



big bad love

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A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ATOM



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Synopsis

Comedian Becky Lucas, recently discovered that one of her best childhood friends Jess, had suffered years of horrific violence and abuse at the hands her partner. At the time Becky had suspected something might be wrong but she wasn't equipped to see what was happening and so did nothing. Becky still feels a deep regret that she didn't act on her suspicions and help her friend. But what does an abusive relationship even look like? How does it begin? And what can anyone do if they suspect someone they know is in trouble?

Becky starts to answer these questions when she meets her friends at a local retirement village, getting a sense of what domestic and family violence was like in their day. After chatting with the women she learns that there was a sense that domestic and family violence was a taboo topic and seen as a private issue between couples and not something others should intervene in.

Today, as a community and a society we are talking about domestic and family violence, what support is available to people experiencing violence, what drives this violence and how it can be prevented. Despite this, 1 in 4 Australian women will still suffer abuse from a current or former intimate partner in their lifetime. Becky is surprised to learn that women aged 18-24 that are most at risk of abuse.

She meets two young women, Ella and Lauren, who have both survived violent and controlling relationships to better understand how abusive relationships begin. Shocked by the brutality of their stories and the violence occurring behind closed doors Becky wonders how people would respond if they could see the violence that affects so many. She sets up a public social experiment where actors play out an abusive role play on the street. It's a nerve wracking and tense experience as people respond in a variety of ways. When is it safe to intervene? Is it safe? What does anyone do when confronted with violence?

Becky meets with experts to understand people's reactions when confronted with domestic violence in public and to learn about what to do if someone sees or suspects domestic and family violence in their daily life



or within their friendships and networks. Becky attends a workshop to uncover the tactics that abusers use and learn more about the manipulation present from the outset of abusive relationships.

Out of this experience Becky emerges realising that abusive relationships look very different to what she first thought. As a comedian Becky is used to making jokes about taboo subjects but now she's determined to make the subject of domestic violence one people can talk about openly in the hope that other women will find the support around them.

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DIRECTOR Briony Benjamin



PRODUCER Daniel Joyce



PRODUCER Susan MacKinnon



Previewing Activities

Students can complete the following activities before viewing “Big Bad Love”:

- Define the following words: relationship, domestic violence, taboo, confrontation, coercion, exploitation, empowerment, bystander, aggression.
- Brainstorm some things that make a relationship positive or negative. Draw up a table in your books and continue to add to it throughout your study of ‘Big Bad Love’. You could use **Table 1** on page 11.
- What relationships do you have in your life? List them all and explain their significance in your life.

Curriculum Links

Trigger Warning: This film deals with issues of domestic and family violence and may be triggering to survivors of abuse.

Advice to Teachers: Note that this documentary deals with issues of domestic and family violence and may raise serious issues and concerns for some students and teachers. Students will need to be prepared prior to viewing as well as having a safe space to debrief and seek further assistance as required.

‘Big Bad Love’ can be used as a text in middle to senior school classrooms. The content and discussions involved in undertaking a study using ‘Big Bad Love’ mean that it is most appropriate for Year 10s and above.

This film could be used as part of students’ study of *Personal, Social and Community Health* strand within the *Health and Physical Education Learning Area*. Students are required as part of this Learning Area to explore: **Being healthy, safe and active**. This requires students to be able to:

- Evaluate factors that shape identities and critically analyse how individuals impact the identities of others/
- Examine the impact of changes and transitions on relationships
- Plan, rehearse and evaluate options (including CPR and first aid) for managing situations where their own or others’ health, safety and wellbeing may be at short or long term risk
- Propose, practise and evaluate responses in situations where external influences may impact on their ability to make healthy and safe choices



Where to get assistance

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000. For sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling available by phone or online, contact 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732 - <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>)

1800 RESPECT also provides phone and online counselling to anyone who has friends, colleagues or family members affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence.





Viewing Activities

Students can complete the following activities as they view 'Big Bad Love':

- Note down any statistics you hear about domestic violence throughout the documentary.
- List the characters that Becky interviews or meets during 'Big Bad Love'. Consider what impact they have on her understanding of domestic and family violence and how to recognise an unhealthy relationship. You could use [Table 2](#) on page 12.

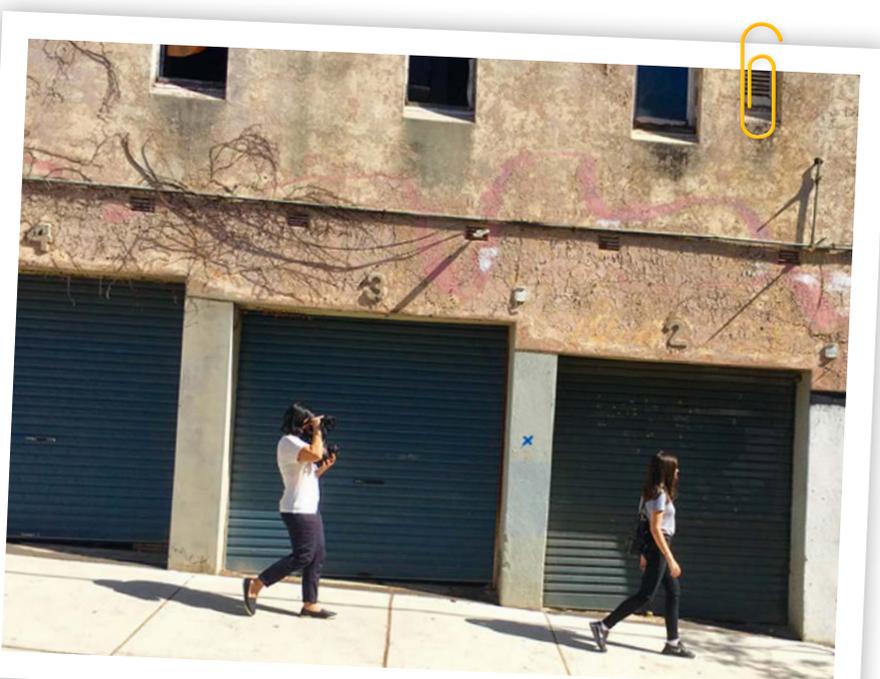
Learning Activities

Students can complete the following activities after they have viewed 'Big Bad Love'.

Ensure that students have space to reflect on the issues brought up by this documentary. Students should be given respectful vocabulary to discuss the ideas raised in 'Big Bad Love'. Teachers are again advised to direct students towards appropriate assistance as required. It might be useful to use the website www.ourwatch.org.au to assist with this

► Becky Lucas

Becky Lucas, recently discovered that one of her best childhood friends Jess, had suffered years of horrific violence and abuse at the hands her partner. At the time Becky had suspected something might be wrong but she wasn't equipped to see what was happening and so did nothing. Becky still feels a deep regret that she didn't act on her suspicions and help her friend.





“WELL IT’S DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT A THING THAT WE DIDN’T TALK ABOUT. WE DIDN’T HAVE A TERM TO SPEAK ABOUT IT LIKE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.”

MAGGIE [BELOW]



Explain why Becky did not recognise that something was wrong in her best friend, Jess’, relationship. How did Jess change after she began this abusive relationship? Why would Becky “be angry at” Jess?

- What are the major questions that Becky wants to find answers to during ‘Big Bad Love’?
- What are some strategies that are explored in the documentary that Becky could have used to help her friend?
- Becky states at the end of the documentary (TIME CODE 00:25:24:18), “Find the thing you can think you can do, and do it”. Explain what you think she means by this. As a class discuss some of things you think you can do to help a friend or someone you know if they were experiencing domestic and family and some likely consequences of taking these actions. It might be useful for students to use the following website to assist with this: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/family-friends/common-questions/dealing-with-domestic-family-violence/>
- Why would people find it hard to intervene in other people’s relationships? Discuss the challenges bystanders might face.
- Becky explains how she “doesn’t understand”. Are there any reasons mentioned in the documentary about why domestic and family violence occurs and what drives the violence?
- How has the pursuit of women’s rights changed people’s understanding of domestic violence and their responses to it? Spend some time researching the history of women’s right and create a timeline documenting major social, political and economic achievements. Zoom in on one woman who contributed to the advancement of women’s rights and create a one page biography of her life which focuses on her achievements

► Women at Local Retirement Village

- (TIME CODE 00:02:52.07)“Well it’s difficult to talk about a thing that we didn’t talk about. We didn’t have a term to speak about it like domestic violence.” Maggie. What do the women in the retirement village reveal to Becky about their understanding of domestic and family violence? Does Maggie’s statement about not having a term for domestic and family violence shock you? Had you ever heard of domestic and family violence before watching ‘Big Bad Love’? If so, where had you heard it?
- Consider how different Becky’s understanding of domestic and family violence is compared to the women in the retirement village. What shapes both generations of women’s perspectives?
- What do the women mean when they describe





family violence as “taboo”? Explain why things might be considered taboo and how ideas around what is “taboo” change.

- The role of the police is mentioned by the women, and that it wasn't until the late 1970s that police were willing to get involved in domestic and family violence cases. Can you explain why the police might not want to have been involved? Why do you think attitudes towards domestic and family violence have changed, both in the police force and elsewhere?

► Ella – Survivor

At the age of 16 Ella found herself in an extremely violent and abusive relationship. Her male partner committed emotional and physical violence. With the support of one of her friends, Ella left her violence relationship.

- Ella describes a relationship filled with physical and emotional abuse. What is Ella's story and what message does she have for other people suffering from domestic and family violence?.

► Lauren – Survivor

At the age of 18 university student Lauren fell for a handsome charming man. What began as a romantic and loving relationship quickly escalated to one where violence and acts of coercion were common. Yet Lauren was unaware she was in an abusive relationship. It wasn't until she saw a

psychologist for anxiety that she realised she was in an abusive relationship..

- Lauren's relationship, like Ella's, is filled with physical and emotional abuse. What is her story and what is her message?
- Lauren's story explains that spotting an abuser can be hard. What signs are there that a relationship is abusive?

► Dina McMillian – Social Psychologist

Dr Dina McMillan is a social psychologist and relationship expert with both a Master's degree and PhD in social psychology from Stanford University. She runs seminars called 'Unmasking the Abuser' and 'Protect Your Daughters' which focus on teaching women about the early warning signs of abusive relationships.

- Why did Becky take herself and her sister to the seminar run by Dina McMillian?
- What does Becky learn this experience?
- Describe the types of behaviours that Dina McMillian suggests perpetrators of domestic and family violence display. How might the “over the top positive” behaviour be a warning sign?
- Why might it be “hard to get away” for victims of domestic and family violence?





► Shannon Spriggs Murdoch – Mentors in Violence Prevention

Dr Shannon Spriggs Murdoch has spent the last nine years delivering and developing the Mentors in Violence Prevention program focused on preventing all forms of violence and utilising a bystander approach to intervention. She has facilitated almost 700 training sessions with various groups including high school students, professional athletes, military service personnel, and business men and women.

- Describe the experiment run during 'Big Bad Love'. How did you feel while watching this experiment? Have you ever witnessed something like this in a public space? How did other people react? What were the findings of the experiment done in 'Big Bad Love'? How did people react? Is this what you expected?
- Shannon Spriggs Murdoch explains that “silence sends a message” (TIME CODE 00;11:40:01). What does she mean by this statement? Can you explain the different barriers to intervention that Shannon discusses with Becky? What suggestions does she offer to people? Why might it be dangerous to “directly intervene”?

► Zoom Out

How is the serious issue of domestic and family violence being addressed in the Australia? Create a table that explores how the following areas are trying to address family violence, whether you think this has been successful and any other suggestions you might have: government (local, state, national, international), education, local and national sporting codes social clubs, media and popular culture. Have there been any challenges? Students might find the following websites helpful:

- Commonwealth government - <http://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/third-action-plan-launched/>
- National sporting organisations - <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/>

[What-We-Do/%E2%80%8BSports-Engagement-Program](http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/%E2%80%8BSports-Engagement-Program)

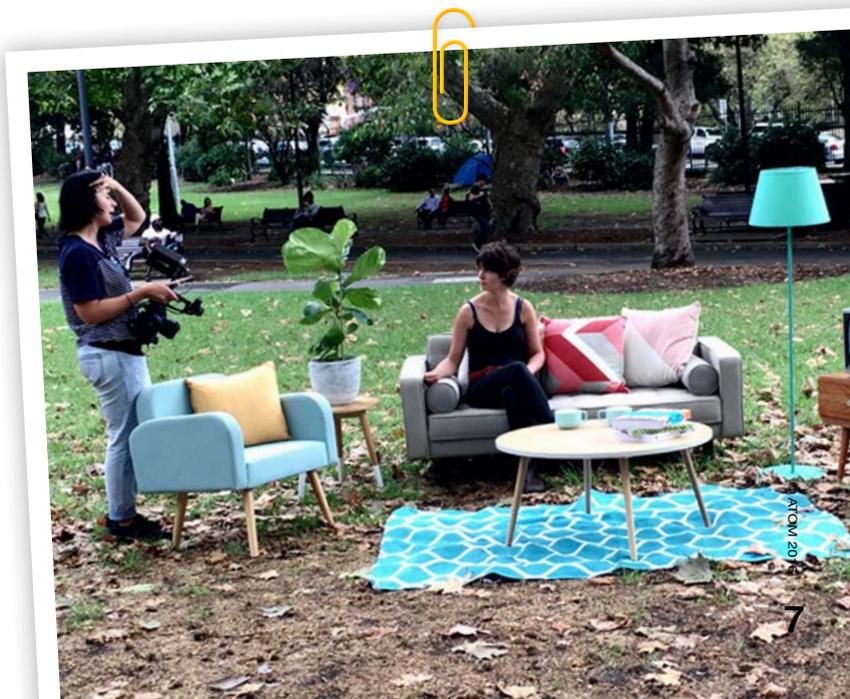
Media - <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/%E2%80%8BVictorian-Workplace-Equality-and-Respect-Project>

Workplaces – <http://www.ourwatch.org.au/What-We-Do/%E2%80%8BVictorian-Workplace-Equality-and-Respect-Project>

Local Government – <http://www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/social-community/gender-equity/Pages/default.aspx>

Reflection writing. Respond to the following prompts and reflect on what you have learned from watching 'Big Bad Love'.

- What did you know about domestic violence and family prior to watching this documentary?
- Did the documentary change your views around domestic and family violence? Why/why not?
- Do you think this documentary helped you to understand how to spot an abusive relationship?
- Would you recommend this documentary to students? If so, what would you say about it?
- Are there any questions you have after watching 'Big Bad Love'? Do you know who to talk to about these questions?
- How can you build healthy relationships? Discuss in pairs what it takes to have positive relationships. How do you make relationships positive? Who do you have in your life that can support you throughout different types of relationships? Students may find the following website helpful: <http://www.theline.org.au/recognising-respectful-relationships>
- What are some actions that you can suggest that would prevent violence against women?





Where to get help or for more information

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000. For sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling available by phone or online, contact 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732 - <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>)

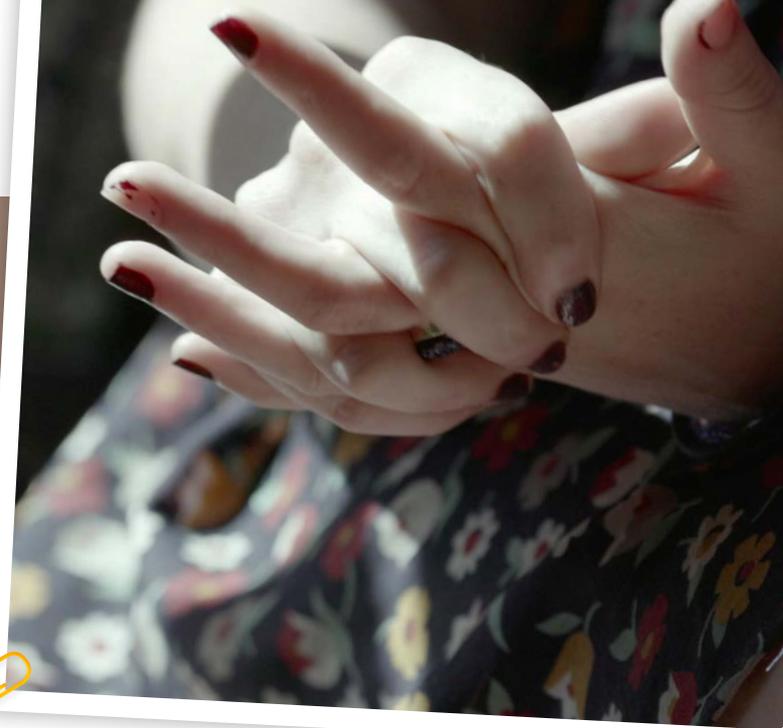
1800 RESPECT also provides phone and online counselling to anyone who has friends, colleagues or family members affected by sexual assault and domestic and family violence.

For more information about domestic and family violence:

<http://www.dvrcv.org.au/>

<http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/>

<http://www.ourwatch.org.au/>



FAQ's

► What can you do?

If you or someone you know is impacted by domestic, family or intimate partner abuse call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au.

In an emergency, call 000.

► Should I get involved?

Sourced from: Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

<http://www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/guide-for-families-friends-and-neighbours>

Many people worry that they will be 'interfering' if they get involved, or that it is a 'private matter'. But it is equally worrying if someone is being abused and you say nothing. Your support can make a difference. You might risk some embarrassment if you approach her and she rejects your support or tells you your suspicions are wrong. But if you approach her sensitively, without being critical, most people will appreciate an expression of concern for their well-being, even if they are not ready to talk about their situation. It is unlikely you will make things 'worse' by expressing concern.



► How can I recognise abuse?

You might be unsure if what your friend or relative is experiencing is 'abuse'. Maybe you just have some sense that something is 'wrong' in her relationship. Sometimes there may be signs that indicate that there is abuse. But often there will be nothing obvious.

Signs that someone is being abused

- She seems afraid of her partner or is always very anxious to please him or her.
- She has stopped seeing her friends or family, or cuts phone conversations short when her partner is in the room.
- Her partner often criticises her or humiliates her in front of other people.
- She says her partner pressures or forces her to do sexual things.
- Her partner often orders her about or makes all the decisions (for example, her partner controls all the money, tells her who she can see and what she can do).
- She often talks about her partner's 'jealousy', 'bad temper' or 'possessiveness'.
- She has become anxious or depressed, has lost her confidence, or is unusually quiet.
- She has physical injuries (bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc). She may give unlikely explanations for physical injuries.
- Her children seem afraid of her partner, have behaviour problems, or are very withdrawn or anxious.
- She is reluctant to leave her children with her partner.
- After she has left the relationship, her partner is constantly calling her, harassing her, following her, coming to her house or waiting outside.



► How should I approach her?

Approach your friend or relative in a sensitive way, letting her know your own concerns. Tell her you're worried about her, then explain why. For example

- *I'm worried about you because I've noticed you seem really unhappy lately.*

Don't be surprised if she seems defensive or rejects your support. She might be scared of worrying you if she tells you about the abuse. She may not be ready to admit to being abused, or may feel ashamed and afraid of talking about it. She might have difficulty trusting anyone after being abused. If the victim is a man, he may feel particularly embarrassed about speaking about the abuse as he may be seen as 'weak' or 'unmanly'.

Don't push the person into talking if they are uncomfortable, but let them know that you're there if they need to talk. Be patient, and keep an ear out for anything that indicates they are ready to talk about the abuse.

► What can I do to help her?

The most important thing you can do is to listen without judging, respect her decisions, and help her to find ways to become stronger and safer.

You don't have to fully understand to be of assistance. All you have to do is give your time and love without being judgemental.

- Listen to what she has to say.
- Believe what she tells you. It will have taken a lot for her to talk to you. People are much more likely to cover up or downplay the abuse, rather than to make it up or exaggerate. You might find it hard to imagine someone you know could behave abusively. But the person who is abusive will probably show you a very different side to the side the victim sees.
- Take the abuse seriously. Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally. Don't underestimate the danger she may be in.



- Help her to recognise the abuse and understand how it may be affecting her or her children.
- Tell her you think she has been brave in being able to talk about the abuse, and in being able to keep going despite the abuse.
- Help to build her confidence in herself.
- Help her to understand that the abuse is not her fault and that no-one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do. Let her know you think that the way her partner is treating her is wrong. For example, 'No-one, not even your husband, has the right to mistreat you'
- Help her to protect herself. You could say 'I'm afraid of what he could do to you or the children' or 'I'm worried that it will get worse'. Talk to her about how she thinks she could protect herself. See the section 'Helping to increase her safety' (see below).
- Help her to think about what she can do and see how you can help her to achieve it.
- Offer practical assistance like minding the children for a while, cooking a meal for her, offering a safe place to stay, transport or to accompany her to court, etc.
- Respect her right to make her own decisions, even if you don't agree with them. Respect her cultural or religious values and beliefs.
- Maintain some level of regular contact with her. Having an opportunity to talk regularly to a supportive friend or relative can be very important.
- Find out about Intervention Orders (Victorian name for a court protection order – in NSW these are called 'Apprehended Violence Orders', and in other states they are 'Protection', 'Restraining' or 'Domestic Violence' Orders) and other legal options available and pass this information on to her if she wants it.
- Tell her about the services available. Remind her that if she calls a service, she can just get support and information, they won't pressure her to leave if she doesn't want to.
- Keep supporting her after she has left the relationship. The period of separation could be a dangerous time for her, as the abuse may increase. She may need practical support and encouragement to help her establish a new life and recover from the abuse. She could also seek counselling or join a support group.



► Questions you could ask and things you could say

These are just some ideas. It is important that you only say what you believe, and use your own words.

The way he treats you is wrong.

What can I do to help you?

How do you think his behaviour has affected you?

How do you think his behaviour is affecting your children?

I'm worried about what he could do to you or the children.

What do you think you should do?

What are you afraid of if you leave?

What are you afraid of if you stay?

► What not to do ...

When talking to someone who is being abused, some things may not help, or may stop her from wanting to confide in you fully.

Here are some of the things victims of abuse say did not help:

- Don't blame her for the abuse or ask questions like 'what did you do for him to treat you like that?' or 'why do you put up with it?', or 'how can you still be in love with him?' These questions suggest that it is somehow her fault.
- Don't keep trying to work out the 'reasons' for the abuse. Concentrate on supporting the person who is being abused.
- Don't be critical if she says she still loves her partner, or if she leaves but then returns to the relationship. Leaving an abusive partner takes time, and your support is really important.
- Don't criticise her partner. Criticise the abusive behaviour and let her know that no-one has the right to abuse her (for example, say 'your partner shouldn't treat you like that'). Criticism of her partner is only likely to make her want to defend him or her.
- Don't give advice, or tell her what you would do. This will only reduce her confidence to make her



own decisions. Listen to her and give her information, not advice.

- Don't pressure her to leave or try to make decisions on her behalf. Focus on listening and supporting her to make her own decisions. She knows her own situation best.

► What's the difference between a bad relationship and an abusive one?

For family violence to be present, there are two key attributes to it. One of them is that one party is in fear of the other. The other is that the abuser uses a planned, systematic approach to remove a person's confidence, support networks and independence in order to highlight their own power and control within the relationship.

Annette Gillespie, Head of Victoria's Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre.

1<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2015/march/1425128400/jess-hill/home-truths>

<http://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/Myths-about-violence>

Bibliography

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

<http://www.dvrcv.org.au/>

<http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/>

<http://www.ourwatch.org.au/>

What about violence against men?

All violence is wrong, regardless of the sex of the victim or perpetrator. But there are distinct gendered patterns in the perpetration and impact of violence. For example, both women and men are more likely to experience violence at the hands of men, with around 95% of all victims of violence in Australia reporting a male perpetrator.²⁰

While men are more likely to experience violence by other men in public places, women are more likely to experience violence from men they know, often in the home.²¹

The overwhelming majority of acts of domestic violence and sexual assault are perpetrated by men against women, and this violence is likely to have more severe impacts on female than male victims.²²

Recognising the gendered patterns of violence doesn't negate the experiences of male victims. But it does point to the need for an approach that looks honestly at what the research is telling us, and addresses the gendered dynamics of violence

TABLE 1



POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS Eg, Communication	NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIPS Eg. Mistrust

TABLE 2

CHARACTER	IMPACT
Eg. Dina McMillian	Eg. Becky and her sister attend a seminar run by Dina McMillian. They learn about early indicators of abusive relationships.



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