

Six positive things all men can do to make the world safer for women

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Piper Dawes

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In the wake of the Weinstein allegations, what can men do to make society better for women? Piper Dawes from White Ribbon UK, which asks men to campaign to end violence against women, has six suggestions

We live in a progressive society. One built on multi-cultural communities, safe spaces, and responsible, caring human beings. This is what we tell ourselves, and in so many ways it's true.

'Violence against women is still considered a women's issue, but we all must be part of the conversation'

But something's not right. The Harvey Weinstein scandal and countless others before it should wake us up to the fact that in all walks of life, women are facing increasingly hostile environments.

Change is essential, and that starts on an individual level. Violence against women is still widely considered a women's issue; however, to even imagine a world where this does not happen, we all must be part of the conversation. [White Ribbon UK](#) is part of a global movement to encourage men to be a part of the solution; to understand the effect that toxic masculinity is having on our society, and help other men and boys to take responsibility.

Here are a few ways men can help to make a safer future for women:

1. Be an active bystander. It's easy to brush it off when we hear sexist or abusive remarks. Instead, be an

active bystander, calling out this language and behaviour when it happens, or afterwards to the perpetrator in private if that feels more effective.

'Can any man say with conviction that they've never said anything inappropriate to a woman?'

2. Listen. When women talk about abuse, the automatic reaction for many men is defensive. When people say, "all men", it is a request to take responsibility.

We all think of ourselves as good people, but can any man honestly say with conviction that they've never made a woman feel uncomfortable or said something inappropriate? That is not your call to make. Rather than immediately crying 'not all men', men need to listen; and keep listening.

3. Ask. Again, this is about breaking down the defensiveness men may feel when confronted with the harsh realities women face on a day-to-day basis. Taking responsibility as men is not about riding in to save the day. Ask women what you can do to help.

4. Teach. To have any hope of eradicating violence against women and girls, we need to understand why it happens. Growing up, we've been told that 'boys will be boys', and in a society that tells girls to protect themselves and not dress provocatively.

Encouraging men to take responsibility means undoing this thought process, focusing on what we teach boys about what it means to be a man. As responsible parents, we need to teach boys to treat women with respect; not to tolerate sexism, or be abusive.

5. Exercise 'positive masculinity'. Ask a man what it means to be a man and they might give any number of positive, caring answers.

But ask a woman 'what are men like?', and the response may be very different. This tells us a lot about the society we live in. Understanding toxic masculinity, 'lad culture' and how that has been ingrained in the psychology of men and boys since birth is an essential part of undoing that programming.

6. Treat women as equals, and encourage other men and boys to do the same. There was a [popular article](#) posted by Anne Victoria Clark on the online publishing platform, Medium last week, giving advice to men on how to act around female co-workers. The writer suggests picturing your co-worker as Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson. She writes:

"Next time you meet Karen, a pretty friend of a friend looking to network, pretend Karen looks like Johnson.

'Wow! Karen looks pretty tough and strong and sweaty! She looks like a person who is working very hard to achieve her goals, having left behind a situation that clearly wasn't working, headed for bigger and better things. Maybe ask her about that? But definitely don't hit on her. It looks like she could kill you with the chair you're sitting on.'"

The article is, of course, very tongue-in-cheek. But it is making a serious point about sexual harassment in the workplace. A lot of men still subconsciously see women as second-class citizens, or worse, sexual objects to be conquered. This is hard to step back from but essential if we want this world to be safe for all of us.

If you would like to know more about how men can help stop violence against women and girls, White Ribbon UK offer resources and a full ambassador training programme at whiteribbon.org.uk. White Ribbon Day is on 25 November. It marks the UN's international day for the eradication of violence

towards women, and we encourage people of all ages to wear a white ribbon and pledge never to commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women.

Help is available for women experiencing abuse from the Women's Aid 24 our helpline: 0808 2000 247.