

# Let's talk about domestic violence differently



Let's change the narrative and reframe victim-blaming language. We can start by using language which clearly puts the accountability for the family and domestic violence back on the perpetrator.

## Reframing victim-blaming language is very important

FROM	TO
Why did she let the violent perpetrator back into the house?"	Why didn't he stop threatening and harassing her?
She is a bad mother for staying in the violent relationship	He is a bad father for perpetrating domestic violence
She is in an abusive relationship	Her partner is violent and controlling
Why didn't she just leave him?	Why did he threaten to kill her if she left
She did nothing to stop the abuse!	She protected her children from the abuser.
Why does she have such bad choice in men	Why does he keep choosing to abuse women
It's a mutual violent/toxic relationship	There is one primary aggressor and one victim
She failed to protect her children	Despite her protective efforts the children remained at risk from his behaviour
The perpetrator just 'snapped'	Perpetrating domestic violence is a choice
Why did she go back?	Why did he promise to stop, and then abuse her again?
Why does she put up with it?	Why does he say he loves her and then abuses her?



What we write and what we say about violence against women and children matters. Language is not neutral—it is loaded with meaning. It communicates to others how we interpret, evaluate and make sense of a perpetrator's violence.

Perpetrators of violence often use language to hide, minimise or justify violence. Victims may use language that downplays or denies the violence to avoid pressure or judgment from others. Third parties may often use language that supports or promotes their particular interests or positions in relation to violence against women.

**Language is about choice - choosing what we say, how we say it and to whom we say it.** Our choice of language has direct and immediate impacts on perpetrators and on women and children. It has the potential to make women and children who have been abused feel confused, scared or at fault. Equally it can make them feel supported, energised or empowered.

We need to place responsibility for the violence with the perpetrator, we need to use the right language to understand the efforts used by women and children to resist the violence

[www.cwpracticelive.facs.nsw.gov.au/@home-truths/2015/04/09/36241/language-matters](http://www.cwpracticelive.facs.nsw.gov.au/@home-truths/2015/04/09/36241/language-matters)



Sadly, it is often overlooked how much women do to keep themselves and their children safe—they probably don't even realise it themselves. Women might also be afraid to admit the violence because of the 'why doesn't she leave' sentiment.

*Let's change the narrative and empower women so they feel comfortable to speak up and be heard.*

People often underestimate the importance of using DV informed language to discuss the issues of domestic and sexual violence. When domestic violence is discussed the mother/women repeatedly becomes the focus and the perpetrator becomes invisible. By doing this the responsibility for the violence gets placed back on the mother/woman—as if she must do something about the violence—rather than a discussion which clearly identifies the person who uses the violence and how they should be challenged to take responsibility for their actions and for changing their behaviours. After all, the responsibility for ending violence in a family ultimately rests with the perpetrator.

*“Domestic violence is a choice or series of choices made by one person to act in ways that are abusive, violent and/or controlling towards their family members”* - The language in this statement highlights that there is a *person* who is responsible for the violence and its consequences. This shift in language clearly identifies who is responsible for acts of domestic violence. Victim-blaming language ends up obscuring the specific responsibility of the perpetrator. For example, someone might say, “the couple has a history of domestic violence,”. Or, they might say, “the mother and father engaged in domestic violence”. “The children have been exposed to domestic violence” is also a common phrase used to describe domestic violence.

The more we challenge this in our everyday life the better supported victim-survivors will be.

[www.cwpracticelive.facs.nsw.gov.au/@home-truths/2015/04/09/36241/language-matters](http://www.cwpracticelive.facs.nsw.gov.au/@home-truths/2015/04/09/36241/language-matters)

## Words Are Powerful - Let's Use them Wisely!

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She provoked him.	He made a choice.
Why does she stay?	Why does he abuse his partner??
She is an abused woman.	He is an abuser.
He has an anger control issue.	He uses abuse to have power and control over his partner.

### Stop Failure to Protect Approaches to Domestic Violence & Children

#### PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY STARTS WITH LANGUAGE

- ◇ **Stop** referring to domestic violence as harming children and **start** referring to domestic violence perpetrator's behaviours harming children.
- ◇ **Stop** talking about domestic violence as something that occurs just between the adults and **start** referring to domestic violence perpetration as a parenting choice.
- ◇ **Stop** talking about children witnessing domestic violence and **start** talking about how perpetrator's patterns impact child, partner and family functioning.

DV West: 4732 2318

[www.dvwest.org.au/](http://www.dvwest.org.au/)

#### Other useful numbers:

Lifeline - 13 11 14

Beyond Blue - 1300 22 4636

Suicide Callback Service - 1300 659 467

DV Line: 1800 65 64 63

