs it's important to acknowledge that, the part of our brain that responds to needs, struggles to **distinguish** clearly between real threats and perceived ones. The result of this is that abstract ideas can trigger real feelings of fear that are felt just as strongly as immediate physical risks.

For example, a male employee who has heard that the company's new gender targets mean men are going to lose their jobs, may find his sense of safety (shelter, finances) may feel threatened. As this perceived threat is to a basic survival need, he likely won't be influenced by messages appealing to a need for respect and acceptance until he knows whether he is going to keep his job.

Campaigns that oppose gender equality often rely on creating or amplifying fears and deliberately disrupting the sense of safety, making open communication more difficult. If you feel this is happening within your audience, it is important to lean into them with **empathy** so you can understand what they are fearful of.

Sometimes you will need to reassure people that gender equality actions aim to increase safety and security for everyone. Sometimes, by asking people to **articulate** their fears or worries, they realise that their concerns are stemming from emotions rather than real threats.



4.6 Vision-Barrier-Action

Vision-Barrier-Action messaging is particularly useful when you have a sense of the type of resistance you may encounter because it asks you to speak to those in your community who would be considered persuadable. Rather than focusing energy on those who are strongly opposed, this approach encourages you to speak to the wider community with authenticity and clarity. Your focus should be on:

1. clearly articulating a **shared vision**
 2. naming the **barriers** that get in the way, and
 3. highlighting **practical actions** that move change forward
- (PIRC, 2011)

Over time, as your messages are repeated and become familiar, social norms begin to shift. As the majority adopts new expectations and values, opposition often loses influence and becomes more isolated or find their values shifting with the community.

In this way, Vision-Barrier-Action messaging supports lasting change by **building momentum** with the persuadable majority, rather than trying to directly convince those who are unlikely to change their views.

The following pages have examples of statements of resistance and possible Vision-Barrier-Action responses.

“What about violence against men?”

VISION

I can hear that you are really concerned about the safety and wellbeing of men, and that's great. I am too, we all deserve to live free from violence.

BARRIER

Evidence consistently shows us that men are the perpetrators in almost all cases of violence; and that women are more likely than men to be victims of family and sexual violence. This impacts everyone, including men.

BARRIER

While both men and women experience violence, they experience it differently. In relationships, men most often use violence to exercise control over a partner, while women often use violence in self-defence or retaliation, or in an effort to gain freedom. Violence against women is more likely to be perpetrated by someone they know, in private, and be more severe, while violence against men is more likely to be perpetrated in public, with witnesses and support.

ACTION

By working together to change the attitudes that give rise to violence against women, we can build a world where all people live free from violence.

“Not all men.”

VISION

We all deserve to feel valued and free from discrimination.

BARRIER

But while men who choose to use violence against women are in the minority, many more men are complicit in encouraging sexist behaviour, and many stay silent when they see disrespect towards women, or aggressive or controlling behaviour.

ACTION

Even those who are not part of the problem can be part of the solution by speaking out against disrespect, role modelling respectful relationships, and valuing women equally.

“Men and women are naturally different.”

VISION

Everyone is unique and we all want to be respected as individuals with our own interests, skills and aspirations.

BARRIER

But rigid ideas of what men and women are capable of locks us into roles that don't help us live the life we really want. For example, beliefs that men should act tough are hurting people's mental health.

ACTION

It's up to all of us to challenge these outdated expectations and give everybody the opportunity to choose their own path.

Stop - Think - Discuss: Vision-Barrier-Action

Imagine someone in your community has publicly made the statement below. Try creating a response using the Vision-Barrier-Action model.

“We’ve had gender equality and it didn’t work.”

A diagram illustrating the Vision-Barrier-Action model, enclosed in a red rounded rectangle. It consists of three stacked, empty shapes for writing:

- VISION:** A pink trapezoid at the top, with the word "VISION" written vertically in red on its left side.
- BARRIER:** A teal rounded rectangle in the middle, with the word "BARRIER" written vertically in teal on its left side.
- ACTION:** A blue trapezoid at the bottom, with the word "ACTION" written vertically in blue on its left side.

A small red and black pencil icon is located at the bottom right of the diagram.

4.7 Constructive Conversations

The Constructive Conversations model has a similar structure to Vision-Barrier-Action. The difference with this way of communicating is that it focuses on open dialogue — encouraging the **sharing of different views respectfully** (Safe + Equal, 2022).

Rather than arguing or trying to force agreement, this approach encourages people to listen to one another, ask questions, and share personal experiences without judgment. It helps **create space for understanding**, even when an issue feels difficult or sensitive.

This model is helpful in promoting gender equality because it recognises that conversations about gender can be complex, and that people are more open to different perspectives when they feel heard and respected. By focusing on common values, asking thoughtful questions and responding with care, constructive conversations help reduce tension, build trust and create space for learning and positive change.

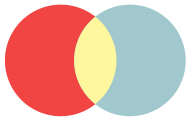
To authentically engage in Constructive Conversations, you must listen to others' perspectives and be open to learning as much as your audience.

5 Steps to... Constructive Conversations



SPEAK TO PEOPLE'S BEST SELVES

Be willing to listen to concerns or ideas. Try to appeal to the values of people's best selves. This can significantly reduce people's prejudices.



FIND COMMON GROUND

Find something you agree on and use that as your starting point. This way you are positioned as 'on the same side' from the start.



TALK ABOUT CHANGE

Discuss what change is possible; look at examples of success and explore specific actions that are possible. This is the problem-solving stage.



MAKE IT REAL

Big numbers and graphs do not evoke emotions in most people. Give your message a human face and a real story.



STAY FOCUSED

Avoid myth-busting as that can draw you into a messy debate. Instead, focus on spreading truths and sticking to your evidence.

“Gender equality feels very political.
We shouldn’t discuss politics at work.”



SPEAK TO PEOPLE’S BEST SELVES

I hear that concern, and I think most of us want work to feel respectful, professional and focused on what helps people do their jobs well.



FIND COMMON GROUND

That’s something we have in common. When we talk about gender equality at work, we’re not talking about party politics — we’re talking about making sure everyone is treated fairly, feels safe, and has equal opportunity to participate and contribute.



TALK ABOUT CHANGE

In practice, that can look like who gets listened to in meetings, how leave and flexibility are supported, or whether harmful stereotypes are shaping expectations of people.



MAKE IT REAL

These are real workplace issues because they affect culture, wellbeing and people’s ability to thrive at work.



STAY FOCUSED

So rather than debating politics, the focus is on creating a workplace where everyone is respected and has a fair go.

Stop - Think - Discuss: Constructive Conversations

Have a go at creating a response to the statement below. Use the Constructive Conversations model to structure your response.

**“Why are we doing this now?
This was never an issue 30 years ago!”**

SPEAK TO PEOPLE’S BEST SELVES

FIND COMMON GROUND

TALK ABOUT CHANGE

MAKE IT REAL

STAY FOCUSED



Constructive Conversations: Helpful & Unhelpful Behaviours

Helpful

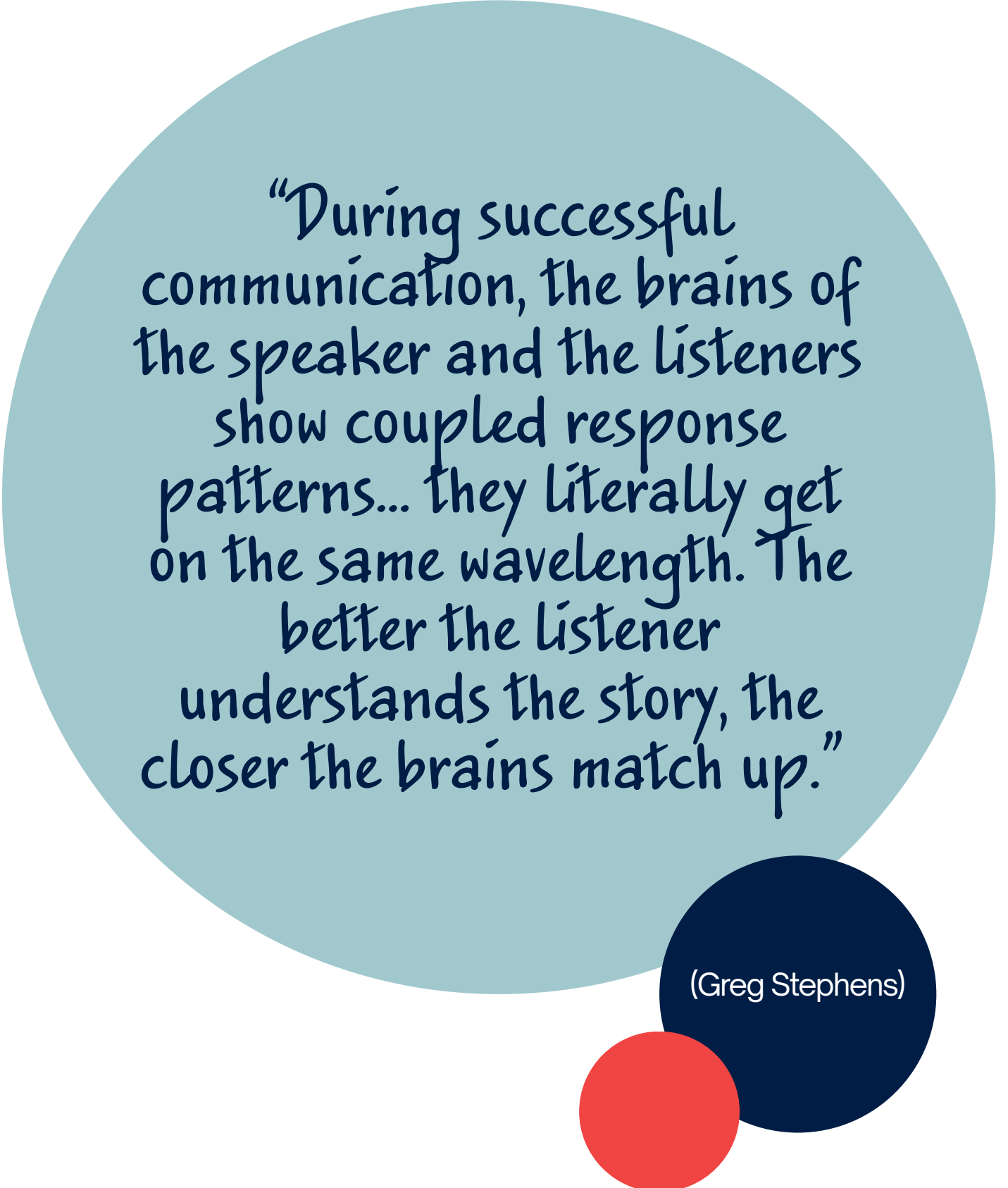
- Acknowledging concerns and emotions before responding;
- Asking open questions with real curiosity;
- Focusing on shared values such as wellbeing, fairness and safety;
- Using calm, respectful language;
- Allowing space and time for people to think and reflect;
- Sharing information gently and at the right time.

Unhelpful

- Arguing, debating or trying to 'win';
- Dismissing the other person's concerns;
- Telling the other person they are wrong;
- Using academic language that feels overwhelming;
- Being defensive or emotional;
- Repeating myths while trying to bust them;
- Expecting immediate agreement or change.

Remember

The goal of constructive conversations is not to *convince* anyone in the moment. It is to build understanding, trust and openness over time - creating the conditions for your team to grow.



“During successful communication, the brains of the speaker and the listeners show coupled response patterns... they literally get on the same wavelength. The better the listener understands the story, the closer the brains match up.”

(Greg Stephens)

4.8 Wired for Storytelling

Storytelling has long been used across cultures to **share knowledge** and pass on understandings from one generation to the next. Our brains are wired to make sense of the world through stories; we understand, remember and connect with information more easily when it is presented as a narrative rather than a list of facts. Stories help us **attach meaning** and emotion to ideas, which makes them more memorable and easier to understand (FrameWorks, nd).

When someone listens to a story, their brain responds as if they are part of the experience. People are more open to new ideas when they are presented in ways that engage the senses because they are not only hearing the message — they are **feeling** it.

Just as we can build connection to meaning through storytelling, we can also use stories to create distance when it's necessary. The use of metaphors in storytelling is particularly powerful because metaphors allow complex or sensitive ideas to be **explored at a distance**, helping people engage without feeling personally exposed.

Real stories can be thoughtfully adapted to suit the message and audience. This might require you to change identifying details, combine elements from several experiences, or adjust the focus to **highlight learning rather than harm**. Adapting stories in this way helps protect privacy, reduce distress and ensure the message remains strengths-based and purposeful.

Stop - Think - Discuss:

Storytelling

Can you think of a brief story that highlights the need for gender equality?

- *How personal or sensitive is this story? Can you adjust it to provide more space for safe reflection by your audience?*
- *What does this story teach your audience? Is that your intention?*
- *Does your story include hope? Does it inspire or motivate?*



4.9 Review For The Future

If you or one of your team members faces a challenging instance of resistance or backlash, there is great value in taking time to review what occurred. Approaching this process in a similar way to **OHS incidents** or near misses can be a helpful way to plan for the future and avoid facing the same challenge again.

Rather than focusing on blame, the aim is to understand what happened, what was effective in the moment, and what could be done differently next time.

Reviewing these incidents helps teams strengthen their responses and build confidence for future situations. Key questions might include:

- What helped de-escalate the situation?
- What messages were heard, misunderstood or missed?
- Were there early signs that the conversation was becoming challenging?

Reflections of this type are most powerful when we start to look ahead. Consider what can be done proactively to reduce the likelihood of similar situations arising again. This may include sharing learnings with other staff so responses are consistent and the team feels well-supported, changing the way messages are shared or accessing training for staff. In some cases, it may also be appropriate to involve leadership or external services.

Taking a thoughtful, reflective approach helps ensure challenging encounters become opportunities for learning, rather than setbacks to progress.

Communications Review Checklist



The goal of reflection is not to assign blame, but to build confidence, consistency and care in how we respond.

What happened?

- What was the situation or conversation?
- Who was involved?
- What were the key moments?

How was the situation managed?

- What actions were taken in the moment?
- What escalated/de-escalated the situation?

What worked well?

- Were any strategies particularly effective?

What could be done differently next time?

- What alternative responses may have been more effective?
- Were there early signs that could have been noticed sooner?

What can we learn from this?

- What does this incident tell us about our communication or environment?
- Are there patterns or recurring themes?

What can be done proactively?

- Do we need to change our proactive messaging?
- Could clearer communication help prevent similar situations?

Who needs to know?

- Should this be shared with other staff as learning?
- Is leadership or external support needed?

4.10 Response Library

A response library can be a valuable tool for supporting staff when they encounter resistance or backlash. A response library is a **shared, moderated** document where teams record examples of challenging questions, comments or reactions they have faced, alongside agreed and approved responses. These examples might come from face-to-face conversations, emails, complaints or online interactions.

By capturing **real examples**, a response library helps make the work feel more manageable and reminds staff that they are not alone in navigating difficult moments.

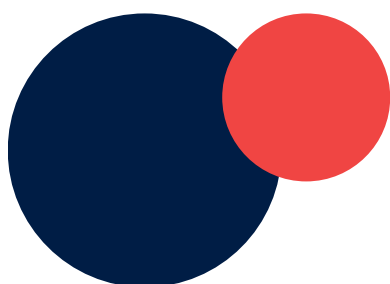
Response libraries reduce the pressure on individuals to find the “right words” in the moment and help ensure **responses align** with a setting’s values and approach. Over time, reviewing and adding to the library also supports learning and reflection, allowing teams to identify patterns, strengthen proactive messaging and reduce the likelihood of escalation.

4.11 Self-Care for Sustainability

Caring for staff wellbeing is always important, and is an essential part of sustaining gender equality and prevention work over time. This work is meaningful and rewarding, but it can also be emotionally demanding. Supporting social change often comes with moments of progress and hope, alongside periods of frustration, resistance or fatigue. Recognising this reality — and responding to it with care — helps ensure staff feel supported, valued and able to continue this work **safely and confidently**.

Self-care is not just an individual responsibility; it is also an organisational one. When leaders actively support staff wellbeing, they help **build resilience** and **reduce burnout**. This might include creating space for reflection, encouraging staff to step back when needed, sharing the emotional load across teams, and normalising rest and boundaries. When staff members feel cared for, they are better able to engage thoughtfully with others, respond calmly to challenges and stay connected to the purpose of the work.

Looking after people supports **longevity** — not only of individual staff members, but of the change efforts themselves.

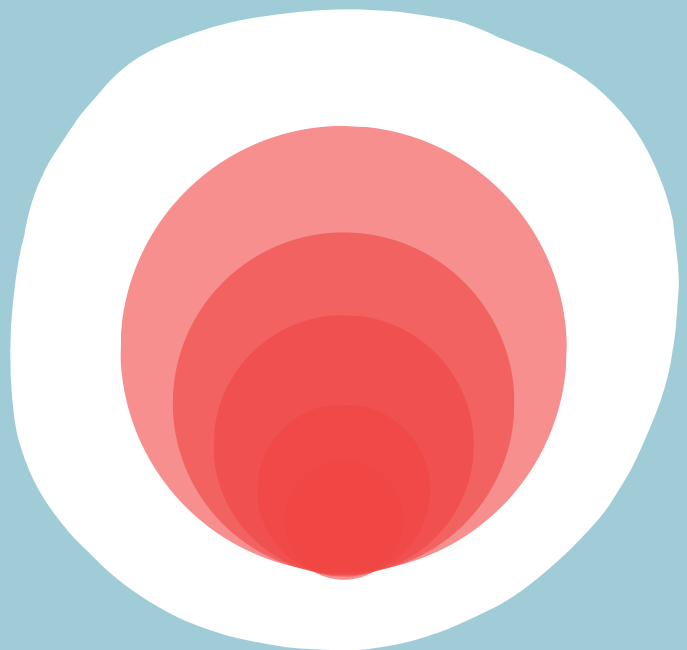


Practice Scenarios

5

“What we have to learn to do,
we learn by **doing**.”

[Aristotle]



Practice Scenarios:

Example 1

Either individually or as a team, try responding to these examples of resistance and backlash. In each case, consider what type of resistance or backlash you are facing, what may be causing the resistance and an appropriate response.

Feel free to adjust the scenarios to suit your setting and community.

Sure primary prevention is important, but crisis support is more important.

What's going on here?
What type of resistance is it?
What might be motivating it?
What model might work?
Do you need additional information?

How might you respond?



Practice Scenarios:

Examples 2 & 3

I was just joking! Settle down,
you should get a sense of
humour.



What's going on here?
What type of resistance is it?
What might be motivating it?
What model might work?
Do you need additional information?

Some violence is cultural.

How might you respond?



Practice Scenarios:

Examples 4 & 5

Sure, violence is bad but I'm a good husband and dad, so it's not my problem.



What's going on here?
What type of resistance is it?
What might be motivating it?
What model might work?
Do you need additional information?

How might you respond?

You try telling my teenage daughter not to wear make up and see how far you get!



Practice Scenarios:

Examples 6 & 7

Do you talk to kids about this stuff? It sounds like child abuse to me!



What's going on here?
What type of resistance is it?
What might be motivating it?
What model might work?
Do you need additional information?

How might you respond?

This is a conspiracy led by man-hating women trying to get on top. Don't fall for it!



Practice Scenarios:

Example 8

*Sometimes resistance is not expressed in words but shown through actions or body language. It's important to remember that non-verbal cues can be misread, so respond with care and **curiosity**.*

Aim to keep your response calm and open, avoiding reactions that could unintentionally create tension or escalate a situation that may not be a conflict.

Since gender equality actions have been listed as a standing agenda item in staff meetings, you have noticed Trevor inviting only men to after work drinks.

Is this resistance?
How can you check?
If it is resistance, what might be motivating it?

How might you respond?



Practice Scenarios:

Examples 9 & 10

When your organisation celebrates women in the window display, it feels like fewer men come in the door.



Is this resistance?
How can you check?
If it is resistance, what might be motivating it?

How might you respond?

A staff member has disclosed that other staff members are complaining about recent gender equality actions when you aren't around.





*"Revolution is
not a one-time
event."*

(Audre Lorde)

Additional Resources

6

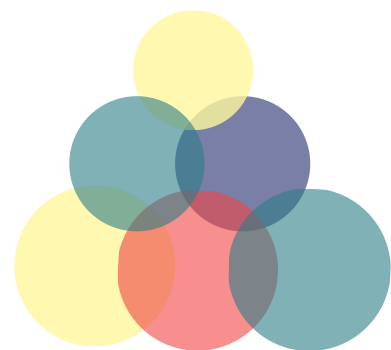
"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the
shoulders of giants."

(Isaac Newton)



6.0 Additional Resources

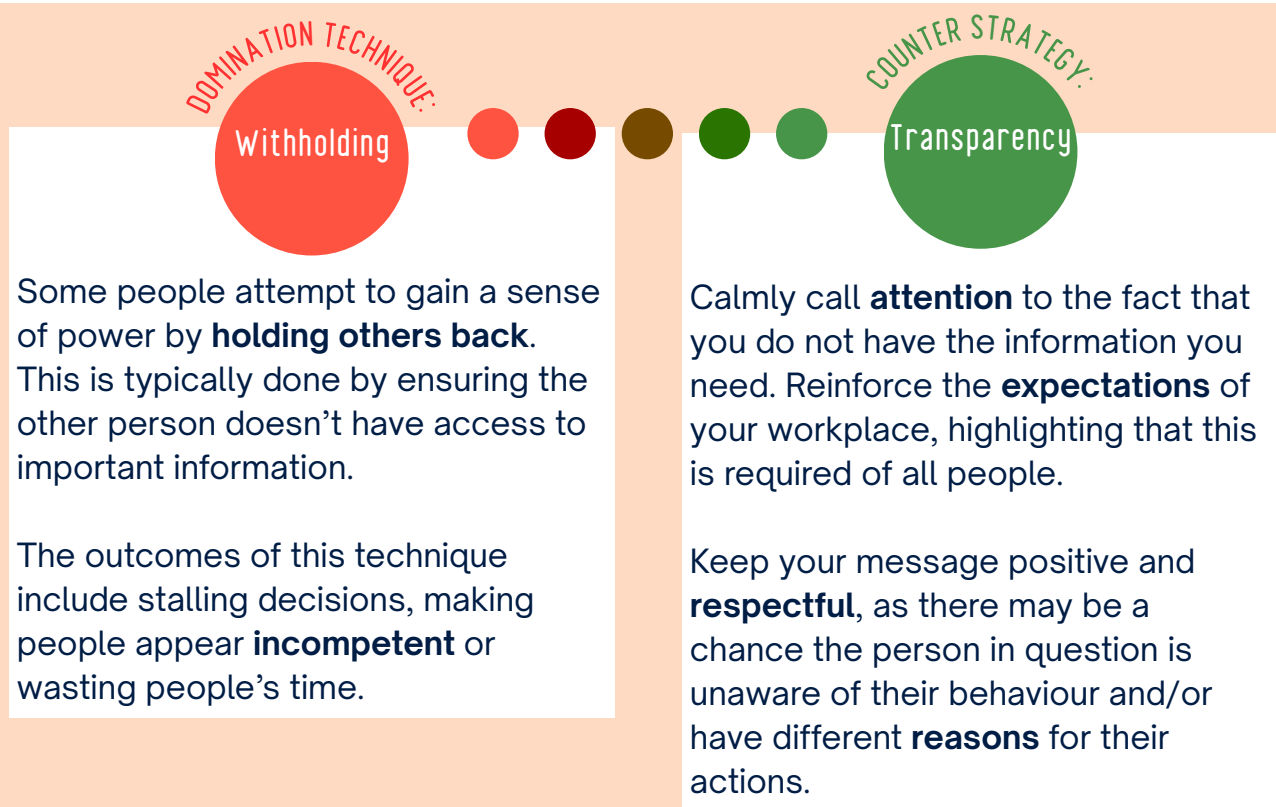
- 6.1 Domination Techniques
- 6.2 Communications Checklist
- 6.3 References & Further Reading



6.1 Domination Techniques

Domination techniques can be used by people of any gender to gain or maintain **power over** others, often by limiting choice, voice or participation (Ås, 1978). Learning to recognise when these techniques are being used — and knowing how to respond — can help reduce their impact and keep conversations grounded and respectful.

The examples and responses provided here are intended as a guide only. If at any point you feel unsafe or threatened, it is important to **prioritise your safety** and end the conversation as soon as possible. Support should then be sought from within or beyond your setting, such as from a colleague, leader, or other appropriate services, including the police if required.



DOMINATION TECHNIQUE:

Ridicule

Ridicule is achieved by **belittling** a person or their message, often turning it into something others are encouraged to **laugh at** or dismiss. This might make you feel that you are not equal in the situation.

Ridiculing women is so common in society it has become **embedded** in everyday language. Over time, these patterns can be internalised, meaning women may sometimes downplay or diminish themselves without realising it.

A related behaviour is **infantilising**, where someone is spoken to or treated as though they are a child. This can occur through tone, word choice or actions, and similarly works to undermine confidence and authority.

COUNTER STRATEGY:

Questioning

Questioning the ridiculing behaviour is a good way to bring **attention** to the impact of their behaviour, make clear that you do not intend to accept this type of treatment and might bring light to their **motivations**.

Stay composed and professional and try not to join them in the laughter at your own expense.

Examples of questioning ridicule include:

- “What do you mean by that?”
- “Could you please repeat that?”
- “Are you saying this because I am a woman?”

DOMINATION TECHNIQUE:

Make Invisible

This technique conveys the message that you do not matter, or that what you have to say or contribute has little value. This message may be directed towards you, or to a shared audience.

Some people may try to achieve this through words or body language and is typically intended to **undermine your confidence** or influence how others perceive you.

COUNTER STRATEGY:

Take Up Space

If you feel someone is trying to make you invisible, calmly and respectfully assert your right to participate and be heard in the moment. Responding with care rather than confrontation is often more effective.

Stay grounded and try to **avoid internalising** the message. Always remember there may be different reasons for the behaviour you see.

DOMINATION TECHNIQUE:

Lose-Lose

Is a technique that attributes **negativity** to your actions or decisions, no matter what you do. This technique can leave you feeling that whatever choice you make, it will be the **wrong** one.

An example of this technique is: Sue planned an open forum to discuss the changes to the centre and was told she was *grandstanding*. So, Sue cancelled the forum but was then told she was *being secretive*.

COUNTER STRATEGY:

Win-Win

The counter strategy for this technique involves knowing what your **priorities** are and why they are important.

Understand what **motivates** your actions so, if you are questioned or a negative lens is applied to you, you don't start questioning your own intentions.

If you feel you need to check your intentions or actions with another person, reach out to a trusted colleague who understands your efforts in promoting gender equality and ask them to be honest with you.

DOMINATION TECHNIQUE:

Blame & Shame

This technique is often used with women in person and in the media. It involves making you feel **ashamed** or guilty for an event that is partially or fully **out of your control**.

The intention of this technique is to incorrectly put the **responsibility** for the outcome on you, rather than the true cause.

An example of this technique is asking a woman what she was wearing on the night she was attacked.

COUNTER STRATEGY:

Not Personal

If you start feeling guilt or shame, assess whether this feeling is coming from another person or **your own moral compass**.

If you find it hard to reflect on your role in an outcome, try to imagine another person (colleague or friend) being in your shoes, blamed for the same action – would you feel the blame is unjust?

6.2 Communications Checklist

Clarity & Purpose	☐ Is the main message easy to understand? ☐ Is the purpose clear (why we're sharing this)? ☐ Does it avoid jargon or technical language?
Tone & Warmth	☐ Does the message feel welcoming and respectful ? ☐ Is the tone strengths-based (not blaming or shaming)?
Consistent Values	☐ Does it align with your organisation's values and philosophy? ☐ Does it support gender equality and respectful relationships? ☐ Is the messaging culturally safe ?
Audience Awareness	☐ Does it consider the diversity of your audience? ☐ Is the language accessible for multilingual or low-literacy communities?
Evidence of Inclusion	☐ Does it avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes? ☐ If photos are used, are they respectful and representative ?
Proactive Framing	☐ Does it explain the " why " before the "what"? ☐ Is it framed around shared goals ("we", "our community", "together")?
Anticipating Questions & Concerns	☐ Does the communication acknowledge that change can feel new or unfamiliar? ☐ Are staff/clients given a way to ask questions or seek clarification?
Cultural Safety	☐ Could any wording be interpreted as dismissive of cultural practices or norms? ☐ Have First Nations' perspectives been respected (not tokenistic)?
Practicality & Next Steps	☐ Does the message clearly state what people can expect next ? ☐ Are contact details or follow-up pathways included if appropriate?
Review by Multiple Perspectives	☐ Has at least one colleague reviewed it for clarity ? ☐ Has someone considered how the audience might feel reading it?

6.3 References & Further Reading

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Thank You

Thank you for the thoughtful effort you are putting into promoting gender equality. Striving for equality is an ongoing journey, and the small, intentional choices made each day have a powerful and lasting impact.

We hope this guide has supported your confidence and provided practical ideas you can adapt to your organisation. If you have questions, reflections or would like further support, we encourage you to reach out — connection and conversation are an important part of this work.

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"True peace is
not merely the
absence of
tension; it is
the presence of
justice."

(Martin Luther
King Jr.)

