

Responding to challenging statements

When you talk with people about violence against women, you may hear some challenging statements.

The statements might make you feel shocked, angry, embarrassed, sad or insulted.

This document is designed to help you prepare for this and gives some advice on how to respond to challenging statements.

Examples of challenging statements

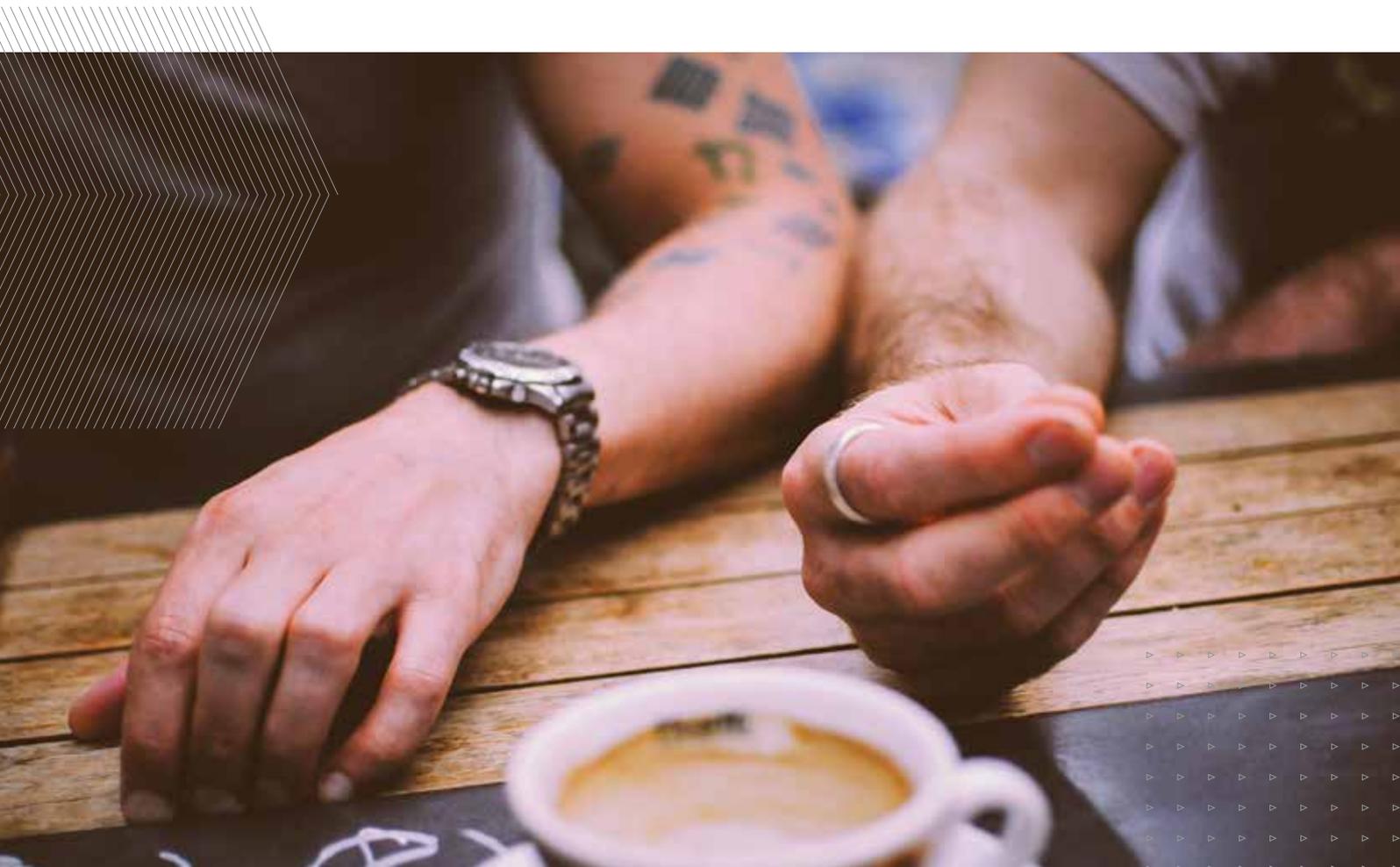
- She was asking for it
- Just as many women abuse men
- If a woman is drunk, it is her own fault
- Women shouldn't wear short skirts if they don't want the attention
- Women lie about rape
- Men can't control their sexual urges
- Why doesn't she just leave?

- She went to his house, what did she expect?
- I'm not violent towards women, so why should I care?
- I don't know anyone who is violent/has experienced violence

You have probably heard some or all of these statements. They are known as violence-supportive statements because they justify, excuse, minimise or trivialise violence against womenⁱ. Violence-supportive statements can also blame women, entirely or in part, for violence perpetrated against themⁱⁱ. This is also known as **victim-blaming**.

People make these comments for many reasons. They may genuinely hold these beliefs or may want to discredit efforts to end men's violence against women.

Sometimes people will share a personal experience or the experience of someone they know in an attempt to prove their statement.





4 steps to responding to challenging statementsⁱⁱⁱ

1. Process ►►►

Think about the ideas or beliefs behind the comment.

2. Respect ►►►

Assume that this idea or belief is important to the person.

3. Respond/clarify ►►►

Ask a question or respond to the comment respectfully.

4. Empower

Encourage the person to see the issue in another way.

Speaking to a group of people about men's violence against women?

If you are speaking publicly about men's violence against women, try to avoid getting into a lengthy or heated argument with a person making challenging statements.

Acknowledge the statement with respect and encourage the person to consider a different point of view. Offer a clear argument against the violence-supportive statement. Have some statistics at hand to help prove your point. Visit the White Ribbon website for statistics on men's violence against women in Australia.

To avoid derailing the message you are trying to share, you can say something like 'In the interest of others in the group I would like to continue with the presentation now, but I am happy to discuss this with you later'.

ⁱVicHealth (2014) Australians' attitudes to violence against women. Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS). Victorian Health Promotion Foundation: Melbourne, p. 8.

ⁱⁱIbid, p. 8.

ⁱⁱⁱThis information was developed from facilitator notes from the CASA House Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools 'Train the Trainer' material and has been used with their permission. See casahouse.com.au for more information.