16 Days of Activism

A note before we begin

This toolbox talk discusses gender-based violence and respectful behaviour. These topics can affect people personally, so please take care of yourself and step away from the conversation if you need to. Remember, Sonder, our EAP and wellbeing support service, is available if you need support at any time. You don’t need to wait until things feel overwhelming to reach out.

What are the 16 Days of Activism?

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is a global campaign encouraging people and communities to take action to prevent gender-based violence.

It begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and ends on 10 December, Human Rights Day. This deliberately connects violence against women with the broader issue of human rights.

The message is simple but important: everyone has the right to feel safe, equal and respected. Gender-based violence includes violence directed at someone because of their gender, as well as violence that disproportionately affects people of a particular gender. While the global campaign has a strong focus on violence against women and girls, gender-based violence can also affect people of other genders.

Change can start with everyday actions

Ending gender-based violence can feel like a big and complex issue, but prevention isn't only about responding when violence has already occurred. It is also about addressing the attitudes, behaviours and everyday interactions that can contribute to inequality and disrespect.

It starts with the culture we help create every day, at work, at home and in our communities. We all have a role to play in creating environments where people feel safe, valued and respected.

The way we speak to and about one another, the jokes we challenge, the assumptions we question and the behaviour we choose not to ignore can all make a difference. Small actions can help set expectations about what is and isn't OK, and show others that disrespect isn't simply "part of the culture".

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Some practical things we can all do

Call out disrespect. If a comment, joke or behaviour puts someone down because of their gender, don't simply let it pass.
Check in with others. If something doesn't seem right, a private "Are you OK?" can create an opportunity for someone to talk.
Don't join in. Sometimes taking action is as simple as not laughing along with a sexist joke or not reinforcing an inappropriate comment.
Challenge stereotypes. Notice assumptions about what women, men or people of different genders "should" do, whether that's at work, at home or in relationships.
Listen rather than judge. If someone shares an experience with you, listen and take them seriously rather than questioning why they responded in a particular way.
Think about your own behaviour. We can all pause occasionally and ask, "Am I contributing to a workplace where people feel respected and included?"
Back someone up. If another person respectfully challenges inappropriate behaviour, support them. Speaking up is easier when we know others will stand with us.

Have the conversation

Conversations are an important part of preventing gender-based violence and changing the attitudes and behaviours that can contribute to it. Sometimes these conversations can feel uncomfortable or awkward, but talking openly about respect, equality and the behaviours we expect from one another can help create positive change. The important thing is being willing to listen, reflect and have respectful conversations, even when the topic isn't always easy.

Discussion question for the team: What is one everyday behaviour that helps create a workplace where everyone feels safe and respected?

There doesn't need to be one "right" answer. The purpose is to get us talking about what respect looks like in practice and how each of us can contribute through our everyday actions.

Take one action

Over the 16 Days, choose one small action you can carry forward: Notice it. Question it. Challenge it. Support someone. Start a conversation. The 16 Days might put a spotlight on gender-based violence, but respectful behaviour isn't something we practice for only 16 days. The everyday choices we make help shape the culture around us.