



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

The Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework:

Promoting healthy sexual relationships and
consent among young people



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Joint Ministerial foreword

Australians are experiencing sexual violence at an alarming rate, particularly younger age groups. One in 5 women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. For women in their twenties, around 1 in 2 have experienced this form of violence.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* and the supporting *First Action Plan 2023–2027* commit governments to take action to prevent sexual violence and sexual harassment. They highlight the need to specifically engage with young people, including boys and young men, on consent and respectful relationships.

There is much work still to be done to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to sexual violence. The latest *National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey* shows that, while attitudes and understanding are slowly improving over time, attitudes that objectify women and disregard consent persist.

According to that survey, 1 in 5 young people (and 1 in 4 young men) agree that women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets.

Evidence shows that improving attitudes and understanding among young people is a key method of preventing sexual harm and violence.

The Commonwealth consent policy framework: Promoting healthy sexual relationships and consent among young people supports initiatives that promote healthy sexual relationships and sexual consent and aims to reduce sexual violence by providing practical, evidence-based advice.

This framework focuses on sexual violence prevention and the needs of young people. It is acknowledged that further resources may be needed to assist with communicating around consent more broadly, including to older Australians and other at-risk groups, and these are being actively considered.

We thank everyone who contributed to this framework through the consultation process, including those with lived experience of sexual violence, and the people and organisations who work tirelessly every day to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.



The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
Minister for Social Services



The Hon Justine Elliot MP
Assistant Minister for Social Services
Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters and of the oldest continuous living culture on Earth.

We pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the positive legacy left by ancestors – which is lore and strength of culture.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them for better life outcomes to be achieved.

Help and support

Sexual violence can be hard to discuss and reading this document may cause distress.

Help is available.

1800RESPECT – 1800 737 732, text **0458 737 732**, www.1800respect.org.au

National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

13YARN – 13 92 76

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support line. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

Ask Izzy – www.askizzy.org.au

A website that connects people in need with housing, a meal, money help, family violence support, counselling and much more.

Australian Sexual Assault Services Directory – www.nasasv.org.au/support-directory

A directory of the multiple specialist sexual assault services and rape crisis centres in each state and territory available across Australia.

Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636, www.beyondblue.org.au

National crisis support line for anxiety and depression. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

Blue Knot Foundation (Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service) – 1300 657 380

Supporting adult survivors of childhood trauma and adult survivors of institutional child sexual abuse around the National Redress Scheme. This service operates from 9am to 5pm AEST/AEDT, 7 days a week.

Blue Knot Foundation (National Counselling and Referral Service – Disability) – 1800 421 468

Supporting those living with a disability who have experienced or witnessed someone being hurt, treated badly or taken advantage of. The service operates from 9:00am to 6:00pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Friday and from 9:00am to 5:00pm AEST/AEDT Saturday and Sunday and public holidays.

Bravehearts – 1800 272 831, www.bravehearts.org.au

Support line for children and young people who have been impacted by child sexual abuse, and their non-offending family members. Available from 8:30am to 4:30pm AEST, Monday to Friday.

Full Stop Australia – 1800 943 539, www.fullstop.org.au

National trauma counselling and recovery service for people of all ages and genders experiencing sexual, domestic and family violence. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800, www.kidshelpline.com.au

National crisis support tailored for children and young people (aged 5 to 25). This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

Lifeline – 13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au

Telephone crisis support service in Australia. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

MensLine Australia – 1300 78 99 78

Online counselling support for men with concerns about mental health, anger management and family violence. Available 24/7.

Men’s Referral Service – 1300 766 491, www.ntv.org.au

National counselling, information and referral service for men across Australia who use family violence. Available from 9:00am to 5:00pm AEST, Monday to Friday.

My Blue Sky – 02 9514 8115, <https://mybluesky.org.au/>

Free legal and migration support to people experiencing forced marriage and other forms of modern slavery in Australia. Available from 9:00am to 5:00pm AEST, Monday to Friday.

Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline – 1800 497 212

National helpline for anyone from the LGBTIQ+ community whose life has been impacted by sexual domestic and/or family violence. This service is free and confidential. Available 24/7.

Say It Out Loud – www.sayitoutloud.org.au

National resource for LGBTQ+ communities and service professionals working with people who have experienced sexual, domestic and family violence.

SAMSN (Survivors & Mates Support Network) – 1800 472 676

A free service that supports male survivors of child sexual abuse.

Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467

Free counselling for suicide prevention and mental health via telephone, online and video for anyone affected by suicidal thoughts. Available 24/7.

Thirrili (Indigenous Postvention Services) – 1800 805 801

Contributes to the broader social wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by supporting individuals, families, and communities affected by suicide or other significant trauma. Available 24/7.

Well Mob – www.wellmob.org.au

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Translation and interpreting services

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) – 13 14 50, www.tisnational.gov.au

Access to phone and on-site interpreting services in over 150 languages.

Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) – (08) 8999 8353 (24 hours), Fax (08) 8923 7621, Email ais@nt.gov.au

Helps to address language barriers faced by Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. Interpreters are trained to work in a wide range of settings and environments including legal and justice systems, health care, education, social services and community engagement.

National Relay Service (NRS) – Voice relay number 1300 555 727, TTY number 13 36 77, SMS relay number 0423 677 767

Allows people who cannot hear or do not use their voice to communicate with a hearing person over the phone.

Introduction

Consent is fundamental to safe, healthy and pleasurable sexual activity and relationships. To promote a shared community understanding of consent across initiatives and programs, it is important to use consistent messaging, supported by an evidence-base.

Consent is a particularly important concept for young people in their early and formative experiences of dating and relationships because they are at increased risk of experiencing or perpetrating sexual violence.¹

The Commonwealth consent policy framework: Promoting healthy sexual relationships and consent among young people (the framework) aims to:

- promote a **clear and consistent community definition of sexual consent** across programs that focus on young people
- provide **practical advice on how to communicate effectively** with young people about sexual ethics, healthy sexual activity, relationships and consent
- suggest **ways to address the underlying gendered drivers** of sexual violence.²

The framework is designed for governments, education providers, communities, workplaces, sports clubs, media, health and disability providers, caring facilities, religious organisations, public services and the justice system. It is particularly useful for any initiative or programs aimed at young people that promote healthy sexual relationships, sexual consent or aims to reduce sexual violence, including:

- respectful relationships and sexuality education
- community prevention programs
- communication and social marketing campaigns
- peer education programs
- workplace training
- parenting interventions and programs
- bystander programs
- media literacy initiatives
- social activism.

The framework has 2 sections. The first section proposes a shared community definition of consent and 5 core concepts that underpin this definition. The second section provides guidance on how to promote consent and healthy sexual activity through 10 key principles. It includes relevant research and a *Consent and healthy sexual relationships program checklist* to guide and self-assess your activity, program or product.

This framework uses binary language such as 'men' and 'women' in many places. We recognise that gender does not exist simply in binary categories and that not everyone's experiences and identities are fully reflected because of this categorisation. However, these categories continue to have real effects and remain useful to frame discussions about gendered violence under *the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

This framework was developed in consultation with key partners across the family, domestic and sexual violence sector and youth representatives to ensure a holistic and evidence-based approach.

Sexual violence and its drivers

Sexual violence:

- includes – but is not limited to – sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment, stalking and image-based- abuse
 - is prevalent across Australian society
 - occurs most commonly within family and intimate partner relationships
 - also occurs between people who are dating, friends, acquaintances and strangers
 - is a form of gender-based violence and most commonly perpetrated by men
 - can be part of a pattern of behaviour and abuse within relationships, including as a form of coercive control
 - occurs online and can be facilitated by technology.
-

Key statistics:

- **1 in 5 women** and **1 in 16 men** have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15³
 - women are most likely to experience sexual violence **in their home**, at the hands of **a male current or ex-partner**⁴
 - **1 in 2 women in their 20s** have experienced sexual violence⁵
 - **First Nations women, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people** are at higher risk of sexual violence⁶
 - **1 in 5 young people** agree that women who say they were raped had led the man on and then had regrets.⁷
-

The 4 drivers of violence against women are:

- condoning of violence against women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence
- rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity
- male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.⁸

Section one: A shared vision of consent

To convey and promote consent and respectful sexual activity among young people, it is vital to have a clear, shared understanding of sexual consent across sectors, programs and initiatives.⁹ This section of the framework provides a person-centred, community definition of consent, underpinned by 5 core concepts.

This shared definition and concepts can help inform relevant initiatives and policies, and improve understanding of consent to promote ethical sexual behaviour and prevent sexual violence.

This is not an attempt to create a shared legal definition of consent (which differs across Australian jurisdictions). While conversations about consent and healthy sexual relationships should include an understanding of sexual assault and consent laws, the aim of this framework and definition is to support a cultural shift in community attitudes, to promote respectful sexual behaviour and relationships and prevent violence.¹⁰

While the practical communication of consent can be complex, this definition represents an ideal view of consent that can inform new initiatives and, over time, support greater alignment and consistency in the approach and language used when communicating about consent.

Defining sexual consent and healthy relationships

Not only is consent the baseline for sexual activity free of violence and coercion, it is also fundamental to healthy, pleasurable sexual activity within or outside of relationships. Healthy sexual relationships are inclusive of all sexual orientations and genders, and founded on characteristics like trust, empathy, effective communication, equality, safety and respect.

For the purpose of this framework, sexual consent refers to consent as it relates to sexual acts, including sexual intercourse, sexual touching, sharing sexual imagery, sexting and online sexual acts. Sexual consent is defined as:

“A free, voluntary and informed agreement between people to participate in a sexual act. This agreement is only present when these people mutually and genuinely want to engage in that sexual act, and actively ensure their partner does too”.

This definition aims to characterise reaching, communicating or withholding consent as part of a set of skills that are the foundation of healthy sexual activity and relationships based in empathy and respect. The intention is to shift our collective view of consent away from being a problem to be solved, or a transaction where consent is ‘given’ or ‘received’.

Core concepts of sexual consent

Core concept 1: **Free and voluntary**

Consent must be free and voluntary. It is present only when all people genuinely or enthusiastically want to engage in the sexual activity.

All people engaging in any sexual acts must also be free from violence, pressure, coercion, threats, deception, intimidation, monitoring, degradation, surveillance, control or abuse of power.

Someone who has a position of authority over another person cannot obtain that person's consent.¹¹

Consent to a sexual act is not transactional. Reaching, communicating or withholding consent is part of skills that are the foundation of healthy sexual activity and relationships. These skills are founded in empathy and communication.

Core concept 2: **Specific and informed**

Consent must be specific and informed. This means that consent is only present when everyone involved genuinely or enthusiastically wants to engage in that specific sexual act, and everyone understands what that act is and any potential consequences of that act.

Agreeing to one specific sexual act does not mean agreeing to other kinds of sexual acts, including the on-sharing of sexual images or information. Agreeing includes *how* a specific sexual act is conducted, including the use of protection and contraception.

Core concept 3: **Affirmative and communicated**

Consent must be affirmative – meaning sexual partners need to actively say or do something to check for consent.

Communication is fundamental to consent. The communication of consent can be verbal and non-verbal.

Consent can never be assumed. Silence, freezing, the absence of a 'no', appearing disengaged or a lack of any apparent discomfort, hesitation or resistance, does not imply consent. Signs of physical arousal do not mean there is consent.

Core concept 4: **Ongoing and mutual**

Consent must be ongoing and mutual. Consent for past sexual activity does not mean consent can be assumed in future sexual activity.

Consent can be withdrawn at any point in time.

If one person consents but another does not, then consent is not present. All people must genuinely or enthusiastically want to engage in the sexual activity.

Core concept 5: **Reflects capacity**

Everyone involved in a sexual act needs to have the capacity to reach, communicate or withhold consent. A range of factors, including age, intoxication, consciousness or other impairment, can affect this capacity to consent.

If someone is unconscious or asleep, they are not capable of giving consent. Laws across various jurisdictions may place restrictions on people's ability to give consent, based on their age and the age of their sexual partner.¹²

In some cases, a person might be so affected by drugs or alcohol that they are not capable of giving consent. Intentionally giving someone alcohol or drugs to make them more likely to engage in a sexual act is a form of coercion.

Everyone involved in a sexual act needs to consider and account for their sexual partner's capacity to understand and agree to the sexual activity.

Section two: Putting a shared vision of consent into practice

This section provides practical advice, in the form of 10 principles, on how individuals, organisations and governments can best promote healthy, consensual and safe sexual relationships.

The 10 principles of practice – at a glance

Principle 1. Put sexual violence and its drivers into context

Incorporate a broad understanding of sexual violence, its gendered drivers and an intersectional approach when promoting consent and healthy sexual activity and relationships.

Principle 2. Consider your organisation's broader culture

Consider and address the drivers of violence across your organisation, school or workplace.

Principle 3. Focus on empowerment, skills and practice

Empower young people to use affirmative consent, empathy and communication skills in day-to-day situations.

Principle 4. Balance a positive focus on pleasure with risks

Balance a positive focus on what young people can do to have healthy, pleasurable sexual activities and relationships, with what young people should not do.

Principle 5. Be direct and avoid stereotypes

Avoid talking about consent and sexual relationships in metaphors and euphemisms and challenge, rather than reinforce, harmful gender roles and stereotypes.

Principle 6. Be relevant, age-appropriate and prepare for backlash

Promote healthy sexual activity, relationships and consent skills in different ways to meet the needs of different audiences, population cohorts and age groups, while preparing and planning for backlash.

Principle 7. Focus on safety

Prioritise safety, and be inclusive, trauma-informed and offer support.

Principle 8. Tailor to diverse audiences and be culturally safe

Tailor content to different audiences, show a diversity of experiences and relationships, and prioritise cultural safety.

Principle 9. Build partnerships

Partner with young people, those with lived experience and experts to design and deliver initiatives.

Principle 10. Measure progress to improve

Think about how to measure progress and gradually improve an initiative from the outset.

The 10 principles of practice

Principle 1. Put sexual violence and its drivers into context

Incorporate a broad understanding of sexual violence, its gendered drivers and an intersectional approach when promoting consent and healthy sexual activity and relationships.

Helping to prevent sexual violence among young people is not just about providing a clear definition of consent and expecting that knowledge alone will prevent sexual violence or drive respectful sexual behaviour.

To prevent violence and promote healthy sexual relationships, consent should be communicated in the context of the society-wide, gendered and intersectional factors that drive violence. This means moving away from misconceptions that it is an individual's actions or inactions that drive violence.¹³ Example of these misconceptions are the idea that drinking alcohol or someone's clothing signals consent or excuses people for assuming consent.

Along with providing basic information about consent, initiatives need to address the gendered drivers of violence. This includes challenging:

- attitudes and beliefs that excuse or condone violence against women or people in the LGBTIQ+ community
- aggression and disrespect towards women or people in the LGBTIQ+ community among men's peer groups
- stereotypes about men and women's decision-making roles in relationships and in public life
- rigid ideas about gender roles.

This also involves challenging harmful and persistent myths and misconceptions. For example, that:

- all sexual activity is transactional where women are the gatekeepers of sex and men are always entitled to, desiring and seeking sex
- that it is normal for a man to want to be in control of their partner in a relationship
- that it is natural for men to be sexually aggressive and women sexually submissive
- that men and women are equal perpetrators of violence in relationships
- that it is common for women to lie about claims of abuse and sexual assault
- that sexual activity is only 'natural' in heterosexual relationships, ignoring the experience of gender diverse and LGBTIQ+ people
- that LGBTIQ+ people do not experience sexual violence
- that innately, women and men communicate differently.

This includes challenging and critically addressing media that depicts gendered aggression, sexual objectification, non-consensual behaviour, and an absence of consent communication – particularly pornography, which is a key source of information about sex for many young people.¹⁴

It is important to recognise the dynamics of sexual violence where it occurs in the context of domestic and family violence, including the impact of power imbalances and coercive control on consent.

Prevention efforts and initiatives that promote healthy sexual activity and relationships must not only address the gendered drivers of sexual violence, but also how these drivers interact with other kinds of discrimination that stem from racism, classism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.¹⁵ It is also important to consider the impact of colonisation. Programs and initiatives need to be flexible to be relevant to local contexts, cultures and histories.

Discussions around consent and sexual violence prevention need to acknowledge this context and the wider drivers to provide young people with a comprehensive understanding of sexual ethics and violence.

Principle 2. Consider your organisation's broader culture

Consider and address the drivers of violence across your organisation, school or workplace.

Organisations and their associated cultures can have a significant impact on the behaviours and attitudes of young people.

Sexual violence prevention should be part of a 'whole-of-setting' approach,¹⁶ which includes engagement and consistent messages around gender equality across the organisation and its broader community, rather than one-off interventions. Actions should include addressing the drivers of violence and gender inequality across the organisation (for example, schools, universities and workplaces), as well as broader community settings.¹⁷ This may include broad and multifaceted engagement around policies and practices with organisational leadership, parents and carers, young people and staff.

Male-dominated institutions in particular can reinforce, support or excuse attitudes or behaviours that are supportive of violence against women.¹⁸ Without examining other gender equality drivers across an organisation, young people can receive contradictory messages. For example, a young person is told through respectful relationships education that men are not the default decision-makers in relationships, but the decision-makers in their school leadership are all men. Another example is differences in uniform policies or sports offered to students based on gender.

Within the context of schools, whole-of-school approaches mean that sex and relationship education takes place within a broader school context that promotes gender equality through consistent principles and values, and by equipping staff and engaging with parents and carers as partners.¹⁹ The evidence shows the whole-of-school approach is effective at reducing violence as well as improving other sexual health outcomes.²⁰

Principle 3. Focus on empowerment, skills and practice

Empower young people to use affirmative consent, empathy and communication skills in day-to-day situations.

As well as increasing a general understanding and awareness of consent, it is important to empower young people with the skills and the motivation to use affirmative consent, empathy and communication skills in their day-to-day lives – both in online and offline interactions.²¹

These skills include:

- building empathy and respect
- social and emotional skills
- communication and decision-making skills
- the ability to assess risk and resist peer pressure
- critically questioning messages conveyed around sexual consent and gender norms, including in pornography²²
- consent and communication skills in the context of sexting, sharing intimate images, and dating apps
- reflective skills to better understand personal needs and express them confidently
- managing emotions and accepting rejection.²³

It is important to tailor content to young people's day-to-day context and experience of consent and sexual relationships, and the practical skills that are part of their experience. This could include providing examples of realistic affirmative consent phrases that allow sexual partners to 'check in' with each other or by acknowledging the role of non-verbal cues, such as freeze responses.²⁴ This might also include how to communicate consent in online contexts, for example, how to understand whether there is enthusiastic or genuine consent without the ability to assess body language. In relation to sharing images, this might include how long a sexual partner may hold an image and who, if anyone, the image can be shared with.

Young people generally prefer an approach that is practical and focused on skills. This also gives young people broader life and relationship skills that go beyond the aim of sexual violence prevention.²⁵

Identifying motivators to encourage the use of these skills and knowledge is vital. This could include how practicing affirmative consent, including active communication about sexual preferences, is often desirable, makes you a better sexual partner and is a skill that sexual partners increasingly expect (as well as affirmative consent being the legal standard in some jurisdictions).²⁶

Instead of affirmative consent practices being seen as an extra barrier or a constraining task, encourage young people to see these practices as freeing them from having to 'guess', 'take the lead' or assuming it is a 'man's job' to know what women want. Active communication makes for better sexual partners, because everyone is different, and even the same person can want different things at different times, so it is not reasonable to assume what a partner may want.

Along with motivators, it is also important to address perceived barriers and emotional challenges associated with consent communication that may prevent sexual partners from practicing affirmative consent.²⁷ For example, it is important to dispel the idea that checking in with your partner to see how they're feeling about a sexual activity will limit the spontaneity, 'spoil the mood', be awkward, transactional, legalistic or lead to being seen as 'too eager'.

More generally, there are benefits to examining and questioning gender stereotypes. For example, some research suggests that men who reject restrictive ideas about what it is to be a man are more likely to engage in positive, supportive and respectful relationships and, overall, have better mental health and wellbeing.²⁸

Taking a practical and motivational approach – while acknowledging personal responsibility – also reduces the likelihood of young people rejecting the information as confrontational or critical. Behaviour change is most likely when individuals feel supported to learn new skills.

Other priority skills to develop among young people include how to engage with issues such as online harassment and abuse, including in gaming, and how to deal with image-based abuse, surveillance and 'sextortion'.²⁹

Principle 4. Balance a positive focus on pleasure with risks

Balance a positive focus on what young people can do to have healthy, pleasurable sexual activities and relationships, with what young people should not do.

Given the serious nature of sexual violence, campaigns and initiatives can tend to focus on fear and frame consent only in the negative. The associated messaging can focus on what young people should not do, and the relevant laws, risks, negative consequences and potential for harm.

Evidence shows young people dislike and disengage with sex and relationship programs that overemphasise risks and the negative aspects of sexual activity, and do not acknowledge pleasure and the positive aspects of sexual activity and relationships. This is because for most young people, this framing does not resonate with their own experiences or expectations.³⁰ This approach can create stigma and shame, and make it challenging for young people to engage and ask questions.

Without a balanced approach, young people may not perceive healthy relationships and being a respectful sexual partner as an aspiration. It should be desirable to seek healthy sexual activity and relationships based on mutual preferences, pleasure, respect and equality. However, discussions of consent that exclude these elements miss the opportunity to provide this positive message.

A balanced approach acknowledges concerning and harmful sexual behaviours, associated laws criminalising sexual assault and how these frame societal expectations around sexual behaviour. It is valuable to understand, consult and provide information on the laws that apply in your state and territory.

However, this should be balanced with articulating what healthy sexual activity and relationships founded on consent look like, and the benefits of acquiring related consent skills (see more on this in *Principle 3*). For example, clear communication of consent can help promote feelings of safety

within a partnership and improve perceptions about the quality of sexual and relationship experiences.³¹

Principle 5. Be direct and avoid stereotypes

Avoid talking about consent and sexual relationships in metaphors and euphemisms and challenge, rather than reinforce, harmful gender roles and stereotypes.

Simple, clear and direct language reduces the likelihood of confusion about sexual consent and violence. Young people want information that is open and frank, and that acknowledges their autonomy and lived experience, while being age-appropriate.³²

While metaphors and euphemisms might appear useful in some contexts, they risk trivialising and oversimplifying issues, reinforcing the idea that sex is too taboo or awkward to discuss, and confusing their audience with unintended meaning. In addition, some neurodiverse young people may have difficulties in understanding metaphors, creating significant barriers to understanding consent and healthy sexual activity and relationships. Commonly used metaphors include sports, food and driving.³³ Carefully consider and test any use of metaphors, including visual metaphors,³⁴ before use with a broader audience.

Breaking down rigid gender roles is an important part of promoting healthy sexual activity and relationships, as well as violence prevention. If the initiative reinforces ideas that speak to men's expected dominance, control and strength, or women's innate submissiveness, passiveness, need for protection or need to be sexually attractive to be valued, the audience will receive confusing and contradictory prevention messages.³⁵

The evidence shows that young people are more interested in a sex-positive approach that addresses gender stereotypes.³⁶

Representing diverse ideas about gender roles, including roles beyond the gender binary, can be powerful tools. This can include ideas that speak to women's sexual pleasure and desire, and that do not place the responsibility of sexual relationships and violence prevention onto women alone,³⁷ as well as articulating positive and healthy masculinities that allow men to engage with their emotions and take an active interest in their partner's sexual pleasure as well as their own.

Principle 6. Be relevant, age-appropriate and prepare for backlash

Promote healthy sexual activity, relationships and consent skills in different ways to meet the needs of different audiences, population cohorts and age groups, while preparing and planning for backlash.

Consent and respectful relationships can be communicated and understood across a range of ages, developmental stages, learning styles and different audiences.

In early childhood education and primary school, for example, understanding consent can start with learning about and recognising emotions in other people, coping with rejection, expressing permission or consent in communications with others, understanding bodily autonomy, expressing and understanding boundaries, as well as understanding friendships and family relationships.³⁸

As young people's understanding and experience changes, they want information that acknowledges they may be sexually active, dating or in relationships, as well as recognising their autonomy and their maturity.³⁹

A survey of Australian secondary students in Years 10 to 12 found that nearly 70% had been in a romantic or sexual relationship and 60% were sexually active. On average, these young people became sexually active at around 15-years-old and their first viewing of pornography was at 13-years-old.⁴⁰ However, it is not uncommon for children as young as 8 or 9 to be viewing pornography, influencing their understanding of sex, attitudes and behaviours well before their first sexual experience.

It is important to start building relevant skills and understanding before first sexual activity or exposure to sexually explicit material. Many young people indicate that sex and relationship education was delivered too late.⁴¹

Age and developmentally appropriate information on consent and respectful relationships for people in high school and older cohorts can focus on a broad range of topics. These include encouraging young people to develop a positive relationship with their bodies, identifying personal values surrounding sex, understanding the right to have autonomy in decisions involving their bodies, setting healthy sexual and relationship boundaries with themselves and others, understanding how substance and alcohol use can affect consent, and communicating their preferences with their partner.

If initiatives fail to address real-life factors that influence consent – like gender inequality, social pressures, power imbalances, cultural norms and expectations emerging from consumption of pornography – content will seem less relevant and applicable.

It is also important to recognise that different groups of young people may be at different places and stages in their understanding of consent, gender, sex, dating and relationships. Planning and preparing for backlash is therefore an important element of successful consent promotion and education. This involves meeting the concerns that underpin the backlash from a place of compassion, respect and non-judgement – while also standing by the evidence and prioritising young people's wellbeing.

Some groups who are resistant to messages around consent and healthy sexual relationships may feel defensive, helpless, unable to take responsibility for behaviour, deny or minimise behaviour, or blame others.⁴² Preparing for resistance can include focusing on constructive messages including that it is everyone's responsibility to have safe, enjoyable and respectful sexual experiences, and opportunities for pleasurable sex are higher for all people involved when consent is prioritised. This means promoting a sense of empowerment and ownership so everyone feels they have a role to play in developing solutions.⁴³

Principle 7. Focus on safety

Prioritise safety, and be inclusive, trauma-informed and offer support.

Many young people may not realise or recognise violence that has occurred in their lives until it is discussed openly. When a new campaign or initiative is in place, there is an increased likelihood that young people may disclose experiences of sexual violence or their own use of violence and harassment.⁴⁴

Any consent promotion, sexual violence prevention or respectful relationship initiative should put the psychological safety of all participants first. This includes having policies and processes, developed in consultation with experts in sexual violence response, to ensure that any disclosures are handled appropriately. Staff should receive support, resourcing, ongoing coaching and training to appropriately respond to disclosures from both victim-survivors as well as those who have caused sexual harm.⁴⁵ This includes:

- up-to-date knowledge of trauma-informed practices
- an understanding of the range of expected and harmful sexual behaviours displayed by children and young people
- signs of trauma and indicators of risk of abuse
- appropriate training and support for staff at risk of experiencing vicarious and secondary trauma from hearing disclosures
- relevant referral pathways and access to support (see *Help and support* at the start of this framework).

Teachers and some other professional groups also need to be clear on mandatory requirements for reporting child sexual abuse, and the organisational procedures they need to follow if they have a reasonable belief that such abuse has occurred.

Trauma-informed practice might mean excluding content likely to be psychologically harmful for those who have experienced sexual harm, as well as making sure content and language are inclusive, accessible, gender affirming, not ableist and culturally safe. For group work, communication should be clear about confidentiality, forming group agreements and boundary setting, as well as supporting young people with relevant techniques, like 'grounding techniques' and staying within 'windows of tolerance'.⁴⁶

While promoting national support services (such as 1800RESPECT, the Men's Referral Service and Kids Helpline), it is also essential to coordinate with the relevant local specialist sexual violence counselling and other support services, as an increase in demand is likely when prevention activities occur. It is also important to consider safe supports for particular groups, such as culturally safe services for First Nations people.

Approaches that could be seen or understood as blaming victim-survivors of sexual violence, defaulting to a male perspective or in some way, reinforcing the drivers of violence, should not be used.

Principle 8. Tailor to diverse audiences and be culturally safe

Tailor content to different audiences, show a diversity of experiences and relationships and prioritise cultural safety.

Along with considering the target audience's knowledge, initiatives should aim to acknowledge the diversity of experiences, religions, backgrounds and types of relationships while taking care not to stigmatise certain groups.

The default setting for initiatives and campaigns is typically heterosexual relationships between sexual partners who fit within the dominant norms of society.⁴⁷ Instead, consent and respectful sexual relationship initiatives should be inclusive of all genders and avoid reinforcing gender binaries or stereotypes.

Many young people view typical sex and relationship education as being gendered and heterosexist, not showing the diversity of bodies, sexual relationships, orientations and genders.⁴⁸ This can reinforce gender stereotypes that in turn, drive violence.

Showing a broad range of experiences, gender expressions and relationships, including those of non-binary people, and showing consent in diverse cultural contexts and for people with disability is particularly important to increase understanding among participants. Young people should also be supported to explore the impact of racism, colonisation and ableism on how society thinks about sex and consent.

Within a framework of consent being founded in empathy, the ability to ask and interpret the consent of others is a key practical skill. Where young people do not see people who look like them in an initiative, there is a potential risk they may disengage or not see the content as relevant.

A lack of diversity may also mean the discussion misses consent issues relevant for a specific group, such as 'outing' someone⁴⁹ or specific issues around sex and relationships that arise for people with disability.

As well as showing a diversity of experiences, content should reflect and address the experiences and needs of specific communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, faith communities, and people with disabilities.

Content should not assume that all people want to be sexually active, and should acknowledge that some people and communities consider sexual relationships should only occur within marriage. Content should reflect that everyone will have their own beliefs about when it is okay to have a sexual relationship with someone, but that developing understanding around consent and associated skills is relevant no matter when sexual activity starts.

To ensure your approach is inclusive of the diversity of your participants, it is important to consult specialist organisations that work with those communities or at least draw on existing research and good practice material.

Principle 9. Build partnerships

Partner with young people, those with lived experience and experts to design and deliver initiatives.

Where possible, young people should be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of, or have a leadership role in, initiatives aimed at them, and initiatives should include some peer-to-peer learning.⁵⁰

Ideally, and despite the challenges associated with this approach, initiatives should embrace the principle that adults and young people of all genders are equal partners in promoting healthy sexual activity and relationships, as well as violence prevention. Allow sufficient time for consultation, in terms of presenting information, and seeking and receiving feedback. Partnerships with young people, however, must be balanced with the need to minimise risk of vicarious and secondary trauma, or outsourcing adult responsibility to young people.

Best practice in relationships and sexuality education should focus on interactive and participatory activities where possible.⁵¹ Interactive, peer-based activities align with the principles of encouraging empathy and can support young people to feel part of the conversation.

In one study of a peer education program, 92% of program participants agreed or strongly agreed that it is helpful to have young people leading the learning on respectful relationships. This resulted in most participants developing a better understanding of what is 'okay' and what 'crosses the line' in sex, dating and relationships.⁵²

More broadly, partnerships are a vital part of any program. Sexual violence prevention has its own evidence base, and there are organisations with decades of experience and expertise. Organisations without this experience could consider partnering or consulting with an expert organisation. While the role of young people is important, there is also value in content being delivered by expert educators who have an ongoing relationship with the young people and an organisation or school.

It is vital to listen to and be guided by people with lived experience of sexual violence, including those from diverse communities. This can be done either through existing mechanisms or by establishing your own mechanisms for ongoing engagement.

It is also important to consider stakeholders and communities that are part of the future success of any initiative, for example parents, carers and organisational leadership.

Principle 10. Measure progress to improve

Think about how to measure progress and gradually improve an initiative from the outset.

The ultimate goal of respectful relationships education and any consent promotion initiative aimed at young people is to support people to experience healthy sexual relationships and reduce rates of sexual violence.

However, it can be challenging to know if a campaign or initiative is effective. In the short-term, the reports of sexual violence may actually rise with more people able to recognise violence and having the confidence to report.

It is important in the early stages of developing an initiative or campaign to consider how to measure progress and see if the initiative is working towards its intended goal.

While prevalence indicators, and some attitudes, behaviours and practices, may not change in the short-term, there are other ways to measure change. These could include measuring positive shifts in knowledge, understanding and confidence. This can be done through a range of evaluation options including pre and post-initiative surveys and workshops, as well as control group and piloting approaches. Several surveys that measure attitudes and behaviours may provide useful information or reference, including the *National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women survey*. In addition, *Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring* provides comprehensive guidance on measuring progress on violence prevention for population-level initiatives.

Consent and healthy relationship program checklist

This checklist includes important questions to consider as you develop your initiative. Further resources to help you are also provided below.

Have you identified the skills needed for healthy sexual relationships using day-to-day scenarios?

- Consent involves skills that need to be learned and practiced.
- Acknowledge that young people may not feel comfortable or experience other barriers to checking in with their partner, and discuss the best ways to address them.
- Learning skills is different to using them in day-to-day scenarios. Find out ways that can help your audience to feel motivated to use these skills, include being a more respectful partner. See [Principle 3](#).

Have you created partnerships with young people to develop, design and evaluate your initiative?

- Consider establishing advisory roles for young people from the outset. See [Principle 9](#).

Is your content consistent with young people's experience of consent and sex?

- Include relatable phrases that partners can use check in with each other. Avoid using metaphors that can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. See [Principle 3](#) and [Principle 5](#).

Do you have partnerships with sexual violence prevention and respectful relationships experts, and those with lived experience?

- Seek advice from sexual violence services and other organisations that specialise in sexual violence prevention and the promotion of healthy sexual relationships.
- Listen to and be guided by people with lived experience of sexual violence, including those from diverse communities. See [Principle 9](#).

Have you covered the positives as well as the need to prevent harm?

- In an age-appropriate way, have you focused on what young people can do to have a healthy sexual relationship, and the pleasurable aspects of sexual activity, as well as the need to prevent sexual violence, risks and associated laws. See [Principle 4](#).

Have you reflected the idea that sexual violence is gendered?

- Dispel the myth that men and women are equally likely to be perpetrators and victims of sexual violence or that LGBTIQ+ people do not experience sexual violence. The use of data and statistics can help with this. See [Principle 1](#).

Have you reflected that gender stereotypes and inequality drive violence?

- Dispel the myth that only the actions of individuals drive violence. Help your audience reflect on the roles and stereotypes they see in day-to-day life and how these contribute to violence supporting attitudes and behaviours. Analyse your materials and remove any gender stereotypes. See [Principles 1 and 4](#).

Have you prepared for resistance and backlash?

- Talking about sexual relationships and consent can challenge some audiences. Pointing to the evidence can help show why it is important to have conversations about this topic. See [Principle 6](#).

Have you considered what supports are in place for your audience, as well as how staff are supported and trained?

- Many people have been affected by sexual violence. Be prepared and ensure you have options to support anyone involved in your initiative. A list of support services is at the beginning of this framework. See [Principle 7](#).

Are you speaking to a diversity of experiences, audiences and relationships?

- Ensure you are recognising and speaking to the diversity of sexual relationships, backgrounds, sexual orientations and genders. See [Principle 8](#).

How does your initiative sit within your broader community, organisation, school or workplace?

- Reflect on what other messages your audience might be getting that may contradict your message about the need for gender equality in relationships.
- Consider actions that broadly address the drivers of violence and gender inequality across your organisation. See [Principle 2](#).

Are you using the right content for your audience? Are you speaking to the right age group?

- Researching your audience means understanding where they are at in terms of their understanding of consent, sex, dating and relationships. Direct content that is age – and stage-appropriate, as well as relevant to their experience, is key. See [Principle 6](#).

Do you know how you are going to measure success?

- Knowing whether you aim to change attitudes, understanding or behaviours is critical. Consider ways you can test any changes, including through pre and post-workshops and surveys. See [Principle 10](#).

Glossary

1800RESPECT – The national telephone and online counselling and support services for people affected or at risk of domestic, family and sexual violence. Services are available 24 hours, 7 days per week by visiting 1800respect.org.au, calling 1800 737 732 or texting 0458 737 732.

Ableism – A term used to capture the way that the construction of social systems with able bodied and neurotypical people as the norm results in the systemic, structural, intersecting and individual forms of discrimination against, and exclusion of, people with disability.

Affirmative consent – The affirmative consent model requires individuals to communicate their consent and take steps to ensure the other person is also consenting. The model reflects that consent is an ongoing process and must be present for every sexual act.

Backlash/resistance – The resistance, hostility or aggression shown by some groups toward gender equality or violence prevention strategies. From a feminist perspective, backlash can be understood as an inevitable response to challenges to male dominance, power or status, and is often interpreted as a sign that such challenges are proving effective.⁵³

Evidence-based – Models, approaches or practices found to be effective through evaluation or peer-reviewed research. Evidence is usually published and may be found in full or summarised in academic research documents, organisational reports, program evaluations, policy papers and submissions. There is a strong evidence base for strategies to prevent gender-based violence. As understanding of what drives violence against women and children in different population groups and settings increases, the evidence base will continue to evolve.

Gender – The economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being women and men. The social definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man vary among cultures and change over time. Gender is a sociocultural expression of particular characteristics and roles that are associated with certain groups of people with reference to their sex and sexuality. Rigid gender roles leave no space for acknowledgement or celebration of gender diversity.⁵⁴

Gendered drivers of violence – The underlying causes that create the necessary conditions in which violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ people occurs. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life, but which must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

Gender equality – This involves equality of opportunity and equality of results. It includes both the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality.

Gender inequality – A social condition characterised by unequal value afforded to men and women and an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity between them. It is the direct result of patriarchal systems that privilege the needs, interests and behaviours of men over women, and that permeate many aspects of Australian society and institutions.

Healthy sexual relationships – Sexual relationships among intimate, romantic, or dating partners that include characteristics such as trust, empathy, effective communication, safety, equality, mutual respect and healthy boundaries.

Image-based abuse – When an intimate image or video is shared, or threatened to be shared, without the consent of the person shown. This includes images or videos that have been digitally altered.⁵⁵

LGBTIQ+ – An acronym used to describe members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and asexual community. Other acronyms used to describe this community include LGBTIQ or LGBTIQ+.

Our Watch – The organisation established under *the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, to influence and drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women.

Sexual act/sexual activity – Acts that a reasonable person would see as sexual, including but not limited to, kissing, sexualised touching, penetration of any kind and oral sex. It also includes non-physical acts such as online sexual activity, sexting and sharing sexual images.

Sexual harassment – An unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated, where a reasonable person would anticipate that reaction in the circumstances.

Sexual harm – Harm that results from non-consensual sexual activity, and which has a significant effect on someone's physical, emotional and psychological well-being as well as future intimacy and relationships. It may look different for people depending on their experience of trauma and other factors such as exposure to previous traumatic events, access to support and mental health status.

Sexual violence – The intentional perpetration of sexual acts without consent, capturing all forms of sexual assault and sexual harassment. This definition of sexual violence refers to both criminal and non-criminal sexual activity perpetrated without consent to reflect that some emerging forms of sexual violence have not yet been addressed in legislation.

Social norms – The informal, mostly unwritten and unspoken collective rules that define typical, acceptable, appropriate and obligatory actions in a social group, setting or society. They are produced and reproduced by customs, traditions and value systems that develop over time to uphold forms of social order.

Victim-blaming – Refers to comments and suggestions that directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, put blame on the person.

Victim-survivors – People who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence or gender-based violence. This term is understood to acknowledge the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced or are currently living with violence. People who have experienced violence have different preferences about how they would like to be identified and may choose to use 'victim' or 'survivor' separately, or another term altogether. Some people prefer to use 'people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, violence'.

Further information and references

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan \(2023–2025\)](#) (Australian Government). This plan has been developed in recognition of the disproportionately high rates of family, domestic and sexual violence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience.

[The Australian Institute of Family Affairs research and practice resources](#) (AIFS). This website provides high-quality, impartial research into the wellbeing of Australian families, to inform government policy and promote evidence-based practice in the family services sector.

[Change the Story](#) (Our Watch). Change the Story is Australia's a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and children in Australia.

[Changing the Picture](#) (Our Watch). Changing the Picture contains a set of clear actions that are needed to address the many drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

[Changing the Landscape](#) (Our Watch). Changing the Landscape is a national, evidence-based resource to guide the prevention of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

[Counting on Change](#) (Our Watch). Counting on change is a guide for policy-makers, researchers, and advocates on measuring population-level progress towards the prevention of violence.

[The Consent Toolkit](#) (Rape and Sexual Assault Research and Advocacy). The Consent Toolkit is designed for young people, their parents and their educators, as well as anyone who wants to learn more about the law on sexual consent and communicating about sex with confidence.

[eSafety website and resources](#) (eSafety Commissioner). The eSafety website helps to educate Australians about online safety risks and helps in removing harmful content such as cyberbullying of children, adult cyber abuse and intimate images or videos shared without consent.

[The First Action Plan \(2023–2027\)](#) (Australian Government): The First Action Plan provides a roadmap for the first 5-year effort towards achieving the vision of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022–2032 (see below).

[Framework for trauma-informed practice: Supporting children, young people and their families](#) (Victorian Government). This framework promotes and supports a shared understanding of what being trauma-informed means to children, individuals and families, professionals and volunteers.

[The Line](#) (Our Watch). Our Watch's primary prevention social marketing campaign, designed to promote respectful relationships and drive online and interpersonal behavioural change among young people aged 14+ by providing evidence-based information.

[Make No Doubt Campaign](#) (New South Wales Government). This education campaign empowers young people to check consent before engaging in sexual activity.

[Men in focus: practice guide and evidence review](#) (Our Watch). Men in Focus is designed to support people to address masculinities and work with men in the prevention of men's violence against women.

[National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children \(2022–2032\)](#) (Australian Government).

The National Plan is the foundation of the government's strategy to address family, domestic and sexual violence. It sets the national policy agenda guiding the work of Australian, state and territory governments, family safety experts and front-line services.

[National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#) (ANROWS). The NCAS is the world's longest-running population-level survey of community attitudes towards violence against women.

[The Outcomes Framework 2023–2032](#) (Australian Government). The Outcomes Framework links actions and activities by the Australian, state and territory governments with the Australian Government's aim to end gender-based violence in one generation.

[Respect and Equality in Tertiary Education](#) (Our Watch). This website is for people undertaking violence prevention work at TAFEs and universities. It includes information to help create a case for change, as well as planning and implementing prevention activities, education and communications.

[Respectful relationships education toolkit](#) (Our Watch). This toolkit has been developed to support schools in understanding, planning, implementing and sustaining a whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence by promoting gender equality and respectful relationships.

[The Respect@Work website](#) (Australian Human Rights Commission). This website brings together a comprehensive set of resources to support individuals and organisations to better understand, prevent and address workplace sexual harassment.

[Say It Out Loud](#) (ACON). A national resource for LGBTQ+ communities and to build the capacity for service professionals working with people who have experienced sexual, domestic and family violence.

Appendix – Key frameworks related to sexual violence

Sexual violence prevention and response, consent, healthy and respectful relationships are also considered in other national frameworks, including:

- [The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](#)
- [The National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence](#)
- [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025](#)
- [First Action Plan 2023–2027](#)
- [Outcomes Framework 2023-2032](#)
- [National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020–25](#)
- [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030](#)
- [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031](#)
- [National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality](#)
- [National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians \(Elder Abuse\) 2019–2023](#)
- [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031](#)
- [National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030](#)
- [Work Plan to Strengthen Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault 2022–2027](#)
- [National Drug Strategy 2017–2026](#)
- [National Alcohol Strategy 2019–2028](#).

Endnotes

- ¹ Sexual violence perpetrated by adults and older adolescents against children below the age of consent is child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse has unique and distinct drivers that are different to the drivers of gender-based violence among young people and adults. For further information about the Commonwealth's approach to child sexual abuse, please refer to *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*.
- ² The 4 drivers of all gender-based violence are described in *Change the Story* as: Driver 1. Condoning of violence against women Driver 2. Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life Driver 3. Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity Driver 4. Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.
- ³ *Personal Safety Survey*, (2021–22) Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- ⁴ *Ibid*.
- ⁵ N Townsend, D Loxton, N Egan, I Barnes, E Byrnes, & P Forder *A life course approach to determining the prevalence and impact of sexual violence in Australia: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health* (Research report, 14/2022). ANROWS, 2022.
- ⁶ [Intersectionality and violence against women](#), Our Watch, accessed September 2023.
- ⁷ C Coumarelos, N Roberts, N Weeks, & V Rasmussen *Attitudes matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), Findings for young Australians* (Research report, 08/2023). ANROWS, 2023
- ⁸ From *Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and Their Children in Australia*.
- ⁹ The framework's definition is derived from the definition of sexual consent in the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* and was developed through further consultation with experts.
- ¹⁰ In developing any program or activity, it is important to note the jurisdictional laws around sexual assault and consent. Further information about these laws can be found at the relevant state or territory government website.
- ¹¹ For example, this includes teachers, carers, family members or support workers.
- ¹² In Australia, the legal age of consent can vary between jurisdictions and laws may apply to certain sexual acts (e.g. 'sexting' may be considered child abuse material where a person is under 18 years of age, even when in a jurisdiction where the age of consent is 16-years-old). Some jurisdictions provide a legal defence when a mutually consensual sexual interaction is between two young people close in age.
- ¹³ Australia's shared primary prevention framework *Change the Story* notes a range of reinforcing factors that can change the frequency or severity of violence but that are not, in themselves, the main drivers of violence. These include heavy alcohol consumption, which weakens prosocial behaviours towards women, but alone, without other gendered drivers of violence, does not cause sexual violence.
- ¹⁴ A high rate of young people use pornography as a source of information to learn about sex and sexual relationships, with 60% of young men and 41% of young women reporting having done so in the last 12 months. Our Watch 2020.
- ¹⁵ *Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*. Our Watch, 2019.
- ¹⁶ *Respectful relationships education in schools – evidence paper*. Our Watch, 2021.
- ¹⁷ *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed.). Our Watch, 2021.
- ¹⁸ *More than ready: Bystander action to prevent violence against women in the Victorian community*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), 2012.
- ¹⁹ *Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence – final evaluation report*, Our Watch, 2021
- ²⁰ O Burton, P Rawstone, L Watchirs-Smith, S Nathan & A Carter, *Teaching sexual consent to young people in education settings: a narrative systematic review*. Sex Education, 2021.
- ²¹ This is based on the Information-Motivation-Behavioural Skills (IMB) model of sexual health (Fisher & Fisher, 1992). This outlines that for an individual to change their behaviour in favour of safer sexual practices, they need information and knowledge about the behaviour, the motivation to perform the behaviour, and the behavioural skills necessary for the behaviour.
- ²² Films classified as R18+ cannot be sold or hired to minors. For more information, see the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*.
- ²³ P Pound P, S Denford, J Shucksmith, et al [What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views](#), BMJ Open 2017;7:e014791, 2017.
- ²⁴ Burton et al, 2021.
- ²⁵ Pound et al, 2017.

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- ²⁶ E Schumlich, W Fisher, *An Information-Motivation-Behavioural Skills model analysis of young adults' sexual behaviour patterns and regulatory requirements for sexual consent in Canada*. The Canadian journal of human sexuality 28(3):1-15, 2021
- ²⁷ J Edwards, US Rehman & ES Byers. [Perceived barriers and rewards to sexual consent communication: A qualitative analysis](#). Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 39(8), 2408–2434, 2022.
- ²⁸ *The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia*. Jesuit Social Services, 2018.
- ²⁹ 'Sextortion' or sexual extortion is a form of blackmail where someone threatens to share a nude or sexual image or video of you unless you give in to their demands.
- ³⁰ Pound et al, 2017.
- ³¹ Edwards et al, 2022.
- ³² Pound et al, 2017.
- ³³ G Kaplan, ["I would never just plop you into a car and say, okay, figure out how to drive this": Driving metaphors in sex education](#), SSM – Qualitative Research in Health, Volume 2, 2022.
- ³⁴ For example, traffic lights and check boxes.
- ³⁵ M Stathopoulos, *Engaging men in sexual assault prevention* (ACSSA Wrap No. 14). Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2013.
- ³⁶ Pound et al, 2017.
- ³⁷ Burton et al, 2021.
- ³⁸ K Marson, *Ignorance is not innocence: Safeguarding sexual wellbeing through relationships and sex education. International perspectives, practical experience and insights on the design and implementation of relationships and sex education: findings from a Churchill Fellowship*. 2018.
- ³⁹ Pound et al, 2017.
- ⁴⁰ J Power, S Kauer, C Fisher, R Chapman-Bellamy & A Bourne. *The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021* (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 133). The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2021–2022.
- ⁴¹ Pound et al, 2017.
- ⁴² Stathopoulos, 2013.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ *Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence – final evaluation report*. Our Watch, 2021.
- ⁴⁵ In a classroom setting, this can also include what is known as protective interruption techniques. Protective interrupting is a technique to prevent a child disclosing abuse in front of other students and instead, allowing them to disclose in a safe and confidential way.
- ⁴⁶ Resources around these types of techniques are available on headspace.org.au and raisingchildren.net.au.
- ⁴⁷ For example, in one study of consent promotion programs in the United States, only one program out of 18 had content that was specifically adapted for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans students.
- ⁴⁸ Burton et al, 2021.
- ⁴⁹ A term used for making publicly known the sexual orientation or gender identity of another person who would prefer to keep this information private.
- ⁵⁰ A Gebhardt, [Best practices for engaging youth as partners in sexual violence prevention](#). National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2014.
- ⁵¹ Pound et al, 2017.
- ⁵² K Struthers, N Parmenter & C Tilbury, *Young people as agents of change in preventing violence against women* (Research report, 02/2019) ANROWS, 2019.
- ⁵³ ActionAid, *Department for International Development and Gender and Development Network, A theory of change for tackling violence against women and girls*, ActionAid, 2015.
- ⁵⁴ jhpiego, *Gender concepts and definitions*, jhpiego website, 2020.
- ⁵⁵ eSafety, *Image-based abuse*, eSafety website, n.d.