

December 17, 2021

If you see something, do something

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That's the message from Central Victoria's specialist domestic and family violence response service, Centre for Non-Violence, this festive season.

With the number of domestic and family violence reports to police and support services often increasing during the festive season, and significant increases in family violence incidents in the Bendigo, Loddon and Campaspe areas during the past year, CNV is calling on everyone to be mindful of the increased risk to women and children – saying we can all play a part in limiting their risk.

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

“In abusive relationships, one partner tries to control the other – and they 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,” she said.

“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.”

Signs of abuse could include:

- She is afraid of her partner or anxious to please them.
- She has stopped seeing her friends or family, or cuts phone conversations short.
- Her partner makes decisions about her money, who she can see or what she can do.
- She talks about her partner's temper or possessiveness.
- She has lost her confidence or is unusually quiet.
- She has physical injuries and may offer unlikely explanations for them.
- Her children seem afraid of her partner, or their behaviour has changed.
- Her partner criticises/humiliates her in front of others.

It can be difficult to know how to help someone experiencing violence or abuse, and it may not always be safe for you or the victim if you intervene, but it's important you don't ignore what you see or hear.

Some strategies could include:

- Listening without judgment
- Believing what she tells you
- Letting her know the abuse is not her fault
- 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
- Finding practical ways to help – deliver groceries, keep copies of private documents, offer your home as a safe place to go
- Helping her prepare a safety plan
- Maintaining contact

Violence against women starts with disrespect – beliefs and attitudes that see women as less equal to men. These attitudes could be displayed in many ways, including expecting women to conform to stereotypes, belittling or objectifying them, leering or staring or putting them down. If you see some of these behaviours, you could:

- Not laugh at sexist jokes
- Ask the person making the joke what they think is funny
- Have a conversation about your concerns
- Show your emotion about how their comments or actions make you feel
- Calmly disagree
- Disrupt the situation or redirect the focus
- Support others who call it out
- Make eye contact with the person affected, to show your support
- Walk away
- Stand between the person making the comments and the woman they're being directed to

Ms Augerinos says that until we start addressing the drivers of violence against women, we will continue to see high rates of family and domestic violence.

“The main driver of violence against women is gender inequality – which includes attitudes that excuse or condone violence, limit women’s decision-making, adhere to rigid gender roles and disrespect women,” she said.

“It is important we do not place the burden on women to protect themselves and remain safe – but we must also continue to hold perpetrators to account and place the onus on them to change their attitudes and behaviour. The only way we can do this is to address the drivers of violence against women and children.

“Violence is choice – and we can all make a choice not to use violence against the people we love or care about.”

Centre for Non-Violence can be contacted on 1800 884 292 | The Orange Door Loddon can be contacted on 1800 512 359 | 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

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