

Respect Protect Connect - Key Messages for Parents & Carers

This session supports young people to navigate relationships safely, understand consent, and recognise signs of unhealthy or abusive behaviours.

Here are the key messages shared with students and how you can support the conversation at home.

Understanding the Cycle of Abuse

Family violence is not usually a one-off event. It often follows a cycle:

1. **Build-up** – tension increases.
2. **Incident** – physical, emotional, or other abuse occurs.
3. **Excuses** – blaming or denying responsibility.
4. **Making-up** – apologies, gifts, promises to change.
5. **Calm** – things may feel normal, but the cycle repeats.

Help your child understand this pattern so they can spot warning signs in friendships or relationships.

Affirmative Consent

Consent must be:

- **Freely given** (without pressure, fear, or manipulation)
- **Ongoing and mutual** (can change at any time)
- **Clearly communicated** (through words or actions)

New Victorian laws (as of July 2023) require people to take active steps to check the other person is consenting – silence, past behaviour, or lack of resistance is **not** consent.

Coercive Control: Warning Signs

These behaviours **may look like care but are controlling**:

- Constant texts or needing to know where someone is
- Wanting to spend all their time together
- Getting jealous easily
- Controlling money or personal decisions
- Making someone feel guilty for setting boundaries

Encourage open conversation with your teen about what respectful, equal relationships look like.

Why young people don't tell

Some common barriers:

- Fear of getting in trouble
- Shame or guilt
- Thinking no one will believe them
- Not understanding what happened was wrong

Reassure your child **it is never their fault**. Let them know they can come to you, no matter what.

Sexting and Sextortion

Teens are allowed to take and keep sexual images of themselves or others aged 12–17 (within 2 years of age), **but only with consent**. They cannot send images of someone else, or share without permission.

Sextortion is when someone threatens to share private images unless demands (like more images or money) are met. It's becoming more common, especially targeting boys.

What you can do:

- Encourage your teen to talk to you or a trusted adult if this happens
- Avoid blame – focus on safety and support
- Report sextortion to the eSafety Commissioner

Porn and Media

Porn doesn't reflect real relationships. **Most scenes:**

- Show aggression, especially towards women
- Don't show consent or communication
- Reinforce gender stereotypes

Talk with your teen about media literacy. Ask: "Does this reflect what respectful, mutual intimacy should look like?"

How you can support

- **Stay calm and open** – your response shapes whether they keep talking to you
- **Avoid judgment** – listen first, guide later
- **Use moments in media/news** to prompt conversations
- **Keep reinforcing** they can always ask questions or share concerns

Support Services

If your child needs help, they can contact:

- **SECASA** – 9928 8741
- **Kids Helpline** – 1800 55 1800
- **1800RESPECT** – 1800 737 732
- **eSafety Commissioner** – esafety.gov.au

You're not alone. These topics can be tricky, but you are the most important influence in your child's life.