

# How men can be allies to women right now

March 16 2021, by Stephen Burrell, Nicole Westmarland and Sandy Ruxton

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Men are primarily responsible for violence against women and girls. All men, including those who are not perpetrating violence or abuse, have a responsibility to play a part in helping to end it.

More men are starting to reflect on their own role in the problem and in tackling it. [Our research](#) has explored why some men come to take an active role in improving the situation and what can be learnt from their experience to encourage others.

Often it was the impact of hearing from [women](#) in their own lives which initiated a process of awakening. In some cases, it was witnessing other men's violence or learning about the experiences of someone close to them. Sometimes the men felt that they didn't "fit" with dominant expectations of masculinity—"be strong, in control, don't cry"—when growing up. For some, it was the impact of a horrifying high-profile death of a woman, similar to the situation in the UK currently, which finally spurred them to speak out. This moment can be an opportunity for more men to become allies.

If we are going to stop violence against women and girls, we need many, many more men to engage. This must start with an honest examination of men's own attitudes, behaviors and attachments to masculine expectations. Sexist ideas and [harmful gender norms](#) are so deeply rooted in institutions and [public discourse](#) that no one is untouched by them. This is not about blaming individual men, but recognizing that for change to happen, each and every man needs to play a part in it.

## **Reflecting on our relationships**

Men can make a real difference in their daily interactions with family members, friends, peers and colleagues. They can challenge sexism and misogyny when they encounter it. This includes making sure that we are "walking the walk" in terms of equal and respectful relationships with women and girls. At home, that might mean ensuring that tasks such as housework and childcare are equally shared, and prioritizing enthusiastic consent and respect in sexual relationships.

Outside of the home, it includes understanding how women's freedom in [public spaces](#) can be [limited](#) in a way which isn't the case for most men. We can take into account our own everyday behaviors and the impact they can have. Even if there is no malicious intent, consider that maybe it isn't clear to the woman you are walking behind that you mean her no harm. We don't control how our actions are received and we cannot know the negative experiences that a woman may have previously had with men.

In their daily lives, men can also be active bystanders; for example, by questioning sexist comments or stereotypes, or talking to a friend whose behavior towards women doesn't feel right. If you witness actual or potential abusive behavior, options include challenging the abuser if it feels safe to do so, trying to distract them, checking with the victim if they need help, and getting the support of others.

Of course, some groups of men have much more power and privilege than others. Men in leadership positions, and in influential institutions such as politics, business, media and the police have a particular responsibility to speak out and work to build gender equality and inclusiveness in their own organizations and wider communities. There are also organizations already engaging with men and boys on these issues in the UK which men can get involved with, such as the [White Ribbon](#) campaign.

When men do decide to take action, they should do so sensitively, recognizing and supporting women's longstanding leadership in this area. Without this, there can be a risk of men "taking over" by dominating conversations, claiming expertise that they don't have, or taking credit for women's efforts.

These are some examples of why it's essential that male allies act in an accountable way. If you care about this issue, be prepared to receive and

act upon critical feedback from women. One of the most important things men can do is really listen to women in their lives, and instigate conversations with other men about what women are saying.

It is vital that men explore what the implications of violence against women are for them, and the role they can play in shifting harmful masculine norms. Men must address these issues honestly and openly, engage with one another, and work towards a society which is free from men's violence against women and girls.

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