Fathers, Fathering and Preventing Violence Against Women

White Ribbon Research Series –
Preventing Men's Violence Against Women

White Ribbon

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The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest global male-led movement to stop men's violence against women. It engages and enables men and boys to lead this social change. In Australia, the campaign is led in particular by the White Ribbon Foundation.

The White Ribbon Campaign works to prevent men's violence against women through a range of strategies, both national and local, including social marketing and media, efforts by campaign Ambassadors, and initiatives among communities, schools, universities, sporting codes and workplaces.

As part of its work, the White Ribbon Foundation publishes policy and research reports intended to add to the knowledge base regarding the prevention and reduction of men's violence against women. These reports comprise the White Ribbon Research Series – Preventing Men's Violence Against Women.

The White Ribbon Research Series – Preventing Men's Violence Against Women is intended to:

- Present contemporary evidence on men's violence against women and its prevention;
- Investigate and report on new developments in prevention locally, nationally and internationally; and
- Identify policy and programming issues and provide options for improved prevention strategies and services.

The White Ribbon Research Series is directed by an expert reference group comprising academic, policy and service experts. At least two reports are published each year and available from the White Ribbon website at www.whiteribbon.org.au.

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This report

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Introduction

Contributing to the prevention of men's violence against women requires more than simply being a non-violent man. It requires an understanding of the factors which underlie and contribute to violence against women and how these factors are deeply engrained in our culture, to the degree to which they are sometimes not immediately obvious. It requires an awareness of how these factors influence our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours – about what it is to be a man and how to relate to others. It requires the courage to change, to adopt new beliefs and new attitudes, and it requires the knowledge and skills to put new actions and behaviours in place.

Fatherhood provides this opportunity. Perhaps more than any other life stage, it delivers the chance for men to examine how the factors that contribute to violence against women impact on their choices and behaviours on a daily basis. A good father is a non-violent father. Yet fathers can do much more to prevent violence against women than being non-violent men themselves. Through their relationships with women and children and their involvement in family tasks and responsibilities, fathers are well positioned to reflect on issues of masculinity and gendered power relations, to do more than just practice non-violence, but actively work towards the creation and maintenance of equal and respectful relationships, and to contribute significantly to the prevention of men's violence against women.

The changing nature of fatherhood?

A generation ago, our understanding of fathers and fatherhood was heavily influenced by what has come to be known as the 'traditional' model of fatherhood. According to the traditional model, a father's main function was to be a good economic provider for his family – a 'breadwinner' – and to work outside the home. It was not expected that men would undertake more than a minimal role in housework, or in the care and nurturing of their children, which was considered to be the natural domain of women.

However, the social, economic and cultural conditions which sustained traditional fatherhood have changed. A decrease in permanent full-time work and a rise of part-time and casual work, particularly among women, has meant that many fathers are no longer the sole 'breadwinner' in the family (HREOC, 2005). In recent times we have seen the rise of 'dual income' families as more women contribute as 'breadwinners' to the family income. And in addition to this change outside the home, we have begun witnessing a change inside the home. Family structures are changing amid a growing recognition of the importance of fathers to families, and as an increased response to gender equity.

In contemporary society many men are exploring new models of fatherhood characterised by an increasing level of father involvement in childcare and household tasks, and greater equality between men and women. Men are re-examining their place in the family and seeking to become fathers who are actively involved both in and out of the home, as carers as well as providers. The 'involved father' is becoming more common.

Or is he?

Despite the popular image of an involved and nurturant father, the perception of fatherhood appears to have changed much faster than the reality (Russell, et.al., 1999; Craig, 2006). The traditional model still has considerable bearing in many families in defining how parents think about the father role (Hatten, Vinter, & Williams, 2002). Our attitudes to parenthood may have changed but the actions of parents, and of fathers in particular, remain stereotypically gendered (Russell, et.al., 1999; Katz-Wise, Priess & Hyde, 2010). Despite widespread support among both men and women for the idea that housework and parenting should be shared, there is a marked difference between attitudes and actual behaviours (Craig, 2006).

Contemporary fathers experience the tension between the competing expectations of being a good 'provider' on the one hand, yet 'being there' for their children on the other. But as this paper explores, when these two demands are at odds, more often than not it is the traditional 'providing' aspect of fathering that wins out. Despite the large scale social and economic changes that have occurred over the past few decades, fatherhood has been remarkably resistant to meaningful change.

At this current point in history, more Australian men than ever before are actively involved with their children, yet at the same time, many men remain seemingly 'locked in' to traditional models of fatherhood and choose to have only a minimal level of involvement with their children and in domestic and household tasks more generally. More men than ever before are separated from their children and un-involved (Flood, 2003). Many children do not live with their fathers, relate to their fathers on a regular basis, or enjoy the economic support of their fathers.

One of the most troubling aspects of contemporary fathering is the continued prevalence of men's violence towards women, which remains a problem of enormous magnitude, with wide ranging impacts that are both serious and long lasting. Some fathers are physically violent to their partners and ex-partners. Many are emotionally abusive and controlling. Many more continue to enjoy the privileges that come with being the dominant gender, and most do nothing to actively challenge the *status quo.*

Fathers' role in preventing violence against women

Violence against women is a men's issue and all men should play a role in its prevention (Flood, 2010). Even though it is perpetrated by a minority of men, many more condone it by not taking it seriously, or by failing to speak out against it. Many men would openly say that they denounce violence but they are not actively engaged in promoting violence prevention. Many express a desire to take action to prevent it, but admit that they do not know what to do.

For fathers, however, there is a lot they can 'do'.

A good father is without doubt a non-violent father. But when it comes to prevention, fathers have the opportunity to play an additional key role by addressing the factors underlying and contributing to violence against women. Fathers are ideally positioned, through their relationships with the women and children in their lives, to make a real and significant impact on the range of complex, inter-connected factors which shape the attitudes and behaviours that cause violence against women. This is because the factors that contribute to violence against women are also active and influential in shaping

fathers and fathering. Through the very act of fathering, men are engaging with key issues – masculinity and gender equality – that are crucial to understanding and preventing violence against women.

This paper explores contemporary fatherhood and the role that fathers can play in preventing men's violence against women. Part one asks the question 'what is a father?' and explores ideas surrounding father involvement and the problems that flow from the popular assumption that fathers have a unique contribution to make to the lives of children. Part two looks at the violence of fathers, its impact on mothering and on children and young people. Parts three and four examine the factors underlying and contributing to men's violence against women by examining fathering through the lenses of masculinity and gender equality. The paper concludes in part five by offering a number of practical waysin which fathers can contribute to the prevention of men's violence against women.

Part 1: What is a father?

Defining fathers

At the outset, it is important to note that the group of men we think about when we hear the term 'fathers' are not necessarily a homogenous group. There is a wide diversity of fathers throughout Australian society with varieties of relationships with mothers and children. There are biological fathers related to their children by birth, adoptive fathers related to their children through adoption, and there are step fathers related to their children solely through their relationship (or former relationship) with the child's natural mother. Fathers can be living with or apart from their children. They may be co-parenting, in shared parenting arrangements or sole parents. They may be foster fathers. Furthermore, there are men who, through their relationships with the children in their lives, although they may not refer to themselves as fathers, are nonetheless sometimes engaged in the act of fathering.

When it comes to thinking about fathers and who they are, the tendency is to think primarily about biological fathers. However, to be truly inclusive of the wide range of men engaged in the act of fathering we need to extend our notions of fatherhood to include both the biological and social aspects of fatherhood, thereby acknowledging the complete range of male figures who have an important connection, and contribution to make, to the lives of children and equally, to the lives of the women who are their mothers. Throughout this paper the terms 'father' and 'fathering' are used, unless otherwise stated, with this broader sense in mind. As such, this paper is relevant to all men who have relationships with women and children, be they biological, familial or social.

Table 1: Some statistics on fathers

Biological fathers	In 2006/07 there were over 4.5 million men aged 18 years and over who reported having one or more natural children, living either with them or elsewhere (ABS 2008).
Fathers living with children	There were around 1.8 million fathers living with their children aged less than 15 years in 2003. Almost all (97%) of these fathers were in couple families, with the remaining 3% (or 58,000) being lone fathers (ABS, 2006).
Step-fathers	In 2006/07, 132,000 men were step-fathers to children aged under 18, living in the same household (ABS 2008).
Non-resident fathers	There were 385,000 non-resident fathers in 2006/07, that is, fathers who had at least one natural child aged 0-17 years not residing with them but usually residing with the natural mother (ABS 2008).
Fathers at work	91% of fathers with children aged less than 15 years were employed, with 85% employed full-time. One-third (33%) of fathers working full-time in 2004–05 worked 50 hours or more per week, while 16% worked for 60 hours or more (ABS, 2006).
Fathers at home	Of the 1.7 million couple families with children aged 0–14 years in June 2003, there were 57,900 (or 3.4%) families where the father was not employed while mothers worked either full-time or part-time (ABS, 2006).

Defining fathering

The new model of family, characterised by the 'involved father', has grown in popularity alongside increasing recognition of the benefits for children of father involvement (Fletcher, Fairbairn & Pascoe, 2004). Research has consistently indicated that positive father involvement in childrearing can lead to good child outcomes across socio-economic, behavioural, cognitive and educational domains. (Allen & Daly, 2002; Berlyn, Wise & Soriano, 2008). What's more, there is growing evidence that involved parenting can benefit fathers themselves (Berlyn, Wise & Soriano, 2008) and many fathers, often motivated by a desire to be different from the traditional model provided by their own fathers, are expressing a clear intention to be more actively involved with their children.

However, what do we mean when we talk about father involvement? Are we referring to the quantity or the quality of the involvement?

Certainly, the quantity of the involvement is seen as the starting point. Many men lament the absence of their own fathers from their own lives and resolve to spend more time with their own children – to 'be there' for their kids. But the research indicates that the sheer amount of time spent in the child's company exerts less influence on children's outcomes than other aspects of fathering (Baxter & Smart, 2010). So it must also be the quality of the involvement that's important.

So should fathers be seeking to replicate the same type and quality of care provided by mothers? If so, we are a long way from our goal. Most observers would agree that if there is an expectation that fathers' involvement be equal to that of mothers', it is not being realised. Yet this is probably not the degree of involvement most people imagine when they think of 'involved' fathers.

When most people think about 'involved' fathers, they tend do so within a framework that assumes that mothers are, and should be, the primary carers of children, and that fathers best operate as part-time parents whose relationships with children, although important, remain less important than those of mothers (Wall & Arnold, 2007). But what exactly is the nature of the difference between fathering and mothering? This key question is worth examining in detail because in doing so we uncover a wealth of information about how our understandings of 'fathering' and 'mothering' are largely culturally and socially constructed and shaped to a sizeable extent by attitudes and beliefs about gender, the very same attitudes and beliefs that give rise to gendered violence.

Natural fatherhood?

Cultural ideas of gender and parenting tend to assume that women and men are naturally, fundamentally and inalterably different from one another. We speak of children being parented but attach different meanings, attitudes and values to the terms 'mothering' and 'fathering'. We do not speak of 'fathering' as something women can do, nor 'mothering' as something men can do. We tend to think that mothers and fathers must perform different tasks and fulfil different parenting roles. There is a strong inference that a parent's gender might offer something unique and special (Howard, 2003; Doucet, 2006).

A ‘natural’ difference between fatherhood and motherhood is one view that holds much currency in popular culture. It is based on observations of the distinctive ways in which fathers, when compared to mothers, interact with their children and attempts to explain these distinctions in terms of biology, or innate (natural) traits particular to men. According to this view of fatherhood, fathering is something that is quite different from, and usually complementary to, mothering.

This understanding of fatherhood suggests that fathers do not have the same natural ability that mothers have to care for and nurture children. Instead, a father complements a mother’s care and nurturing by engaging differently with their children, by being more active, or physical, for example. It is an understanding that recognises an important contribution made by fathers to the upbringing of children, but which argues that a father’s contribution is fundamentally different to that of a mother, in the same way that men are fundamentally different from women.

This approach to fatherhood has been adopted and popularised by a number of authors (e.g., Biddulph, 1994) who argue that, as men, fathers make a ‘unique’ contribution to parenting (usually described in relation to men’s unique ability to be role models to boys). And it is a view of fatherhood that is popular and widely accepted, primarily because it seems to make sense of the apparent differences in men’s and women’s involvement in the family, but also because it lends credibility to the common belief in society that traditional gender roles are rooted in the natural abilities of men and women (Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002). But in reality, this model is little more than a thinly disguised validation of the *status quo* and endorsement of traditional gender relations within families and wider society, and can serve to confine fathering to a very narrow set of activities.

Problems with narrow understandings of fathering

There are a number of problems that stem from accepting a narrow model of fatherhood based on ‘natural’ differences between men and women. If we accept that fathers are fundamentally different from mothers, then we must also accept different roles for men and women in the family that are in keeping with their ‘natural’ abilities.

This concept has far reaching implications. It impacts on the way men see their ‘role’ in the family. The tendency is for men to assume that their mere presence in a family – as a father figure and role model – is what is required of them. The implied message is that fathers make such a unique contribution to their children’s lives that no more is required of them than to simply ‘be there’ for their children. But the mere presence of a father does not guarantee positive child outcomes. A violent father, for example, is worse than no father at all.

Problems can also arise from fathers perceiving their role as being complementary to that of a mother. For if a mother’s role is to undertake all the housework and child care and nurturing, then a father does not need to participate in these tasks, at least not as anything more than a ‘helper’. This can result in the responsibility for childcare and domestic work falling solely to women whilst male privileges are sustained.

It is well documented that only a very small number of men feel that a father’s involvement in, and responsibility for, his children’s wellbeing should be equal to that of mothers (Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002). These gendered beliefs about parenting can be a major constraint on fathers’ interactions with children and can impact on the quality of the

father/child relationship, but they are an even greater problem when it comes to achieving gender equality. Gender inequalities become rationalised and explained away as arising from the natural order of things. In fact, gender inequalities – such as the gendered division of household labour and child care – are not identified as 'problems' at all, for they are understood as merely a natural consequence of the complementary abilities and different roles of men and women in the family. The result is that gender inequalities in the family are maintained and reinforced and any power inequalities are ignored or dismissed as 'natural'. The prevention of men's violence against women, however, requires us to name these power inequalities for what they are.

It is crucial, then, to critique narrow biologically-based definitions of fathering that argue that men make a unique contribution to parenting. Superficially, there are some activities that distinguish the parenting styles of many men from their female partners, such as higher levels of physical interaction, but these activities equally can be offered by women.

A biologically-based model of fatherhood assumes that all fathers parent in similar ways and that all mothers parent in similar ways. In actuality there are vast differences in parenting styles, even within groups of mothers and within groups of fathers. Not all men parent in traditionally masculine ways, and not all women parent in traditionally feminine ways. So the unique contribution that this understanding of fatherhood relies upon is difficult to identify.

And even if we *could* observe distinct and unique parenting styles between men and women, would not a better explanation be that these gender differences in parenting emerge in response to social norms and expectations? This would, after all, take into account the array of factors that impact on parenting and help to explain the wide diversity of parenting styles. Fathers may tend to exhibit more traditionally masculine qualities in their caring, but we do not need to resort to rigid biological arguments to explain the apparent differences in mothering and fathering. Fathers' contribution to parenting may be distinctive, but it is not unique to their sex (Flood, 2003).

It is sometimes said that mothers and fathers make 'complementary' contributions to parenting. This can imply that children must always be raised by both mothers and fathers and that non-traditional family arrangements are harmful to children. Yet it takes only a little consideration to realise that children thrive under a variety of family structures, and that some children do well with a single mother, a single father, two mothers or two fathers, and so on, and other children may not just require two parents but more than two parents.

Why it is important to reject narrow models of fatherhood

Rejecting narrow models of fatherhood is important because it enables us to examine fathers and fathering without being constrained by traditional gendered norms and assumptions. It allows us to see how fatherhood is socially constructed, not biologically determined, and to examine the choices men make about how and when they engage in fathering. It does not mean that fathers are unimportant in the lives of children, although it does mean that fathers do not have a unique 'male' contribution to make to parenting. There is no 'one way' to father and no special 'male role' for fathers in the family. Instead, there is a number of ways that men can engage in fathering. Rejecting narrow models of fatherhood opens up a greater range of choices for fathers about how they will parent their children.

The contribution that fathers can and should make to their children's development is primarily the same contribution that mothers make to their children's development, which is the daily ongoing care and nurturing of human life. What male parents contribute to children is vital, not because it is different from what mothers contribute, but because it is the same – care, love, attention, physical and emotional support. Both men and women are equally capable of caring for children (Flood, 2003; Doucet, 2006). Fathers, therefore, do not have a unique role to play that guarantees their importance in the lives of their children. Instead, they have to earn that level of importance through their actions.

The widespread belief among men, that we *do* make a unique contribution to parenting, says a lot about us, our sense of entitlement, and our desire to feel 'important'. It seems that we must always be assured that our contribution is the most important, or that we are the most significant figures in our children's lives, regardless of our actual level of involvement with them. Perhaps it is a reaction to the unique contribution that mothers are able to make to children – through pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding – that we feel impelled to demand our own comparable uniqueness.

However, in order to argue that fathers' involvement with children is desirable, valuable and important we do not need to argue that it is unique, even though the idea of fathers making a unique contribution to their children is a popular belief that many men support and respond positively to. This serves only to ensnare families in traditional gendered patterns of relating. It risks reasserting traditional gender roles and downplaying key issues of gendered power inequalities. By rejecting narrow understandings of fatherhood we are rejecting traditional ideas about masculinity, chipping away at the barriers to gender equality and moving towards the goal of preventing violence against women.

Part 2: Fathers and violence against women

Violence against women is a widespread social problem with large numbers of women suffering violence in any given year. Whilst it is not possible to know exactly how much violence is perpetrated by fathers, what we do know is that a significant proportion of men's violence against women is perpetrated by current and previous intimate partners and that many of these men are likely to be fathers. In the 12 months prior to the *Personal Safety Survey* (ABS 2006) over 70,000 women experienced violence by a male current or former partner. Over the course of their lifetime, more than a third of women (34 per cent) who have ever had a boyfriend or husband report experiencing at least one form of violence from an intimate male partner, whilst more than one in ten women (12 per cent) who has ever had a boyfriend or husband has experienced sexual violence from a partner (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004).

Women's experience of intimate partner violence can be both frequent and prolonged. Men's physical violence is often part of a pattern of behaviour that includes threats, intimidation, sexual assault, coercion, emotional abuse, insults and mind-games, control and isolation. It is not only an issue of injustice or inequality, but one of public health.

The health impacts of violence against women are well documented. Violence impacts on women's physical health through direct injury (which can be fatal), on their mental health in the form of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and self-harming behaviours, and can lead to coping behaviours (such as tobacco, alcohol and drug-use) which further affect their health (VicHealth, 2004).

These impacts should never be underestimated. However, in terms of the current discussion – the violence of fathers – it is important to further identify the impact, not just on the children and young people who experience their father's violence towards women, but on women's capacity to parent effectively.

Impact of male violence on mothering

Violence against women in a family context is an assault not only on the mother but also on the mother-child relationship. A woman's physical injuries, mental health issues and poor general health that result from experiencing violence may negatively impact on a child's attachment to their mother and also on her ability to parent (Radford & Hester, 2006). But more than this, a common phenomenon is that of a man strategising to deliberately undermine a woman by attacking her identity and damaging her authority as a mother (DVRCV, 2009).

Mothering represents a source of positive identity for women, the thing above all else that abused mothers try to preserve. So it is no accident that attacks on mothering are central to abusive men's exercise of power and control over their partners (Lapierre, 2008; Mullender *et.al*., 2002).

Women who have been subjected to men's violence can be innovative in their responses to it, becoming experts at managing their own and their children's survival (DVRCV, 2009). Many women can manage to mother effectively even when they suffer the severest forms of violence, going to great lengths to counteract its effects on their parenting. But by deliberately targeting a woman's mothering, men are being violent, not just to the women themselves but to their children as well.

The impact of violence on mothers can extend well beyond the life of the relationship. Just because a woman has left a violent partner does not necessarily mean the effects of his violence will cease (VicHealth, 2007). The violence of fathers is perhaps most pronounced during divorce and separation and can continue for many years following (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004).

Difficulties can arise when women have left the relationship but find themselves still tied to it through child contact and shared parenting arrangements, often ordered by Family Courts. Child contact can be used by violent partners as a direct route through which to continue to abuse the child's mother (Radford & Hester, 2006). Fathers may use contact visits or shared parenting arrangements to undermine and criticise ex-partners. They may actively undermine the relationship between mother and children, and support the children to disobey and disregard their mother. Many mothers report concerns about the safety of their child and/or themselves as a result of ongoing contact with their ex-partners (Qu & Weston, 2010).

Women are particularly vulnerable to financial abuse during and after separation. This can occur in the form of impoverishing the mother through repeated court appearances (Evans, 2007; Rendell, Rathus, & Lynch, 2000), but most often by fathers failing (or refusing) to pay adequate child support. Large numbers of non-resident fathers simply do not comply with child support liabilities, with many making reduced payments, late payments or no payment at all (Weston, 2010). And although many argue that it is difficult for low income non-resident fathers to make child support payments (Smyth & Weston, 2005), it is highly likely that resident mothers who are left with the responsibility to provide for the children consequently have even lower incomes.

Impact on children and young people

Men's violence has many negative consequences for its victims, and these often include children and young people, even if they do not experience the violence directly themselves. We should therefore challenge the view, sometimes expressed, that men who perpetrate domestic violence against a child's mother can otherwise be considered 'good fathers'. A violent father is worse than no father at all.

Study after study shows that children are affected by domestic violence, whether or not they themselves are directly abused (Kitzmann, *et.al.,* 2003; Wolfe, *et.al., 2003*). Exposure to domestic violence is increasingly considered a form of child abuse (Richards, 2011). Studies reported by the Department of Community Services NSW (2002) indicate that children and young people were present at up to 85 to 90 per cent of domestic violence incidents and in about 50 per cent of those incidents they were directly harmed. And of course, men can use violence against children directly – some even go to the extreme of murdering their own children (Kirkwood, 2011) – as a means of harming their mother.

A young child's experience of family violence impacts on their early development. The experience of trauma, common when children experience family violence, produces a range of biological and chemical responses which affect their emotional, behavioural, cognitive, social and physiological well-being. Children who experience trauma may not reach normal developmental milestones. They may: experience anxiety; be easily frustrated and stressed; have decreased trust; lack capacity to regulate emotions and constructively manage conflict; be hyper-vigilant to the possibility of threat, making them more inclined to lash out against others; lack impulse control; and experience cognitive distortions (Sety, 2011).

Older children and young people may be directly physically hurt during domestic violence, particularly if they try to intervene to protect their mother or siblings from harm. But they can also experience indirect or non-physical suffering through isolation from their friends and family, reduced availability of parents, constant fear and tension caused by an awareness of their mother's stress and the possibility of further violence, not to mention the life changes and events that follow violence, such as separation, missing school or work, disrupted sleep and moving away from home (Imbesi, 2006).

One significant impact of a father's violence against women is the phenomenon whereby children and young people – mainly boys – who are exposed to domestic violence are at greater risk of perpetrating relationship violence in their adult lives. Most incidents of adolescent family violence, for example, are committed by male adolescents against mothers and are often understood as being a result of childhood experiences of violence manifesting as the perpetration of violence against mothers and other family members when boys reach adolescence (Howard, 2011). Indeed, the most significant determinant for adolescent violence in the home is a child's and mother's own experience of family violence (Howard, 2011).

Children raised by violent men can learn it is appropriate and acceptable to use violence against women and that violence is an acceptable way to resolve interpersonal conflict and get what they want. They can also learn to view women as of lesser status to men. Male adolescents who use violence against mothers may progress to using violence against women as adults (Howard, 2011). However, the majority of young men who are exposed to domestic violence do not go on to be perpetrators of violence in their own lives (Imbesi, 2006). Furthermore, not all men who perpetrate violence as adults experienced violence as children. In other words, boys who live with violent fathers are not the only boys who receive training in dominant masculine and violent ways of being.

Violent fathers undoubtedly cause significant harm to women and children and young people. Most fathers, however, are not physically violent and most would acknowledge that violence against women is unacceptable (Flood, 2010). Yet most fathers would be surprised to learn that many of the things they do on a day-to-day basis, many of the beliefs they hold, ideas they express and actions they take, contribute to the perpetuation of men's violence against women. The sections that follow (Parts 3 & 4) examine two key factors underlying violence against women – the construction of *masculinity* and *gender inequality* – and how these intersect with fathers and fathering.

Part 3: Fathers, masculinity and violence against women

Our notions of fatherhood remain closely linked to our ideas about manhood and what it is to be a man. Understanding masculinity, then, is crucial to understanding fatherhood, and indeed, men's violence against women. There are many different ways to be a man, yet some ways are viewed, by many men, more favourably than others. In Australian culture, as in many other parts of the world, being a 'real man' is often associated with being *tough, independent, strong* and *in control* (Connell, 1995). These are the dominant norms associated with masculinity. They form the bedrock of male culture and exert a powerful and inescapable influence on men's lives. Males receive training in these dominant norms from an early age; from parents, toys, stories, television, movies, the media, sport, religion, education … everywhere. From all fronts men are bombarded with messages informing them that, in order to be a 'real man' they must live up to certain traits and expectations. Unfortunately these dominant norms are incompatible with many aspects of involved fathering, and actually prescribe a rather narrow role for men in the family as 'breadwinners', or simply as 'role models' to boys.

Masculinity and breadwinners

Traditionally, men have participated in fathering in a particularly masculine way, in the role of the 'breadwinner', and it is a role that remains central to fathers today. Despite the fact that fathers rate being accessible when children need them as the most important thing that fathers can do (Russel, *et.al.*, 1999), the 'breadwinner' or 'provider' role seems fundamental to many men's lives (Baxter & Smart, 2010). In 2004-05, 91 per cent of fathers with children aged less than 15 years were employed, with 85 per cent employed full-time (ABS, 2006). Furthermore, 33 per cent of fathers working full-time in 2004–05 worked 50 hours or more per week, while 16 per cent worked for 60 hours or more (ABS, 2006). Breadwinning then appears central to most men's experience of fathering, and indeed, manhood.

Masculine culture rewards men who are solid economic providers. Breadwinning becomes a way of demonstrating the independence, strength and control that is highly valued according to the unwritten rules of masculinity. And this is in addition to the social status and economic power that comes with participating in paid work.

In contrast, women experience greater social pressure to do the majority of primary caring. Mothers, for example, are more likely to alter their participation in paid work and the time they devote to household work depending on their family situation. For fathers, however, the amount of time spent on paid work and household work remains relatively constant (Lynch, 2007). Fathers of young children rarely withdraw from the labour market to take over caring responsibilities for children. Men, it seems, want to work – very few wish to reduce their hours or stop work altogether in order to care for children (Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002).

Masculinity and role models

Another key contribution that fathers are often thought to make to their children is that of a 'role model', particularly to boys and young men. The argument is that the presence of a male role model is essential in the raising of well-balanced boys. However, it is important to understand that whilst fathers do indeed have a key contribution to make in modelling positive behaviours to their children they are no longer required to model a particular 'role' in the family.

Whilst the popular myth is that boys need to learn 'how to be men', there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case. Indeed the very idea of a 'role' model assumes that there is one single 'role' that men should play in the family when in a gender-equal society fathers must assume multiple roles. As such the whole concept of male role models is really a validation of the traditional construction of manhood and dominant forms of masculinity, and doesn't allow for the many diverse roles that men can, and do, play in families, communities and throughout society.

The dominant understandings of 'fathers as role models' is based on a number of problematic assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that fathers have a unique contribution to make to the family and consequently that their mere presence in the lives of their children, regardless of their actions or behaviour (which for some men can be violent, abusive and controlling) is valuable. It also assumes that mothers cannot teach boys traditional male qualities such as strength and independence (not to mention non-traditional qualities of caring and nurturing), which is surely not true? And similarly, it assumes that fathers do not have an equally valuable contribution to make to their daughters as well as their sons.

At the heart of the dominant 'fathers as role models' approach to fatherhood is a fundamental fear that, without men in their lives, boys will grow up to be 'feminine'. The devaluing of traditionally feminine qualities is a major feature of the dominant masculinity. Not only is masculinity defined in terms of qualities such as strength, toughness, independence, competitiveness etc… it is also defined in terms of what it is *not*, i.e. not weak, not vulnerable, not emotional and especially *not feminine*. The concept of a 'male role model,' therefore, is built on the assumption that femininity is subordinate to masculinity and by implication, that women are inferior to men.

The concept of fathering by being a male role model is appealing to men because it appeals to their conditioned belief in a dominant form of masculinity. This is also why we tend to raise boys within very narrow predetermined boundaries that are based on dominant masculine norms.

There are other notions of fathers as 'role models' which are more useful. Fathers may 'model' non-violent behaviours for their sons and daughters, acting therefore as positive role models. At the same time, common understandings of boys needing male role models tend to perpetuate gendered power inequalities.

Masculinity and caring

The definition of masculinity as being 'not feminine' has major implications for men's involvement with children. Not only do the dominant masculine norms dictate that men should be primarily 'breadwinners' or 'role models', but these same norms actively dissuade men from participating in care giving. The care and nurturing of children involves emotions, intimacy, sensitivity and touch and these traditionally have been understood as feminine qualities. As such, care giving has a subordinated status in men's lives with many men perceiving it as incompatible with their ideas about manhood and masculinity (Hanlon, 2009).

Ideas about masculinity have significant influence on the parenting style of fathers. Fathers are more likely than mothers to use an authoritative parenting style and to demonstrate low parental warmth, especially the fathers of boys (Lucas, Nicholson & Maguire, 2011). This impacts on the 'closeness' of the relationship between fathers and their children, something that often becomes apparent following divorce or separation.

Fathering after separation is often when men's lack of involvement in caring for children becomes problematic. Following separation, most non-resident fathers move into a distant relationship with their children, their level of involvement dropping off with time after separation. Research shows that almost three quarters (74 per cent) of non-resident fathers would like more contact with their children after separation (Smyth, 2003). However, if fathers are uninvolved with their children prior to separation they can find it difficult to make the transition to a significant caring role (HREOC, 2005). The most important obstacle to fathers' parenting *after* separation is the absence of fathers' parenting *before* separation (Flood 2003).

Some observers suggest that the reason why men are not more involved in the care and nurturing of children is simply because they have not been taught the skills of caring for infants and children as they've grown up, with boys and young men routinely discouraged from nurturant and care-giving forms of play and activity. However, this argument, in addition to ignoring the fact that men have a choice in how they parent and are not merely products of their upbringing, assumes that all women *are* taught these skills as they grow up, which is often not the case. Many women do not learn the skills of caring for children until they become parents. Many men do not either. The conclusion to be drawn is that many men choose *not* to learn the skills of caring for children. This is, in part, due to dominant ideas about masculinity. (It can also be understood in terms of 'male privilege' and the perceived benefits that come with not being a primary caregiver - see Part 4.)

Masculinity and preventing violence against women

A key reason why it is important to consider the role of masculinity in fatherhood is because constructions of masculinity also play a key role in men's violence against women. Fathering, constructs of masculinity and violence against women are interrelated.

According to dominant ideas about masculinity, being a 'real man' is often associated with being tough, strong, powerful and in control. For some men the use of violence becomes a way of demonstrating masculine norms, i.e. that they are 'tough' and 'strong', and it can also be a way of obtaining power and control. In this way, ideas about masculinity are intimately connected to both physical and non-physical forms of violence against women. Men who choose violent and abusive behaviours do so because they have been conditioned to believe that obtaining and maintaining power is essential to their masculine identity.

Preventing men's violence against women requires changing our ideas about masculinity and what it is to 'be a man'. We have to reject the traditional belief that a father's main contribution to the family is that of a breadwinner. Instead we have to cultivate new models of masculinity that aren't centred on domination, power and control (Connell, 1995).

By choosing to become more fully involved in the day to day care of their children, fathers have a real opportunity to begin re-shaping dominant ideas about masculinity. Given the changes that have occurred in society over recent decades it is no longer acceptable that women be defined as the default primary carers, especially once the child has moved beyond the breastfeeding stage. Through the act of fathering, men are able to construct alternative models of masculinity based on nurturing, caring, respect and equality. Fathers, of course *can* care for children and modern parenting is based on this expectation.

Part 4: Fathers, gender inequality and violence against women

Contemporary fatherhood is still greatly influenced by deeply entrenched and popular beliefs about the differences between mothers and fathers, about the unique contribution that only fathers can make to a family and about manhood and masculinity. All of these beliefs, and the attitudes and behaviours that accompany them, serve to reinforce and sustain traditional gender roles in the family. And whilst traditional gender roles can work well for some families, they do bring with them the 'baggage' of gender inequality which, unless acknowledged and actively countered, can contribute to a number of problems in relationships, families and society as a whole, not the least of which is men's violence against women.

Gender inequality in families

One of the major implications of traditional gender roles is gender inequality. The traditional male role is to be a good economic provider for his family – a 'breadwinner' – and to work outside the home. This brings with it social status, career opportunities, economic power and decision-making power. The traditional female role, however, is to perform the unpaid work inside the home, predominantly the housework and care giving tasks. In terms of gender relations, the traditional model of the family establishes deep gender inequalities. Women's power and sphere of influence, individually and as a group, is usually quite limited, despite the fact that it is women's unwaged care and related domestic labour that frees men up to exercise control in the public sphere of politics, the economy and society.

Recent decades, however, have seen a large shift in terms of attitudes to gender roles and gender equality, particularly in relation to the role of women in society, with women participating in the paid workforce more than ever. Yet this hasn't been matched by fathers doing more unpaid work. Fathers continue to spend far more of their time in comparison to mothers in paid employment and less time in child care and domestic work (Baxter & Smart, 2010). Fathers rarely withdraw from the labour market to take over caring responsibilities for children, whereas a majority of mothers make significant changes to their working lives (Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002; Baxter & Smart, 2010). A key contributing factor here is the gender pay gap (itself, a manifestation of gender inequality) where women, on average, receive less income then their partners, thereby adding financial incentive for men to remain in the workforce (HREOC, 2005). But there is also a definite expectation that it is mothers, not fathers, who will make changes in their work patterns. This is despite strong attitudinal support for egalitarian roles in relation to parenting and housework (HEROC, 2005).

Gender roles and the division of household labour are key factors affecting relationship satisfaction across the transition to parenthood (Parker & Hunter, 2011) and they are also factors that affect gender inequalities more broadly, in terms of health, social and economic outcomes for both men and women. Most importantly gendered power inequalities are a key underlying cause of men's violence against women (VicHealth, 2007) and this warrants that we critically examine fathering practices from the perspective of gender equality.

Inequalities in caring for children

Gender inequalities are clearly visible in the amount of time that parents spent caring for young children. Across the wide diversity of Australian families, children spend considerably more time with their mother than their father. In 2006 women spent more than two and a half times as long on average caring for children as men did (ABS, 2008). In fact, children spend relatively small amounts of time with their father without their mother also being present. Recent data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Baxter, Gray & Haynes, 2010) shows that on weekdays, children spend on average between 0.5 and 0.8 hours per day with their father alone, depending upon the age of the child. This compares to spending between 1.9 and 2.7 hours with both their mother and father, and between 3.4 and 5.8 additional hours with their mother only. And whilst it could be argued that this is due to fathers' work commitments, the weekend data paints a similar picture. Even on weekends when presumably many men are not working, children spend only a relatively small number of hours with their father when their mother is not present—varying from 0.7 hours per day for infants to 1.5 hours for older children.

As mentioned previously, this has potential effects on father-child relations. If fathers are rarely alone with their children, they are not forging independent bonds with their children. This is of consequence in intact families but may also have significant implications for the quality of father-child contact following separation. If fathers in intact families are seldom fully responsible for children, they may need to make considerable adjustments in their care patterns if children in separated families are to receive quality care from both parents.

Not only do mothers in intact families provide more absolute child care than fathers, but the experience of providing care is different in kind and quality for mothers and for fathers. The aspects of child care that are arguably the most demanding (the physical care) and the aspects of child care that research (Bittman, Craig & Folbre, 2004) suggests are most prized by parents (the interactive care) are not equally experienced by men and women. Fathers spend a greater proportion of their child care time on play activities (41 per cent compared with 25 per cent for mothers), and mothers spend more of their time on physical and emotional care activities (43 per cent, compared with 27 per cent for fathers) (Craig, 2006).

Mothers do more interactive care than fathers on the whole, but it is a much lower proportion of their total time spent engaging in child care. In relative terms fathers enjoy more play and talking time with their children than mothers do. And when it comes to physical care, mothers do more than fathers in both absolute and relative terms. Given that physical care often needs to occur according to stricter timetables, this suggests that mothers are more time constrained by their child care duties than are fathers, or conversely, that men have more discretion about *when* they do child care.

So the experience of providing care is different, in kind and quality, for mothers in comparison to fathers. Mothering involves more double activity, more physical labour, a more rigid timetable and more overall responsibility than fathering – and this applies even when women are working full time (Craig, 2006).

The fact that the child care tasks in which men mostly engage in are arguably the more flexible and fun ones, implies that fathers' time with children is less like *work* than mothers' time and also, that fathers are less likely to sacrifice their own needs in order to care for children. Fewer men, for example, suffer disrupted sleep because of their commitment to being a co-parent to their children (Maume, Sebastian & Bardo, 2010). As women are generally the primary carer, it is *their* sleep that is interrupted by responding to the needs of family members at night and at the beginning of each day.

Furthermore, the fact that fathers are rarely alone with their children means that men do not seem to be undertaking child care in a way that relieves women of the responsibility for care. Fathers are far more likely to see their role as being a 'helper' rather than assuming responsibility for the task (Craig, 2006). Men frequently describe their contribution to caring for children as 'helping out' or as 'babysitting', which of course strongly implies that they perceive the care of children to be ultimately the mother's responsibility. This can have major consequences for the mothers who are carrying the ongoing burden of responsibility for managing care and from a gender equality perspective it appears that expectations that men's involvement in child care could substantially free women to pursue other activities such as paid work are not being widely met.

Inequalities in housework

Gendered inequalities are also evident in the division of household labour. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), while men are doing slightly more household work than in the past, in 2006 women still did around 1.8 times as much as men. Women spent almost six times as long on laundry as men in 2006 and more than three times as long on other housework such as cleaning. Women also spent almost two and a half times as long on food preparation and clean up.

A longitudinal study of over 2,000 randomly selected Australians (Baxter, Hewitt & Haynes, 2008) found that there is a significant increase in women's housework with transitions to parenthood, but no corresponding effect for men. The birth of the first child results in an average increase of six hours of housework for mothers (in addition to the increased hours devoted to child care), but fathers' hours remain unchanged. Having additional children increases women's time on housework but men tend to spend *less* time doing housework when later children are born, perhaps as a result of women's withdrawal from paid work.

These findings are supported by data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009). Having children aged under 15 years increases the volume of household work for both men and women, but the additional work is largely taken up by women. In 2006, mothers aged 20–49 years in couple relationships spent an extra seven hours a week on domestic activities compared to those without children. Fathers aged 20–49 years in couple families spent roughly the same amount of time on domestic activities as men in couples without children.

So although contemporary models of fatherhood emphasise greater involvement in caring for children, there does not seem to be a similar emphasis on involvement in housework. Some men may argue that they contribute to the home in other ways, by performing home maintenance tasks, for example, and in 2006, home maintenance was the only area of household work on which men spent considerably more time than women. However, home maintenance tends not to be a task that is performed on a daily basis.

The evidence clearly shows that when it comes to the division of labour inside and outside the family home it is fathers who invariably engage in the higher status activities. Unpaid caring and housework (predominantly performed by women) remain undervalued and do not have the same status as paid work, despite their significant economic and social contribution (HREOC, 2005). The result is a gendered power imbalance between men and women, a key underlying cause of men's violence against women.

Male privilege

Gendered power inequalities in the family confer a number of benefits or privileges to fathers. 'Male privilege' refers to the benefits and advantages that men receive, purely as a result of being a member of the dominant gender. For fathers, they include the material benefits that flow from higher incomes, the social status associated with paid work, the authority and interpersonal power associated with being the 'head of the house', and most importantly, the increased mental and physical freedoms (and undisturbed sleep) that flow from minimal involvement in caring for children and housework, or indeed, the lack of any expectation that men will make more than a minimal contribution.

The creation of equal gender relations requires men to acknowledge male privilege and to actively work towards dismantling it, yet many men have trouble identifying with the concept of male privilege. Fathers, for example, have far more positive views than mothers about whether or not they do their fair share (Baxter & Smart, 2010). Many fathers feel that they contribute appropriately to caring and housework tasks; that they 'help out' when 'asked'. They can be blind to the influence of traditional gendered roles, norms and expectations. Most men do not feel that they have more power than women. However, one of the privileges of male privilege is being *unaware* of your privileges.

The defence of male privilege and the many formal and informal benefits that flow from it is the key reason why many men are resistant to gender equality (Connell, 2003). It is the same resistance men demonstrate when they are asked to do more housework or become more involved in the care of children. It goes a long way to explaining why many new fathers, when faced with the choice between work and family, invariably express a commitment to paid work, under the pretext of needing to be a good 'provider' (HREOC, 2005; Hatten, Vinter & Williams, 2002) when, more likely, it is simply because to become more involved in care giving or housework would be to give up the perceived benefits of non-involvement.

The defence of male privilege warns us to view with caution the growing emphasis on father involvement, particularly when it is tied to narrow definitions of fatherhood that proclaim an important male contribution to children and the family. A key message of 'fathers' rights' groups, for example, is that children need fathers, but we should question whether or not it is the case that some fathers need children, in order to feel important, or to exercise control over their mothers. Pressure groups are hard at work seeking legal changes to increase men's paternal rights over children after separation and divorce, and even over foetuses inside women's bodies. The current emphasis on fatherhood offers hope when it focuses on increasing positive father involvement, but can become problematic when used to strengthen men's control over women and children, in a society where men are already dominant socially, economically and politically. Sometimes the focus on fathers and fathering is about men's rights over women and children rather than men's responsibilities.

Male privilege is not just an outcome of gender inequality; it is a contributor to violence against women. Men's experience of male privilege results in a 'sense of entitlement' that influences men's choices about their behaviours. If men are the beneficiaries of power and privilege in the family, and if this is a constant feature of their experience of fatherhood (and indeed, manhood), then they can come to believe that they are 'entitled' to more power than women. And if men have an expectation and belief that they will be dominant over women – a sense of entitlement – then they are likely to choose behaviours that are violent or abusive in order to obtain and maintain dominance, power and control.

The reality that men are often motivated to maintain gender inequalities represents a major challenge for the prevention of men's violence against women. This is why being a non-violent man or father is only the first step. Men must become aware of how their engagement in fathering is heavily influenced by traditional gendered roles, norms and expectations, how these play out in terms of caring for children and housework, how they reinforce gendered power inequalities, and how gender inequality is a determinant of violence against women. The prevention of men's violence against women will require men to make the shift from being *against violence* to being *for gender equality*.

Part 5: What fathers can do to prevent violence against women

There is a lot that fathers can do to help prevent men's violence against women. It starts with being a non-violent man. This is the number one thing that fathers can do. But there is still more that can be done.

Even fathers who themselves are non-violent can be contributing to the conditions that allow violence against women to continue. This is why it is vital that fathers gain an awareness of the factors underlying and contributing to violence against women and actively work to change them. Fathers are ideally placed in this endeavour because the very act of fathering engages them with the key issues of masculinity and gender equality that are crucial to understanding men's violence against women and what can be done to prevent it.

There is no 'one way' and no 'right way' to practice fathering in a way that prevents violence against women, although there is definitely a number of 'wrong ways' – these include being violent and controlling, or talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Our aim should be to avoid the 'wrong ways' and to find our 'own way' to make a difference.

The following section outlines the ways that fathers can make a positive contribution to ending violence against women. These suggestions are certainly not *all* that fathers can do, but are offered as a guide to how fathers can engage with the concepts presented in this paper. The ways in which individual fathers can contribute to preventing men's violence against women will vary, depending on their circumstances; however, the important thing is that fathers *do* contribute, in an active and considered way, and the following strategies provide suggestions for *how* these contributions can be made.

Fathers can help to prevent violence against women by:	
1	Being non-violent
2	Respecting the mother of his children
3	Promoting gender equality
4	Being an equal partner in the home
5	Making the most of leave entitlements and family friendly work conditions
6	Sharing financial decisions and resources

1. Being a non-violent father

Know that a good father is a non-violent father and that a violent father is worse than no father at all.

Examine your own behaviours. Investigate whether any of your own behaviours would be considered forms of violence against women.

Take responsibility for your behaviour. If you believe that your behaviours are impacting on the people you love, undertake to make changes or seek professional help.

Be clear that violence against women is a choice. Realise that men choose different behaviours in different contexts. For example a man might use violence against his partner at home, but not at work, or not in public, or not when visitors are in the home… Realise that at all times, men make choices about whether or not to use violence based on the context in which they find themselves.

Choose to act non-violently in your relationships with women and children. Know that being non-violent is simply a matter of choosing not to use violence to get what you want. Model behaviours that do not seek to exert your power and control over others. Model the ability to choose a non-violent course of action.

2. Respecting the mother of your children

Treat the mother of your children with respect. As a father, undertake to support the relationship between your children and their mother. Become aware of how some men deliberately try to undermine the relationship between a mother and her children, and recognise that this is a form of men's violence. Especially in the event of a relationship breakdown, do not allow the emotional turmoil associated with separation to influence your behaviour. Continue to support your children financially. Pay the correct amount of child support on time.

Value the contribution of the stay-at-home parent. If you are the main breadwinner in the family and your partner stays at home to care for your children, ensure that you value her contribution as being equal to yours. Find ways of demonstrating that even though it is unpaid, the contribution of the stay-at-home parent is highly valued. Take an interest in your partner's day. Notice and openly acknowledge the many ways your partner contributes to the family.

3. Promoting gender equality

Reject narrow definitions of fathering. Be critical of popular beliefs that emphasise the differences between mothers and fathers. Realise that not all mothers parent in a similar way, and likewise, not all fathers parent in a similar way.

Critique popular portrayals of fathers and mothers. Talk to your children about how fathers and mothers are portrayed in popular culture. Help them understand that not all parents follow traditional gender roles. When you witness stereotypical portrayals of fathers, invite your children to become aware that the real world is a lot more diverse.

Remember the diversity of families. Explain to your children that some families have two mothers or two fathers. Explain that the important thing is not the sex of the parents but how much they love and care for their children.

Acknowledge there is no unique 'male' contribution. Recognise that in contemporary families, a good father has to fulfil a *number* of roles, some of which are traditionally 'masculine', and some of which are traditionally 'feminine', and that there is no unique contribution that men make to the family. Understand that children require love, care, attention and physical and emotional support. Aim to give them this in a way that is unique to you, not unique to men.

Be aware of the privileges you receive by being male. For fathers, they include the material benefits that flow from higher incomes, the social status associated with paid work, the authority and interpersonal power associated with being the 'head of the

house', and most importantly, the increased freedoms that flow from minimal involvement in caring and housework, or indeed, the lack of any expectation that men will make more than a minimal contribution. Recognise that these privileges are a result of gendered power inequalities.

Acknowledge that male privilege is a factor underlying violence against women. Understand how living in a culture where men receive privileges purely because they are men can result in the development of a sense of entitlement. Understand that men's sense of entitlement is directly related to abusive and controlling behaviours.

Actively strive to counter your male privileges by contributing to, and taking responsibility for, child care and housework, and by creating equal and respectful relationships with women.

Be more than just against violence; be for gender equality. Know that the solution to ending men's violence against women is to create a society that values gender equality. Maintain opposition to violence against women wherever it occurs, but just as importantly, strive for the goal of creating gender relations based on respect and equality.

4. Being an equal partner in the home

Share responsibility for caring for your children. Create an open dialogue with your partner about the care of your children. Understand that you are equally responsible for the care your child receives. Become involved as an equal partner.

Get involved early. Become actively involved with your children when they are babies. Establish a pattern of involvement early on and stay involved.

Spend time alone *with your children*. This is crucial. It means you are forging independent and intimate bonds with your children. It allows you to develop your own parenting style. It gives you the confidence to care for your children for longer periods. It relieves your partner of the burden of responsibility connected with being the primary carer.

Consider the type of care you provide. Aim to be involved in the full range of care giving activities – physical, emotional and interactive. Care giving goes beyond the 'fun stuff'.

Avoid authoritarian parenting. Attend a positive parenting program and reward good behaviour, without relying on threats, loud voices, intimidation or physical violence.

Aim for an egalitarian division of housework. Engage in open and fair discussions with your partner about how to divide the housework. Understand that a traditional division of housework can lead to power imbalances in relationships. Search for strategies to counter this. Seek to create an equal relationship with your partner by doing your fair share of housework.

Take responsibility. Responsibility involves more than just 'doing' the task. It involves noticing that it needs doing, planning when and how it will get done, and often preparation for doing it, cleaning up afterwards and packing away. Do not wait to be asked to do housework. Be an equal partner in the housework.

5. Making the most of leave entitlements and family friendly work conditions

Make full use of 'family friendly' working conditions. These conditions exist for the benefit of mothers and fathers. Investigate options available at your workplace so you can manage your work commitments yet be available to your family and children when you are needed. Have open and honest discussions with your female partner about how you can structure your family and work commitments in a way that benefits everyone.

Make use of leave entitlements. Take time off work to care for sick children.

6. Sharing financial decisions and resources

Share the income with your partner and children. Acknowledge the reality that, if you are employed full time and your female partner stays at home, the only reason you are able to go to work is because she is there to care for your children. Realise that your income belongs to both of you. Put in place a mechanism whereby your partner can have access to your shared income without having to ask for it, or feel guilty for accessing it. Open a joint bank account or have her share of the money paid directly into her account. Share financial decisions with your partner.

Ending violence against women

Violence against women is wholly preventable. But there is still much to be done to achieve this goal. Individual men must do more than simply being 'against violence'. They must seek to understand the factors which underlie and contribute to violence against women. They must develop an awareness of how these factors have influenced their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and undertake to adopt new beliefs, new attitudes, and most importantly new behaviours.

Fatherhood is a key life-stage for all men. It provides an opportunity not just to influence the next generation, but our own generation. It provides an opportunity to examine how the factors that contribute to violence against women impact on our choices and behaviours on a daily basis. It provides an opportunity to reflect on issues of masculinity and gendered power relations, and the range of complex, inter-connected factors which shape the social conditions that lead to violence against women. Most importantly, it provides an opportunity for men to actively work towards the creation and maintenance of equal and respectful relationships with women.

There is a lot that fathers can do, but it will require the courage to reflect on our own lives and relationships and begin to do things differently. A good father is a non-violent father. A great father is one who practices fathering in such a way as to move us, as a society, closer towards ending men's violence against women.

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