

Speaking to young people about respect

Kristy Masella

My name is Kristy Masella, I am a proud Darumbal woman and the mother of two teenage daughters.

When it comes to talking to my daughters about respect, I often draw on personal examples of things I've experienced or reflected on myself. I talk about the disrespectful behaviors that I accepted at times in my life or thought were normal.

When I was younger I think I excused aggression in boys, I think I just accepted this belief that aggression for boys and men was in some ways just a normal and natural part of 'boys being boys'. I also didn't fully realise or reflect on the harm that can be caused by that culture around women being the possessions of men, of 'belonging' to a man.

I've been very quick to have conversations with my girls to say 'I've just realised I've been tolerating this', or, 'this has been part of my life and I've just become aware of it now, so make sure you look out for it and that you are aware of it.'

By doing this, my daughters will be able to identify disrespect a lot quicker and easier. Most women would have examples under their belt to talk about, including positive examples of respectful behaviours and attitudes towards women as well.

I once witnessed a young woman speak up to two men who were whistling at women on the street as they passed by. The woman asked the men if they realised how intimidated and objectified this makes women feel. You could see the men were a bit taken aback by it, but it seemed as though they were taking on board what was being said, I doubt they would have done it again. I felt so empowered by seeing this young woman speak up in that way and it's given me the courage to do the same if I were to find myself in a similar situation in the future. The more we speak up, the more others see us speak up, and then they begin to speak up too.

If we don't have open conversations about disrespect, it becomes normalised and accepted.

Having conversations with one another about respectful relationships is so important because if we don't, we're going to have generations of women to come experiencing and being affected by disrespect and the issues disrespect leads to, such as domestic violence and other forms of abuse. We need to speak up now so we can break the cycle of violence and disrespect.

Kristy Masella is a Stop it at the Start campaign supporter, part of the national campaign to reduce violence against women. For information and to access community resources and video stories visit respect.gov.au.

If you or someone you know is experiencing or at risk of domestic, family or sexual violence contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au.