

Say Something

When Confronted With Men's Violence Against Women

CHALLENGE SEXIST JOKES AND LANGUAGE

Sexist jokes and misogynistic language help to reinforce gender stereotypes and normalize violent behaviour against women. As difficult as it may be, by challenging that kind of language and those types of jokes, you are setting a positive example by helping raise awareness about violence against women. Here is a common scenario.

Your buddy says, "I have a good joke for you."

You get a little smile on your face waiting to have a good laugh but instead you hear a joke that degrades women. It describes women as incompetent, weak, constantly hysterical, or as mere sexualized body parts. Many jokes speak of horrible violence such as rape in a supposed "lighthearted" manner.

That frozen smile is still on your face but you feel very uncomfortable inside and you know that this just does not feel right. You want to say something but the rest of the guys seem to be enjoying it. They have smiles on their faces and you don't want to be the downer of the party.

But maybe, just maybe some of them are thinking the same thing you are and that smile on their face is just as uncomfortable as yours.

What can you say?

Here are some suggestions:

- "Hey man that's actually not very funny. Too many guys joke about rape when rape is a traumatic event and a violent crime. Joking about it kind of makes us forget what it really is, and how serious it is."
- "Would that be funny if it was about your mother / sister / daughter / girl friend / wife?"
- There's a good chance that someone in the room has known someone close to them who has been raped or sexually assaulted - conservative stats say 51% of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical/sexual violence since the age 16 (The Violence Against Women Survey – Statistics Canada, 1993 and Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile – Statistics Canada, 2006). You may be surprised at the positive support you get.
- If no one supports you and you are told to "lighten up" you can simply say "I still don't find it funny. Would you be as comfortable telling a joke about people of colour or Jews?" This is especially effective if there are men from different cultures and backgrounds in the room.



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- Don't be surprised if you hear "you don't have a sense of humour." At least you've planted the seed letting them know where you stand. Challenging guys about this stuff may be a difficult thing to do but it's worth it, knowing you're doing your part to create a world where ending violence against women is taken seriously and sexism and violence are no longer a laughing matter.

- Every time you do it, it gets a little easier!

CHALLENGE A MAN WHO IS ABUSING HIS PARTNER

If you knew your friend was abusing his girlfriend, what would you do? Many men want to say something but don't know where to start. Challenging someone about abuse is never easy and there is no one way to go about it. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Before confronting any man about his abusive behaviour, keep in mind that this may aggravate him to the point that he will take it out on his partner. The best thing to do is to talk to his partner about what you want to do. Make sure she has a safety plan in case he was to become abusive again. Help to inform her of options such as the availability of local women shelters and crisis lines. Does she have friends or family to stay with? Discuss your concerns with her and ask how you can support her. If you ever suspect that she may be in immediate danger, consider calling the police and/or helping her find a safe place to stay.
- Don't become hostile or aggressive since that will likely put that person on the defensive, and besides, you're trying to talk to him about non-violence so the last thing you want to do is follow his example. You can simply let him know that what he's doing isn't right and that it is really hurting someone he cares about.
- You may find that he will react in two different ways. He may deny the whole thing, make excuses (such as being drunk), try to blame her, or become angry at the insinuation that he was abusive. Or on the other hand, he may tell you that he feels ashamed of his behaviour. He may ask for help in ensuring that it does not happen again or he may just want to talk about it with you. When listening to him, it is important never to excuse his behaviour. Remind him that you are not judging him as a person but that you cannot allow his behaviour to continue unchecked.

- Let him know that he has control over his behaviour and what he does about it. If he is ready to make some changes, ask him to visit the White Ribbon web site (www.whiteribbon.com) to obtain a contact number of a local group for abusive men in his area. For more information, you can also visit the “How to Talk to Men Who are Abusive” section of the site:
www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca

She kept saying “no”

If your friend tells you how he “convinced” his date to sleep with him even though she kept saying “no”, you have a perfect opportunity to say something.

Any unwanted touching or sexual act committed upon another is sexual assault.

After alerting him to this fact, he may not agree with you but *it’s still important that you say something*. You may suggest to him that he seek professional help and to cooperate with the authorities if they become involved. Again, this is not an easy thing to do and not one to be taken lightly. **Imagine that the girl or woman was your future wife, your daughter, sister, niece or mother. You would want someone to say something!**

DON’T SUPPORT PROGRAMMING THAT PORTRAYS WOMEN IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT

Another way of *saying something* is to refuse to support programming that portrays women in a negative light or refuses to acknowledge the seriousness of violence against women. Write letters to the editor of a newspaper who seems to dismiss the importance of funding women’s shelters. Write to TV network executives letting them know that you will not watch programming that portrays women in stereotypical roles such as unintelligent sexual playthings, “bitchy” corporate go-getters, and submissive “man-trappers” only looking to snare a man. Write to advertising agencies to let them know that sexually objectifying women to sell products is irresponsible and degrading.

ALWAYS DO IT FOR THE RIGHT REASON

Always remember that you are not speaking out because you are a hero, or because you’re saving a woman with chivalry, or because you want to be patted on the back. You are speaking out because it is the right thing to do and it is a meaningful way to do your part in ending violence against women.

SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF

- When thinking about putting an end to violence against women, remember the importance of taking a look at yourself and how you view and treat women.

- Do you share household duties? Do you share childcare responsibilities? Do you dominate conversations with women or are you a good listener as well? Do you believe there is ever a time where a woman “asked” for abuse? Do you use degrading language when referring to women? Do you view women as mere sex objects? Lead by example - be the change you want to see in the world.

- **Take some time to talk to the women in your life.** Ask them what their thoughts are on the issue of violence against women. Most of all, listen to them, truly listen.

- The best way to help influence other men about ending violence against women is to set an example and then spread the word.

- Be a good role model for younger men in your life (sons, brothers, nephews, etc) and teach them how men can be respectful towards women and not use sexist language, demeaning jokes, and violent behaviour towards others.

- Support and join other men who are working to make a difference and are standing up for what is right. Let them know that they are part of a larger community of caring men, since many men stay quiet simply because they think they will be alone in their stand. Direct them to the White Ribbon web site and they’ll realize they’re not alone.

- Volunteer for a local organization or help fundraise for a women’s shelter or sexual assault centre.

- Start a White Ribbon Campaign in your school, workplace, place of worship, or in your local community. Involve your teachers, school mates, co-workers, friends, family members, and local community leaders. Contact us for ideas and awareness materials.

THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

We welcome all men, who are serious about taking a stand against violence towards women, to use the White Ribbon Campaign as a vehicle to help create positive change for all men and boys and to make the world safer for women and girls. Please visit our web site for more information about us and the resources available.

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