



# RISE UP

against  
domestic  
abuse

## Bystander Book

**Mothers' UNION**  
Christian care for families

At Mothers' Union, we are aware that men are victims of domestic abuse, and believe that any form of gender-based violence is abhorrent. The RISE UP campaign and this Bystander Book and webinar are however aimed at helping women and girls, as the evidence shows that the great majority of victims and survivors are female.

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### Reflect upon...

'Reflect upon' points are here to help you learn and explore different themes. You may want to use them personally or maybe as part of a study group. Our aim is that these 'Reflect upon' points will enable you to become a more confident bystander.

The only way to make a difference is to take action against everyday sexism, gender stereotyping or anything which trivializes violence against women and girls.

### Reflect upon...

- Have you or someone else you know taken action against sexism? How?
- What happened? How was the situation resolved?

## The Good Samaritan Luke 10:29-37

In the parable of the Good Samaritan we are asked 'Who is my neighbour? We are challenged to reach out to those in need and help them. How many of you have heard the hymn 'Cross over the road' by Pamela Verrall which says "Would you walk by on the other side, When someone called for aid? Would you walk by on the other side, And would you be afraid?"

How can we help those in need? It is not often that we will see women being subjected to violence when we are out and about, however what we might see or hear is people using sexist language or being disrespectful towards women. We can take action to address the culture which drives violence against women.

### Could you:

- Speak up when you hear a sexist joke or see a sexist image.
- Speak to someone who behaves disrespectfully.
- Challenge comments which reinforce negative gender stereotypes.
- Challenge practices that perpetuate harmful ideas about masculinity and femininity.
- Speak out when organisations demonstrate behaviours which make equality difficult.
- Speak out when policies or procedures need to be changed and updated.

### Reflect upon...

- Have you or someone else you know taken action against sexism? How?
- What happened? How was the situation resolved?

## Why should we take action?

The vision of Mothers' Union is a world where everyone prospers. We pursue this through prayer and action, helping to build confident people and resilient communities. We aim to help those whose family life has met with adversity.

Taking action makes a difference, it discourages harmful attitudes.

- If we ignore a situation, the offender and possibly bystanders, will perceive this as an endorsement of the behaviour.
- If we challenge behaviours, it sends a clear message that it is not acceptable.
- It shows support for those who are affected by the behavior or comment.
- It can prevent the issue from developing into something more serious.
- It may even give others the confidence to speak up.

### Reflect upon...

Which one of these benefits of speaking out resonates with you?

## Following Jesus.

Time and time again, Jesus challenges cultural norms with his words and actions. In Galatians 3:28 He reminds us that we are all equal in the eyes of Christ.

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

### Reflect upon...

- What examples are there of Jesus challenging cultural norms in the Bible?
- We are called to follow Christ, how do you live out this?

## Preparing to take action

You can make the way you feel very obvious without saying a single word, body language says a lot!

- Make sure you educate yourself.
- Talk to people about the way their actions make others feel.
- Think about the actions you might take.

### Think about:

- What behaviours and comments make you feel uncomfortable?
- How would you feel if you didn't take action?
- Is there anything that might help you speak out?

### How will you respond if someone says:

- It was just a joke!
- You can't tell me what to think/say/do.

### What can you do right now?

- Look into your church or Mothers' Union Branch policies and procedures.
- Does your church or Mothers' Union Branch have an expected standard of behaviour?
- Do you know how to report an incident or complaint?
- Do you know where to refer a person who asks for help?

### Reflect upon...

Could you gather together with other people to discuss actions you might take and how to be confident in speaking out?

Reflect and pray for guidance and support.

Prayer resources can be found here:

[mothersunion.org/what-we-do/faith-and-prayer](https://mothersunion.org/what-we-do/faith-and-prayer)

### What should I do now?

#### What action you take depends on a number of things, including:

- The situation as it is before you get involved.
- Who else is present at the time?
- Your relationship with the people involved.
- How safe and confident you are to act?

#### To decide what to do next, you need to look closely at the situation and consider:

- Your position and power in relation to those involved?
- How your action might affect others?
- Who else will stand by you and support you?
- Is what you say or do likely to make a difference to the person's behaviours?
- Your own safety and skills.
- Your ability to remain calm and respectful.

### Indirect action

When a bystander takes indirect action, they do something about the situation but without becoming directly involved at that time. This might be helpful for situations when the bystander is junior to the person whose comments or actions need addressing or if it would be completely inappropriate for that person to raise their concerns.

### Examples of indirect actions:

- **Asking someone who is better placed to take action**, e.g. someone else in a group situation, possibly a church leader, branch leader, a parent or a friend.  
'Chris, what do you think about that?'  
  
'Reverend Jones, please can we have a conversation about what happened in our study group? I wondered if it was something you could raise with the church/branch leaders?'  
  
'Jo, I don't feel comfortable about the sexist joke which was told by the visiting speaker, but I'm nervous about bringing it up with the vicar. As my youth leader, could you speak to her about this?'
- **Speaking to the person affected afterwards to show your support.**  
'It wasn't OK what was said in the meeting earlier. How are you feeling?'  
'Thanks for making time to call, I wanted to talk about last week's meeting.'
- **Speaking to other bystanders about a joint plan of action.**  
'I felt really uncomfortable about what was said in the meeting today, I was wondering if there was anything we could do about it together?'  
  
'What can we do to raise the matter of that comment made in church/at an event yesterday?'
- **Speaking to your church leader or leadership team about problematic culture or negative practices.**  
'I've noticed that.....'  
  
'Why is it only the women who organize the coffees and teas after church?'  
  
'Why is the children's ministry team entirely female?'
- **Reporting an incident and making a complaint or supporting someone else to make a complaint**  
This might involve following a formal grievance or complaint process.

## Direct Action

Direct action is when a person speaks up to express that something is unacceptable and / or uses facial expressions and body language to show that they disagree with the incident or situation. This also shows support for the person affected.

Direct action needs to be carried out respectfully and appropriately.

### Examples of direct action:

#### In the moment:

##### Asking a question.

‘Sorry, what do you mean by that?’

‘Sorry, I don’t get it. Can you explain the joke?’

‘Isn’t that sexist?’

‘Isn’t that a bit stereotypical?’

‘Would you say that if she was a man?’

‘Am I the only one who feels uncomfortable about this?’

‘Anyone else think this is not OK?’

##### Stating your opinion.

‘I don’t agree with that.’

‘I think what you are saying may be sexist/discriminatory.’

‘I think some women might be offended by that.’

‘That was a bit full on.’

##### Saying how the comment or joke makes you feel and why.

‘Hey, that makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. It is demeaning to women/men.’

‘I feel frustrated that we still hear women referred to in that way, even in church.’

‘I’m pretty upset by this. That happened to my friend.’

##### Reminding a group of the standard of expected behaviour.

‘This isn’t how we agreed to...’

‘I’d like to remind the group of our agreement on how we will work together.’

‘I don’t think that fits in with how we have agreed to talk to each other.’

### Ensuring everyone gets a say, especially about matters that affect them.

‘I don’t think we should decide until we ask them what they think would be best...’

‘I’d like to hear what Monica thinks.’

‘Perhaps we could ask the playgroup parents what the challenges are and what their recommendations are.’

### Amplifying women’s voices if they are spoken over or if someone else takes credit for their idea.

‘Hang on! Ann was making a point.’

‘Sam, had you finished?’

‘Yes, that was the point Emma was sharing earlier.’

### Afterwards...

Speaking afterwards to the person who behaved inappropriately.

#### Here are some potential opening lines:

‘Hey, that joke you made really bothered me.’

‘I don’t think what you said was appropriate because...’

‘I’d like to follow up what you said before...’

‘I am concerned about the joke you told earlier. We have agreed that those types of jokes are not on.’

‘Can we please have a quick conversation about the remark you made earlier?’

‘That might not have been a big deal to you but...’

### Reflect upon...

- Go through the examples of actions for both indirect and direct bystander action to ensure you have understood each one.
- In what situations would these different types of indirect and direct action be helpful?
- What other examples of direct and indirect action can you share that are not covered here?

## How can a church support bystander action?

Churches can help to create positive change by supporting and fostering bystander action.

Church leaders both lay and ordained can create a supportive environment for bystander action by communicating that:

- We all have a responsibility to act and we can all do something to help.
- Small actions can make a big difference.
- This is a place where we welcome bystander action. We want it to be a place where people feel safe to voice their concerns and suggestions and where we can all build a flourishing community together.

### Reflect upon...

We all have spheres of influence and can make a difference in the groups and communities we are part of.

- What vision has God given you for bystander action in your spheres of influence?
- What do you need to do to prepare yourself for this?
- Who are the key people you will need to work with, and how might you need to build their leadership and skills in bystander action?
- What do you need to reflect on, learn about and/or do together to help achieve your vision?

If God is leading you to create a supportive environment for bystander action in your church, we recommend you begin by gathering a group and engaging in the learning process together. Why not use this resource as a tool for discussion?

## A change of culture

Preventing violence against women means that we need a change of culture. To achieve the transformation we long to see, we must each play our part. We can create a culture shift if we each take bystander actions in our everyday interactions in order to challenge the attitudes, behaviours and structures that underpin violence against women and girls.

We encourage you to use this resource to have conversations in your church and the groups you are part of about how to do and foster bystander action to build a safe, fair and respectful culture where everyone can thrive.

With Jesus' teaching and example as our inspiration and guide, let's make the small things count.

**'In the end what will harm us is not the words of our enemies,  
but the silence of our friends'**

Martin Luther King

### Reflect upon...

- What has been helpful for you in this reflection about bystander action?

To find out more about what Mothers' Union is doing to raise awareness around domestic abuse, or to get involved in the RISE UP! campaign, please visit [mothersunion.org/riseup](https://mothersunion.org/riseup) or email [riseup@mothersunion.org](mailto:riseup@mothersunion.org)

