

A WIRE CONVERSATION KIT

# GENDER EQUITY & YOU



wire

any woman any issue

We've all been there: a dinner party or a family gathering where there's an awkward sexist comment.

This kit is designed to help you in that moment, because conversations with a friend or family are one of the most accessible and effective ways to change attitudes.



## How does it work?

Having conversations with people you know is effective because there is an automatic level of trust — you aren't a stranger trying to change their mind, you are someone who they recognise as a rational, reasonable person in their lives. And while some forms of communication (a billboard or a TV show) are one-way, a conversation with a friend or relative lets you have a dialogue and explore questions. People often make decisions and form opinions based on feelings, not just facts. Powerful conversations will draw on both.

## Before you start

### Pick your battles

If you're already aware of gender equity and the work that's needed, you're one of the 'committed' audiences who don't need convincing. When we plan to have a conversation with someone, it's important to identify allies (others who are committed to equality) to work closely with, and then focus on the 'moveable middle' — people who share some values with you and just need some encouragement, education, or a different perspective to progress their attitudes. This group is where change can most effectively begin.

People who are strongly opposed to gender equity — the entrenched opposition — are the least likely to be influenced by your conversation, and the social norms in our culture reinforce their prejudices. By shifting the existing social norms, the entrenched opposition will start to modernise, and realise how outdated and ill-informed they have become. In other words, you do not have to try to persuade them right now; they will come along when the critical mass of community attitudes changes.

### Staying safe

This kind of conversation can be tricky and it's important to assess your surroundings first. If there's someone in the room who you know is dealing with violence at home, make sure it's safe to talk freely; it may be safer to talk to them alone. Is their abuser also there? Maybe now isn't the time to talk. Also be careful when confronting abusers directly: you may escalate the situation and you or their partner or kids may be inadvertently put at risk.

With any societal change there will be some resistance so don't be surprised when this happens. Go gently with your gender equality work, remember to care for yourself and allow yourself to receive care from others. Talking to allies, having some fun or accessing support from a service like 1800 RESPECT or WIRE are all great ways to self-care. If the conversation brings up difficult memories for you or anyone else in the room, let people know that they can call WIRE to debrief: 1300 134 130.

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## How do I start the conversation?

Getting started can be the most difficult part — or there might be a really obvious point to start, for example, if Uncle Jerry has just made a really problematic comment about his attractive female student or if Grandpa is tickling three-year-old Kira and she’s shrinking away.

But how do you make sure everyone stays calm and the food all stays on the table?

One way is to check the myth-buster sheet in the kit for good come-backs to common misconceptions.

Another way is to start with very open-ended questions, so that the people you’re speaking with have an opportunity to air their side.

## Responding to a disclosure

Sometimes, a conversation like this will create a space in which someone feels more comfortable acknowledging experiences they've had. If someone tells you that they're in a violent relationship or have been raped or sexually assaulted, the most important thing is to listen without

judgement and then tell them about specialist services that can help. It's not up to you to provide solutions or keep them safe. If they're in immediate danger, help them to call 000. Otherwise they can call WIRE on 1300 134 130 for referrals.

## What if I can't persuade people?

You're not going to magically shift everyone's opinion in one sitting, but the conversation you've had will have an effect. For people in the room who were already thinking about this, you'll have given them a powerful reinforcement that they're on the right path.

For those who are neutral, or have never thought about gender before, you've flagged that you are someone to come back to for further discussion.

And for your target, you've sown a seed that may blossom later. TV ads may only last 30 seconds but they run on high rotation for a reason. You might need to have this conversation many times before that seed takes root. Hopefully, this will be the start of something wonderful.

# 5 Steps to a transformative conversation



## Listen

This is possibly the most important part of the whole conversation: we invite meaningful conversation by giving respect to the other person. Listen to the person and why they feel the way they do.

This does two things: it builds trust from the person that you're going to be constructive, and that you're not just in it for a fight; and it gives you the information you need to take the conversation to the next stage.





## Acknowledge

Validate the person's issues and feelings.  
Ask clarifying, open-ended questions if you need to and then listen again.

You can paraphrase what the person said to you to make sure you've understood, such as, "so, let me just check I've understood — because she was drinking and it was late, you think she's at least partly responsible for what happened next?"

This lets the person know you've listened and that you understood, and they feel that you value what they have to say.



## Affirm shared values

As you were listening to them, it's likely you heard some things you can agree with. Take this opportunity to summarise those and express how you feel. You could say something like, "Yeah, the fact this just seems to be getting worse makes me really sad and angry too!" or "I know, I feel worried about that too."

You can also use something they said to extend into a value you hope they share, such as care for other people: "You're absolutely right. No decent person would treat their partner that way. I feel so awful for her."

The values we're looking to connect about are: community, care, genuine choice and freedom, respect, love, honesty and friendship.



## Reinforce gender equity

At this point, you've done most of the work, teasing out concerns and objections and identifying their issues. This stage is about 'neutralising' their problematic ideas and reinforcing gender equity.

Take each of the issues they've raised and gently counteract them, using the information from the myth-busting sheet or from your own knowledge of the issue. Because you've already identified shared values, they'll be more open to listening to the facts.



## Expand and connect

In this step, you broaden the conversation from just the two of you, or just the family, and connect what you've said with community attitudes and services that are available.

Here's where you can tell your story — how you came to be a feminist, and why you're so passionate about these issues. If you've got children, you can talk about the world you hope they'll grow up in. Or you can talk about your workplace, and how gendered attitudes influence how you are treated there. Only share what you're comfortable sharing — there's no requirement to bare your soul.



## Aftercare

Conversations like this can be tiring and depending on what you discussed, they can be triggering too. Take care of yourself. Make sure you have a plan for self-care and feel free to call WIRE on 1300 134 130 weekdays between 9.30am and 4.30pm to debrief.

Call us:



**1300 134 130**

Weekdays 9am to 5pm

(mobile costs may vary)



Visit us:

372 Spencer Street,  
West Melbourne 3003

Weekdays 9.30am to 4.30pm



Contact us:

support@wire.org.au



Chat online, download resources  
and book into events:

wire.org.au

(Chat weekdays only)



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Parts of this kit are based on work by  
VicHealth and the Australian Greens  
conversation kit on climate change

We acknowledge the First Nations people  
as the traditional custodians of the lands  
and waters throughout Australia.

WIRE is a service for women,  
nonbinary and gender-diverse people.



WIRE acknowledges  
the support of the  
Victorian Government



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