

December 15, 2020

## **Don't be a bystander this festive season**

With the festive season upon us, central Victoria's specialist domestic and family violence response service, Centre for Non-Violence, is calling on everyone to be mindful of the increased risk to women and children at this time of year – and encouraging all of us to play a part in supporting their safety.

Chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos says while domestic and family violence reports to police and support services increase during the festive season each year, we are expecting to see that number even higher in 2020 as Victorian families come together in large numbers for the first time since Covid-19 lockdowns.

“We know there will be added pressures this year, as the pandemic has had a heavy financial impact for many families,” she said.

“We will also see many families come together for the first time in many months.

“But it is important to recognise that while many families will be under pressure this festive season, violence is a choice – and we can all make a choice not to use violence against the people we love or care about.”

Ms Augerinos says friends and family members should be mindful of how they see others being treated, and not ignore any warning signs.

“Violence against women is everybody's business – we all need to be calling out behaviours that are disrespectful towards women.

“This violence can take many forms, and it's important to note that coercive control and environments where women are restricted or do not feel safe to make their own choices, are just as dangerous as environments where physical abuse is present.

“It is normal for partners to have disagreements. In a relationship where partners are equal, both can state their opinions and feel heard – in a safe environment.

“In an abusive relationship, one partner tries to control the other – and can use a number of tactics to do this.

“It may be physical violence, verbal abuse, restricting their freedom and movement, making demands or threats, or sexual abuse.”

People who see these behaviours can show their disapproval through body language (don't laugh, walk away, stand between the person making the comments and the woman they're being directed to, call it out if it's safe to do so); question sexist jokes, support someone calling out the behaviour, ask them to stop or change the topic.

It's important to follow up with the woman whom the behaviour is being directed towards.

It can be difficult to know how to help someone experiencing violence or abuse, but some strategies could include:

- Listening without judgment.
- Never excusing violence or abuse (whether it's physical or psychological).
- Never questioning their choices. She is an expert in her own safety. Understand that for many reasons, a woman may not leave a relationship.
- Find practical ways to help – deliver groceries, keep copies of private documents, offer your home as a safe place to go.
- Help her prepare a safety plan.
- In an emergency call 000

You can find more about how to help someone experiencing abuse at: [www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help](http://www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help)

**Centre for Non-Violence covers the Loddon region – which includes the City of Greater Bendigo and the Central Goldfields, Mt Alexander, Macedon Ranges, Loddon and Campaspe shires. Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292 | The 24-hour statewide safe steps family violence crisis response line is 1800 015 188 | Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491 | In an emergency, call 000 | For information, visit: [www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help](http://www.cnv.org.au/we-are-here-to-help)**

---

Further information: Nicole Ferrie, Head of Media and Communications – 0475 963 741