

1. Thinking about PREVENTION, what kinds of messages and/or communication channels would be most effective in encouraging positive attitudes and behaviours in relation to DFV?

Our experience it that there is ongoing confusion and misunderstanding in relation gender based violence – what is it, why does it occur and what can be done to address this significant social issue.

The use of a number of different terms to describe the issue also contributes to this confusion – gender based violence, domestic violence, violence against women and children.

Talking about healthy, happy, respectful relationships is an simpler and easier topic for people to relate to and openly talk about. It also an important way in which we can address the issues before they become a problem (ie address the behaviours before they become a pattern of behaviour that lead to violence).

Prevention messages focused on positive behaviours – what does a happy, healthy, respectful and equal relationship look like? How can it be achieved? – can stop offending behaviours before they start or address issues before they become established/normalised.

The National Rugby League (NRL) is committed to utilising its powerful voice and reach to stand by our expert partners (Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia, Our Watch and White Ribbon) to take action to prevent violence against women and children. It is the Game's stance that violence against women and children is never acceptable – full stop.

A key focus for us is on prevention and to encouraging our rugby league communities to take the lessons they learn on the field (respect, responsibility, team work, good communication, hard work, dedication) and apply them off the field.

By using a variety of communications channels and tailoring messages we can reach the maximum number of people and in a way that is most relevant to them. It it our belief that Rugby League has a unique ability to reach relevant communities and a unique way of communicating with those communities (through the platform of our elite competition as was all through our vast network of grassroots clubs).

2. Can you think of any messages relating to DFV that you have read or heard? Were they effective? Why/why not?

Campaigns focused on injured or damaged victims of abuse appear to have an impact but perhaps are not as effective at reaching the vast majority of the community and at achieving long term, sustained changes in behaviour. Based on the feedback from our expert partners, it is our understanding that a proportion of the population are not fully engaged with the issue of gender based violence because they do not full understand it and it's drivers, they themselves are not directly impacted and/or they don't believe they can influence the issue - they are not violent, nor are their relationships violent, so it's not directly their problem or responsibility to address the issue.

The NFL's recent campaigns – “no more” – is a great example of effectively communicating the realities of gender based violence without focusing on graphic images. These advertisements involved NFL players/role models standing up and saying no more to violence and encouraging others to do likewise.

By focusing messages on the foundations of violence (gender inequality, rigid gender roles, male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect for women) and how these drivers can and do lead to gender based violence, all individuals will be able to identify how this issue is relevant to them and the role they can play in preventing the issue.

The #CovertheAthlete campaign was a popular and well received campaign, drawing attention to the inequality between male and female sports stars and how they were treated by the media.

Our Watch's “Change the Story” was also an effective way of demonstrating the link between how males and females are treated differently throughout their lives and how these experiences can impact their lives and has the potential to lead to abusive relationships. Our watch used great imagery, straight forward language and provided simple to understand links between behaviours and life experiences and the issue of gender based violence.

The Italian “Slap Her” campaign went viral in Italy and around the world. The concept and message of in a child's world men don't hit women was very effective and the content of the video was very relatable and elicited an emotive response.

The movie/documentary “call me dad” was also a very good way to raise awareness for ways in which perpetrators could get support and help and provided real motivation and inspiration for both perpetrators and victims to seek such help..

3. Thinking about EARLY INTERVENTION, what should be done to best recognise and support those at risk of experiencing or perpetrating DFV?

By increasing awareness and understanding in relation to the issue (clearly defining it and using consistent, easy to understand language) and the foundations of this violence, people will increasingly see it as their responsibility to address these foundations and contribute to the prevention of violence.

Individuals will also become more capable and confident in identifying the early indicators of an unhealthy or abusive relationship – either their own or of those around them – and will have the knowledge of what they can do and who they can go to for support.

The NRLs programs are designed to empower individuals, teams and communities to take action and contribute to the prevention of violence against women and children by helping them to clearly articulate their expectations in relation to their own behaviour and also the behaviour of those around them. We also look to help people to identify when someone crosses the line (behaves in way that is unacceptable) and how to respond when that line is crossed (both directly or indirectly).

A focus on “the ethical bystander” is another way in which the NRL encourages people to assist in recognising violence and providing support to those experiencing or perpetrating violence.

4. What could be done to respond to those who deny or do not recognise that they are at risk?

Research to better understand why people deny or do not recognise that they are at risk would be beneficial to this issue.

It would also be recommended that any campaigns designed to build awareness and understanding of this social issue specifically acknowledge and explain that gender based violence occurs across all sectors of the community. Such campaigns could include people from all walks of life talking about their experiences.

Communicating the issue in simple terms - what is a healthy, happy, respectful relationships vs what is an unhealthy, unhappy, disrespectful relationship - could also be effective in assisting people to acknowledge that they are at risk or experiencing violence.

Increasing awareness and visibility of the support networks available to victims, at risk individuals and perpetrators, will also assist people to seek help and/or recognise that they may need help.

Reducing the stigma associated with being a "victim" of such violence would also assist in addressing this issue.

The NRL is currently working with its expert partners to identify where the 'at risk' communities in relation to our rugby league communities. We will then prioritise our face-to-face programs where there is a cross over between those communities.

Our face-to-face programs are designed to help increase awareness and understanding and to encourage and empower rugby league clubs (and the players within those clubs, who are more often than not leaders and role models in their communities) to establish plans of action to contribute to this very important social issue - including standing up to acknowledge that the issue exists, speaking out to raise awareness as well to educate people on what gender based violence is and what the drivers are, and then to take action to address the issue.

5. What would you do if you suspected someone you knew - a friend, family member, colleague etc - was at risk of experiencing or perpetrating DFV?

Contact an expert organisation - Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia (either directly or through their crisis line 1800 Respect), White Ribbon Australia or Our Watch - and seek their expert guidance and advice.

6. Thinking about SUPPORTING VICTIMS' SAFETY AND RECOVERY, what should be done to make it easier for people in crisis to identify, access and understand DFV services?

Awareness campaigns through traditional social media to increase awareness and understanding of the support networks available.

The introduction of a website which provides a "one-stop-shop" for information on gender based violence and what support is available as well as links/connections to those support networks.

Reducing the stigma surrounding gender based violence will also assist victims to more readily access help.

7. What should be done to ensure those affected by DFV are supported to recover from immediate trauma and its long-term effects?

Identifying ways in which to reduce the stigma associated with being a victim of such violence (for example victim blaming). Also by ensuring effective psychological, emotional and financial support is available and accessible to assist the individual to firstly leave the relationship and then recover from the abuse - both in the short-term and the long term.

8. Thinking about PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY, what should be done to hold perpetrators to account for their actions and help them change their behaviour?

It is our understanding that a number of "myths" and misunderstandings exist in relation to why perpetrators are violent.

It would be useful to clearly communicate the drivers and/or foundations of such violence and to remove the "myths and misunderstandings". This will make perpetrators responsible for their actions and also responsible for changing their behaviour. No longer will they be able to use excuses for their behaviour such as "I was drunk, or stressed".

Also, by increasing the awareness of this issue and the role everyone has to play in addressing/contributing to the prevention of violence, people will feel empowered to hold perpetrators accountable and the perpetrators themselves will feel the pressure to acknowledge their behaviour and make changes or face the consequences.