



A Sport For All In Every Way

A gender equity handbook
for Victorian tennis clubs

Action for Gender Equity Partnership

This handbook was developed by Women's Health Goulburn North East, as part of a project on behalf of Action for Gender Equity Partnership (AGEP). We acknowledge the contributions of our AGEP colleagues from Women's Health Grampians and Women with Disabilities Victoria in the development of this handbook.



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All tennis player photographs with thanks to Tennis Victoria, except the photograph on page 10.

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Acknowledgements

We are intersectional in our approach and are proud to stand beside generations of great women whose work has brought us closer to equality for all.

We acknowledge the wisdom, living culture and connection of the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which we work, and acknowledge the profound disruption of colonisation and the Stolen Generations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We believe in shared and just cultural transformation that embraces diversity, and these acknowledgements are part of the ethical principles that guide our work and conduct.



Image: *Partnerships*, Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation & Women's Health Goulburn North East 2018;
<https://www.whealth.com.au/project/making-two-worlds-work/>

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Key terms

(Adapted from [A Team Effort \(evidence guide\)](#))

Violence against women

Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life. This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience (including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, financial and others) which are gender based.

Primary prevention of violence against women

Primary prevention of violence against women is defined as activities and interventions that aim to prevent violence against women before it occurs. Primary prevention aims to address the underlying drivers of this violence, and it does so by working across the whole population.

Bystander action/intervention

Bystander approaches focus on the ways in which those who are not direct targets can identify, intervene, and engage others in responding to attitudes, practices and behaviours that drive violence against women in order to prevent violence against women.

Whole-of-sport approach

A whole-of-sport approach is a holistic one where a sporting organisation aims to address the drivers of violence against women by enacting multiple strategies to change structures, norms, practices, attitudes and behaviours both within the organisation (including players, coaches, officials, staff, board members and executives) and in the broader sporting community (fans, media, volunteers and external stakeholders). A whole-of-sport approach can operate at different levels across a sport, from a peak national body to state associations, and regional and local organisations.

Gender

Gender refers to the socially learnt roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defines masculinity and femininity. Gender expectations are dynamic, vary between cultures and can change over time.

Gender inequality

Gender inequality refers to the unequal distribution of power, resources, opportunity and value afforded to men and women in a society due to prevailing gendered norms and structures.

Gender equality

Gender equality is associated with fairness and therefore involves the enjoyment of equal opportunities, worth, resources and wellbeing by all, regardless of their gender. It includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality.

Gender equity

Gender equity is associated with the principle of justice, and recognises that women and men don't start from a position of equality. Therefore, gender equity is the structured process of being fair and inclusive to all people, regardless of their gender. It recognises the barriers that prevent people from participating full and equally in life, and employs specific strategies, practices and policies to address this inequity.

If gender equality is the goal, gender equity is the pathway.



Image: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (@RWJF); <https://betterbikeshare.org/2019/10/24/equity-vs-equality>



Introduction

Developed as part of a joint initiative of the Action for Gender Equity Partnership, and led by Women's Health Goulburn North East and Women's Health Grampians, this handbook has been designed to support Tennis Victoria employees and local tennis club committees to create safe and inclusive club cultures, built on principles of equality, inclusion and respect.

As part of this project, Tennis Victoria employees undertook Bystander Action training in November 2020 to build their capacity to step in and call out inequities in tennis. This handbook includes a focus on bystander action to support the practical translation and application of knowledge and skills gained from the training.

One of the strategic goals for Tennis Victoria is 'for tennis to be the safest and most inclusive sport, especially for young people'. Tennis Victoria is addressing this in a number of ways, with gender equality being a key focus, including the introduction of policies and practices that support women and girls to be their best.

As an organisation, Tennis Victoria has strong female representation at all levels

and now, as a result of receiving funding from the Office for Women and Sport and Recreation Victoria, is investigating the role sport, and in particular tennis, can play in reducing gender inequalities that currently exist in tennis clubs.

The primary aim of *Tennis – A Sport for All in Every Way* initiative is to 'reduce barriers that women experience when accessing the sport of tennis, both on and off court and thereby creating cultures that are equal, safe, welcoming, and inclusive for everyone, regardless of their gender, gender identity, race, religion, culture, sexual orientation or any kind of difference'.

For more information about the initiative or the Tennis Victoria resources included in the handbook, speak to one of the Inclusion team members or email inclusionvic@tennis.com.au.

Project phases

Introduction	Cultural audit	Education	Audit review & action plan	Implementation	Communication
Project launch meeting with the club committee to discuss the why behind the project and the process to be undertaken. Confirmation of project timelines.	Conduct surveys with committee and club members to identify opportunities for improvement.	Opportunity for club representatives to learn more about the benefits of gender equality and how they link to the prevention of violence against women.	Meeting to review the outcomes of the survey and discuss how the club may be able to implement some of the ideas. Create an action plan to capture this.	Identify 2-3 actions from the plan and using the grant funding provided by Tennis Vic , action those items.	Provide members and stakeholders with an update on the outcomes of the survey, including what the club has implemented. Tennis Vic to create a case study.

← EVALUATION →

Image: Tennis Victoria, Club Journey Map 2020

Stopping violence before it occurs – the work of primary prevention

The prevention of violence against women requires a strategic, long-term approach that aims to stop violence from occurring in the first place; this is the focus of primary prevention. Primary prevention approaches are whole-of-population initiatives that address the underlying, or primary, drivers of violence.

The evidence tells us that “gender inequality sets the necessary social context”, therefore actions to prevent violence against women aim to change this social context.¹

According to research by [Our Watch](#),² the underlying drivers of violence against women are:

1. Condoning of violence against women
2. Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence
3. Rigid gender roles and identities
4. Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.



Image: [Our Watch](#). Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) & VicHealth 2015



Why sport settings?

Sport has always played an integral role in Australian culture and is an iconic element of community life. Sport brings regional communities together through a sense of pride and common purpose, contributes to a positive community identity and promotes social interaction and inclusion.³

Sporting codes, clubs and organisations bring together large numbers of people of all ages, genders and backgrounds; they are ready-made environments to promote women's participation and opportunities to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence-supportive attitudes. Given the significant role of sport in our society, it is important that sporting clubs, including tennis clubs, use this influence to advocate for respect, gender equality, inclusion and non-violence on and off the court.¹ Through the creation of a respectful and inclusive culture, clubs will see benefits like increased participation and satisfaction of members at their club.

Tennis Victoria acknowledges in its Code of Conduct (2018) that,

"the relationships we have, and the behaviours we adopt, with each other, our stakeholders and the broader community help us connect more people to the sport of tennis."

Demonstrated commitment across all levels of the sporting organisation – from the president, board, staff, coaches and players through to the volunteers, fans and sponsors – positions the prevention of violence against women as 'core business'. A whole-of-sport approach requires tailored and mutually reinforcing actions that engage people according to the role they can play in the organisation.¹

Current state of play

Sport plays a significant role in Australian culture and in the lives of many individuals. Particularly for those in rural communities, sporting clubs are the heart and soul of the community and have an integral role in bringing people together.¹

However, women, girls and gender diverse people don't always have the same opportunities as men and boys in sport and continue to face inequalities in their everyday lives. This section will highlight some of the specific inequalities experienced by women, girls and gender diverse people in sporting club settings.

Women's participation in tennis

Almost one million (908,100) Australian adults and 285,100 Australian children participate in tennis each year.⁴ Among adults, more than 40 per cent of those who participate are female. Despite the majority share of play being held by males aged 15 to 54, females aged 45 – 65+ make up almost one-fifth of all tennis participants nation-wide.⁴

Tennis is one of the few sports that is considered to be gender-neutral.⁵ Unlike football clubs, which have historically been associated with a 'masculine' culture, there is generally greater acceptance of participation by women at tennis clubs. However, it is important to consider the gendered aspects of tennis clubs more closely than just broad participation rates, by examining leadership, visibility of women at the club and equitable access to facilities. Additionally, sporting clubs have historically, and continue to, promote a culture of ableism (favouring of able, neurotypical people) based on intense physical prowess and high achievement. This sense of competitiveness and culture of winning can further marginalise people living with diverse abilities, and strategies for addressing this should also be considered in a club's review.



For men and boys, participation in sport offers a space to play the game, connect with other men and boys and construct ideas about what it means to be a man.¹ However, this is not the case for women, girls and gender-diverse people, with these groups experiencing greater barriers to accessing sport and recreation compared to men.⁶ Gendered stereotypes and socially constructed ideas around men's and women's roles in sporting clubs and the broader community, inhibit the ability for women, girls and gender-diverse people to participate fully in sport.

Coverage of women's sport in the media

Research has shown that outside of major sporting events, such as the Australian Open Grand Slam tournament held every January, media coverage of women's sports remains at less than 10 per cent of all sports coverage.⁷ Television news reports on female sport had the lowest average duration of all the types of sport analysed, with reports on male sport having an average duration of 30 seconds longer than reports on female sport.⁷

The 2010 report, *Towards a Level Playing Field: Sport and gender in Australian media*, highlighted that horseracing received more airtime than women's sport.

Additionally, television scheduling continues to benefit men's competitions, with men's sport taking the majority of prime-time television spots on free-to-air television.⁸

Barriers to women's participation include:⁶

- lack of time due to competing commitments, such as childcare and unpaid domestic work;
- lack of access to appropriate, accessible, affordable and acceptable facilities and services;
- lack of culturally appropriate facilities or programs;
- lack of childcare facilities, or options for women with children;
- fear of gender-based harassment;
- limited role models concerns around appearance, skills and abilities;
- lack of self-confidence;
- lack of suitable options for social participation;
- lack of leadership opportunities;
- restrictive and inflexible structures that favour male participation in leadership; and
- the traditionally male-dominated culture with a strong focus on competition and ability that is often present in sporting clubs.

It is not only the quantity and timing of coverage that is at issue. There are differences in the way the media portray women's and men's sport, mostly reinforcing gender stereotypes, or undermining women's achievements. Sportswomen are more likely to be sexualised by the media or have media focus on their appearance or physical attraction rather than their skill or ability.^{8,9}

The social norms and gendered expectations that individuals are exposed to on a daily basis through the media and popular culture are often subtle but powerful in the way that they shape what is accepted in society and how that then plays out in our social interactions within community settings.





Taking action: embedding gender equity in tennis clubs

This handbook applies a gendered approach to a range of practices and norms within tennis clubs; this is called a whole-of-sport approach. Included are suggestions for key areas for action at your club, in line with Our Watch's Change the Story Framework.

This handbook is structured using the essential actions to reduce the gendered drivers of violence against women (see figure below). Each section provides tips on how to implement gender equitable policies and practices at your club and examples of gender equity in action.

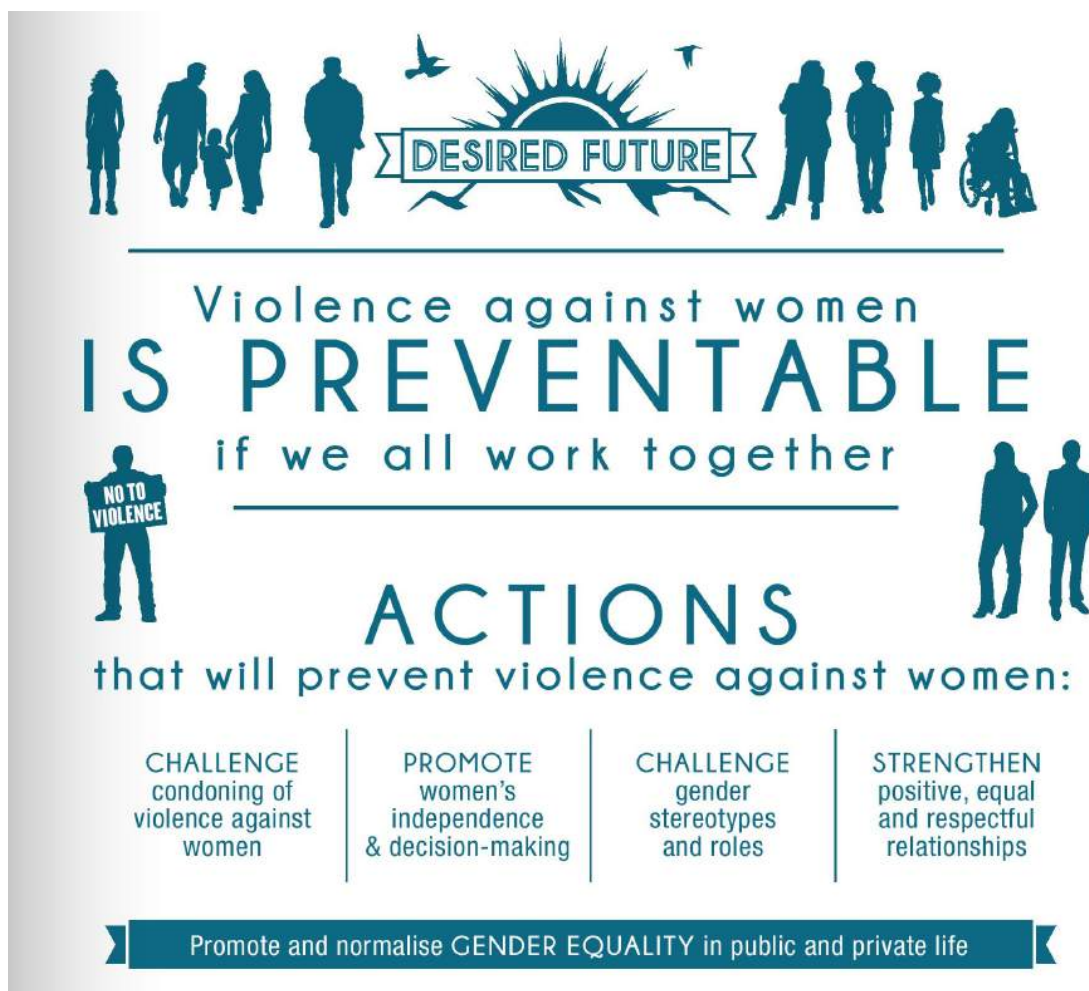


Image: [Our Watch](#), [Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety \(ANROWS\)](#) & [VicHealth](#) 2015

Creating a safe and inclusive club culture

Players, coaches and volunteers who enjoy what they do and the club atmosphere are more likely to remain engaged with club activities and stay connected with the club long-term. This results in improved playing performance, member satisfaction and greater connection with the community.¹⁰

It requires conscious effort and a sustained level of commitment from sporting organisations to ensure the notion of a 'level playing field' is a reality for players, staff members, volunteers, fans and anyone connected to the club. An inclusive club is one that celebrates diversity and where people of all genders and abilities feel welcome.

Tennis clubs have a unique influence over a close-knit community of people, where they are able to extend principles of equality and fairness beyond the tennis court, and into committee meetings, coaches' box, the stands, change rooms and local media. Putting these principles into practice may include ensuring a mix of genders participating in the running of the canteen, equal representation of men and women on the committee, and sharing decision making amongst members.

By promoting diversity and removing stereotypically gendered practices, clubs can address the underlying causes of violence against women, discrimination toward marginalised populations and challenge the attitudes and cultures that

support violence against women in our society.

Not sure where to start? Ask your members

The best way to understand how your members feel about different practices within the club is to ask them. Conduct member surveys to find out what is working and what is not working, as well as how members perceive the current club culture. It is recommended to analyse data by separating responses based on gender and roles at the club, in order to get a richer and more in-depth understanding and to be able to tailor responses.

Importantly, check in regularly with women, girls and gender-diverse people at your club and in your wider community. Seek to better understand their experiences with the club and commit to working together on solutions to ensure better experiences into the future. Also consider broader population demographics of your local community to identify who isn't currently represented at your club, and seek to find out why that may be.

Club policies demonstrate your club's commitment to diversity and inclusion

It is useful to conduct a review of your club's current policies to ensure gender, diversity and inclusion are embedded within your club's guiding documents and practices.

Creating and implementing gender equitable policies demonstrates the club's commitment to diversity and inclusion. It is important that members are aware of all relevant policies and pathways for addressing concerns are actively promoted and communicated.

- Consider the language that is used in your policies. Do they reinforce gender or ableist stereotypes or rigid gender roles?
- Do your members know about your policies and understand what they mean in practice?
- Does the club have a diversity and inclusion policy or a sexual harassment and discrimination policy?

In action: Tennis Australia policies

- Tennis Australia [Code of Behaviour](#)
- Tennis Australia [Member Protection Policy](#)
- Tennis Australia [Safeguarding Children: Code of Conduct](#)
- Tennis Australia [Safeguarding Children: Club Resource Kit](#)

Look up Tennis Australia's HR Manual for more information regarding internal policies for employees and volunteers of Tennis Australia, including:

- Tennis Australia Code of Conduct
- Tennis Australia Grievance Resolution Policy and Procedure
- Tennis Australia Inclusion, Diversity and Personal Safety Policy

As part of Tennis – A Sport for All in Every Way initiative, Tennis Victoria has developed the following templates for clubs to use in implementing a whole-of-sport approach to gender equity and inclusion:

- Gender Equity Strategy template
- Gender Equity Policy template
- Gender Equity Implementation and Communications Plan template



Putting it into practice: Inclusive Club Culture checklist (appendix)

Taking bystander action and responding to disrespectful behaviour

We are witness to subtle and not-so-subtle acts of sexism and forms of gender discrimination every day. When these incidents do not directly involve us, we are bystanders to the event. It is at these times when we make a choice, sometimes unconsciously, about how we respond.

There are no times where we are neutral. In fact, by doing nothing we are effectively supporting the sexist or discriminatory behaviour or comment. Choosing to be an active bystander when witness to discrimination and exclusion encourages other people and organisations to contribute to the development of a strong and healthy community.

“The standard I walk past is the standard I accept.”

- Tennis Victoria's Inclusion, Diversity and Personal Safety Policy

Bystander action may be a new concept to many of your members. Essentially, bystander action is when an individual safely steps in when they see or hear a comment or behaviour that doesn't feel right or respectful.

Some examples of stepping in and being an active bystander include:

- speaking to a teammate or club member about their recent disrespectful behaviour;
- 'calling out' disrespectful language or behaviour (e.g. challenging sexist, racist or ableist remarks or jokes, assumptions of incapacity or heroism that challenges the processes that exclude people with a disability);
- letting the committee or other club leaders know when issues relating to policy compliance, codes of conduct or behaviour need addressing;
- highlighting club cultures and practices that exclude or make it difficult for women and men to participate equally; and
- challenging gender stereotypes (e.g. women participating in the canteen, while men hold the decision-making roles).

Steps to empowering bystanders in your club to take action

Tennis clubs have a unique and important role to support their members to be active bystanders within the club setting and in the community. By endorsing bystander action and helping your members to understand the significance of these behaviours, the club is able to demonstrate action against sexist and sexually harassing behaviours, and progress towards gender equality.

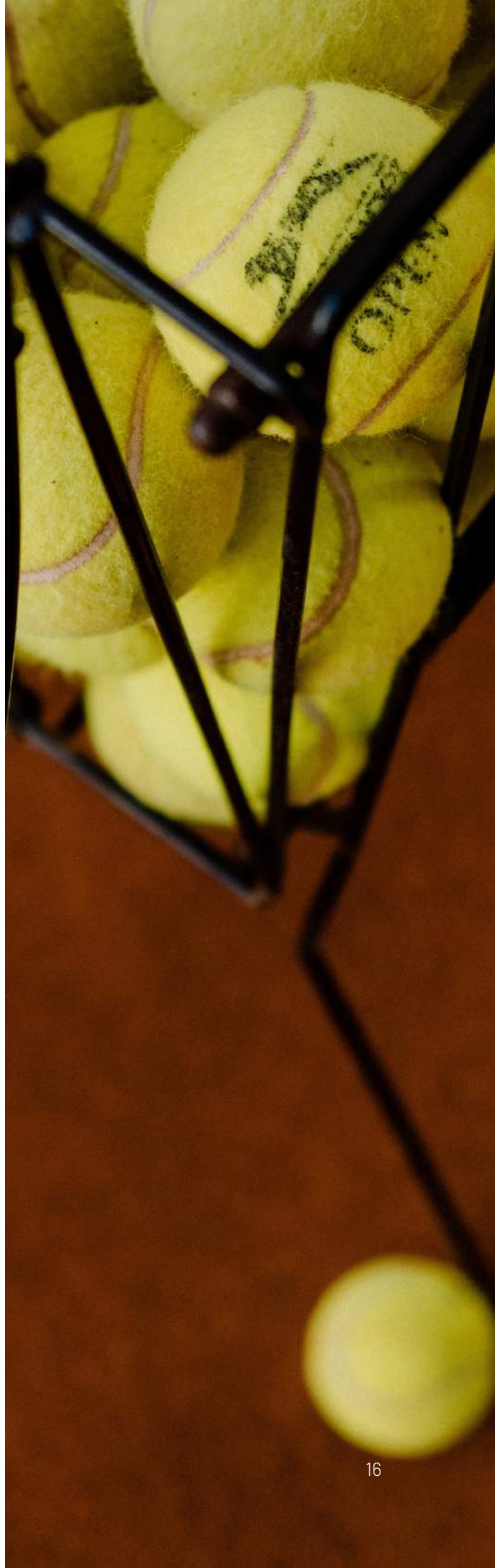
A club that endorses, supports and expects bystander action will:

- prepare your whole club to take bystander action when it is needed;
- help people who are on the receiving end or discriminatory comments of behaviours feel they will be supported;
- let people who deliberately or inadvertently behave inappropriately know to expect bystander action and how to respond when they do; and
- promote a club culture that is safe, inclusive and respectful for everyone.

People are more likely to speak up against sexist language, sexual harassment and disrespectful behaviour if they believe they will be supported.¹¹



Putting it into practice:
Bystander Action 101 guide for club members - see page 34



VicHealth's Take Action resource identifies the four steps that should be followed by organisations, including sporting clubs, to design, implement and evaluate bystander initiatives:

Step 1: Prepare the club for success

The use and general understanding of integrated policies and reporting procedures designed to address sexist, sexually harassing or discriminatory behaviours demonstrate that the club is serious about working towards gender equality and inclusion. Use an intersectional approach, considering presence of disability, race, religion, sexuality and class.



Step 2: Assess the readiness of people to become active bystanders.

When designing bystander initiatives, explore the current skills and attitudes of members of the club. This may be done through a reflective discussion with coaches, leaders and players.

Reflection can take place in discussions led by coaches/leaders who can guide players to:¹⁰

- identify player behaviours and language that will help provide a fair and respectful club;
- identify whether the types of behaviours they individually or collectively engage in may be sexist, discriminatory or harassing;
- identify and agree on the types of behaviour they want to be present in their club;
- identify and agree on strategies to modify or change individual and collective unwanted behaviours;
- identify and agree on the ground rules that support club members speaking up and challenging sexist or ableist language, discrimination and harassment;
- the pros and cons for the team in using bystander action;
- what may help or get in the way of taking bystander action; and
- identify ways to monitor team behaviours.





Step 3: Design bystander action initiatives that promote behaviour change.

The EAST framework for behaviour change can be applied to conversations on bystander action, to encourage members of your club to speak out against sexist or sexually harassing behaviours.^{11, 12}

Easy: Make it easy for your members to act.

Encourage conversations about bystander action; connect motivated club members to support each other to take action.

Attractive: Make bystander action attractive to your members.

Take the time to help your members understand why bystander action is necessary and how it benefits your club culture, for everyone.

Social: Demonstrate that bystander action is socially acceptable at your club.

Work with your coaches and leaders to identify members who will make great messengers about bystander action at your club. Consider those people whose opinion is valued by the club and community.

Timely: Plan your approach to bystander action at your club.

It can be powerful to capitalise on moments of change – a new sporting season or a refreshed club committee can be a great time to introduce new practices. Get buy-in from club members.



Step 4: Evaluate your initiative to determine its success.

Ask your members about behaviours people have witnessed or experienced (e.g. a sexist joke or comment, inappropriate physical contact) and, if a bystander stepped in, what action was taken.

Bystander action scenarios – What would you do?



Scenario 1

A male coach at your club is training a new player who is hoping to make the A Grade side this season. The coach comments on their playing ability, saying, *“You serve like a girl.”*

Scenario 2

Morning tea is being held in the clubroom and someone makes a sexist comment about some of the female members at the club, saying, *“I hear the ladies have been complaining again. When will they give it up?”*

Scenario 3

A spectator at the club disagrees with a call made by a female umpire and insults them by saying, *“Are you blind? There’s a reason why women shouldn’t be umpires in sport!”*

Scenario 4

A woman with a physical disability has requested additional facilities to be able to support the needs of people with disabilities. At the committee meeting, a notable club leader says to her, *“I’m sick of women like you making me feel bad about this issue!”*

Actions you can take:

- Pull the person who made the comment aside and let them know that comments like this are not appropriate to anyone, regardless of their gender or ability.
- Remind the person who made the comment of the club’s values of respect and inclusion, and that disrespectful behaviours such as this are not welcome at the club.
- Consult with the club committee to determine ways to communicate the club’s values of respect and inclusion, and actions that demonstrate these values, to the broader club community.
- Role model respectful and inclusive language to the broader club community.

Scenarios adapted from [Act@Play](#) project



Promoting women's leadership at your club

Women continue to be under-represented in visible leadership roles across the sport and recreation sector. Leadership and coaching roles have traditionally been viewed as 'male-dominated activities' across many sports.¹³

Where women have been involved in leadership positions within their sporting clubs, these roles have been stereotypically feminine – such as managing the canteen or coaching younger children. Community sporting clubs, including tennis clubs, play an important role to drive positive change.¹⁴

At Tennis Victoria, the current Board of Management has gender balance with the president and vice-president roles being held by women. However, at the club level there are still opportunities for improvement.

At a recent Top 50 Community Club Presidents forum, 47 of the 50 presidents were men, meaning that six per cent were female.¹⁵

In addition to the barriers faced by women to participate in playing sport, women, girls and gender-diverse people face different barriers to leadership, including:

- Women often feel reluctant to take on leadership roles in male-dominated environments;
- Women in leadership roles often report feeling intimidated or treated dismissively;
- If a leadership environment is not welcoming and inclusive, women are likely to leave.¹⁴



Overcoming barriers to participation in leadership

Establishing an inclusive culture at your club is integral to attracting more women, girls and gender-diverse people to participate in all facets of the club, including leadership. Creating a club where people of all genders and abilities are treated fairly and equally, and where diversity is promoted helps to demonstrate that everyone is welcome.

Having a gender balance on your club's leadership team or committee helps to:

- enable your committee to better understand the needs and interests of all club members;
- reduce the risk that members of one gender will be prioritised over others;
- improve your collective problem-solving abilities;
- increase the pool of ideas and skills available for the committee to draw on; and
- empower the committee to be more creative and innovative.¹⁴

When recruiting for new leaders at your club, consider the following:

- promote committee roles widely so that different people have the opportunity to apply;
- approach women and ask them about the roles they would be interested in fulfilling at the club, and listen to any hesitations or barriers they may have;
- present your club as diverse and inclusive;
- enact a Diversity and Inclusion Policy - Tennis Victoria's Gender Equity Strategy and Gender Equity Policy templates are a great place to start;
- write clear and inclusive position descriptions for committee and leadership roles;
- provide opportunities for women to have a role in decision making; and
- provide a welcoming and informative induction process.¹⁴



In action: Opportunities for leadership development for women, girls and gender-diverse people

SHEroes

An initiative of Tennis NSW, SHEroes will be piloted in Victoria in 2021. SHEroes is aimed at getting more women actively volunteering and progressing to leadership roles within the tennis community. SHEroes Ambassadors meet several times a year to share ideas, gain insights from industry leaders on relevant topics and engage socially with one another.

SHEroes include women who are mothers, coaches, teachers, aspiring coaches and ex tennis players who are passionate about become leaders in their community. For more information about the SHEroes program, click [here](#).

Future Leaders

Future Leaders is a Tennis Australia initiative designed to engage and empower young people in volunteering and community leadership by supporting participants in the delivery of a project in collaboration with their own tennis club, coach or community organisation. The program is aimed at young people in years nine and 10, and girls and gender-diverse young people are encouraged to apply [here](#).

Change Our Game

Change Our Game was created in response to the Victorian Government's [Independent Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation \(2015\)](#), which shed light on gender inequality in Victorian sports. The overwhelming finding was that women were, and continue to be, under-represented in leadership roles in a sports sector that is still predominately male-centric and dominated. Change Our Game offers grants for community and leadership initiatives that empower women and girls to take on leadership positions in sport. Click [here](#) for more information.

Enabling Women Leadership Program

An initiative of Women with Disabilities Victoria, The Enabling Women Leadership Program empowers women with disabilities to speak up and have a voice about issues that relate to them, and other women with disabilities. The program builds on, and expands the knowledge, skills, tools, and networks of women with disabilities, so that they are confident to take on advocacy and leadership roles within their communities. Visit the [Women with Disabilities Victoria website](#) for more information.



Challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging diversity at your club

Tennis is played by men and women in almost equal numbers nationally, with more than 40 per cent (42.92 per cent) of adult players identifying as female.⁴ This places tennis clubs in the ideal position to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes that limit people of all genders and abilities.

Challenging gender stereotypes can look different across different aspects of the club.

Some examples of this in action include:

- offering equal match play opportunities across both men's and women's competitions, for example players and members are consulted regarding competition formats (singles, doubles) rather than these being decided based on stereotypical assumptions;
- normalising men taking on stereotypically feminine roles in the club, such as helping in the canteen, and women taking on stereotypically masculine roles, such as outdoor maintenance work;
- consulting with members to determine appropriate days and times for scheduling matches, rather than defaulting to 'the way things have always been'. For example, it may be assumed that women prefer mid-week games as it fits in around part-time work and childcare, however this may not be the case for many participants who work full-time or have other responsibilities.
- considering the ways in which different members of the club are treated or spoken about, because of their gender. For example, are you hearing that the midweek ladies are "always complaining" because they don't have access to the facilities they need to play? Consider how this would be received differently if it were men who were asking for additional resources.

Club promotion and communications

Many sporting clubs use social media to stay in touch with their members, update them on what is happening and connect with the wider community. Social media presents an opportunity to build a brand for the club that the wider community will come to know your club for. Effective communications and marketing strategies can encourage new members to join, growing your membership base and bringing a range of experiences to the club.¹⁶

Visible commitment from senior club leadership demonstrates clear support for equality and diversity at your tennis club. It is important to engage senior leaders as role models for respect and inclusivity, and to actively challenge gender stereotypes.

People in positions of leadership and identified role models within the club have a responsibility to:

- emphasise that the club is welcoming and has something for everyone, regardless of ability;
- actively promote diversity; and
- promote the additional benefits of your club, including opportunities for social connection, skill development and confidence building.

Imagery

“If you can’t see it, you can’t be it.”

People need to be able to see themselves reflected in promotional material that clubs develop, so it is important to use imagery that depicts involvement by a range of people and shows commitment to inclusion. VicHealth’s This Girl Can VIC campaign uses photos and stories from real Victorian women to inspire women aged 18 years and older, of all abilities and from all cultural backgrounds to get active.¹⁷ Sign up to the [This Girl Can VIC Supporters Hub](#) to access resources to help implement inclusive practices at your tennis club.

Tips for using inclusive imagery:¹⁶

- display diverse images and use inclusive language in advertisements and marketing materials to attract a diverse range of members;
- don’t play into gender stereotypes;
- ensure a mix of genders and abilities are represented in any club promotional material; and
- strive for a diverse representation of the club’s members in promotional images, for example include photos of club volunteers, club leaders and trainers, rather than focusing only on successful players.

Inclusive language

“Put simply, inclusive language is effective language – it is respectful, accurate and relevant to all.”¹⁸

Inclusive language enables everyone in your club community to feel valued, respected and able to contribute. Inclusive language gives a more accurate view of the real world by reflecting social diversity rather than perpetuating stereotypes. It avoids making false assumptions about (or stereotyping) people based on their age, cultural background, disability, gender, Indigenous background or sexual orientation and gender identity.

Research suggests that non-inclusive language contributes to an continues stereotyping, and is harmful to people who witness it, as well as the intended targets.¹⁸ People may not intend to be hurtful when they unknowingly use an ableist, or otherwise non-inclusive term, but it will hurt people anyway.¹⁹

“A word’s meaning cannot be erased with good intentions.”¹⁹

Clubs should review all advertising and promotional materials, such as brochures, social media pages, club website, flyers, advertisements and annual reports, to ensure they use inclusive language and feature photos of all members and aspects of the club. To present your club as a respectful and inclusive club, ensure all members are acknowledged and represented in promotional images and channels, and their contribution is valued.

When implementing inclusive language, it is important to:¹⁸

- keep an open mind and be open to changing the way you do things;
- focus on the person first, rather than the demographic group they belong to. For example, instead of 'disabled person', use 'person with disability';
- consider the context of where language is being used. If you are unsure, ask the individual or a representative of a group what terminology they would prefer; and
- if you are called out for not being inclusive, apologise and focus on understanding the other person’s perspective without getting defensive.



Putting it into practice: Social media checklist- see page 37





In action: Count Me In Too project

A partnership initiative of Merri Health, Moreland Council and Tennis Victoria

Count Me In Too encourages women and girls from different cultural backgrounds to get involved in sport. As part of the partnership project, women and girls from culturally diverse backgrounds participated in Tennis Victoria's Open Court Sessions Host Training. The training provided an opportunity for women and girls to be trained to facilitate sessions at the club.

In addition to the training, Tennis Victoria delivered a four-week social women's-only tennis program, where participants were encouraged to pick up a racquet and give tennis a go. For some participants, this was the first time they had played sport outdoors.

At the end of the project, participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the club, Tennis Victoria and Merri Health, and expressed their interest to continue playing socially. Following the project, membership increased by 20 per cent in just five weeks.

Take a look at this video of the project, [here](#).

Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships

Promoting positive, equal and respectful relationships at your club

Community sporting clubs, including tennis clubs, have a responsibility to foster respectful relationships across all areas of the club; from board members to players, coaches, fans and sponsors.

This is largely supported by the community, as identified in a [survey published by VicHealth](#) that found that the majority of Victorians (98 per cent) expect their local community sporting clubs to provide an environment that is welcoming and inclusive to girls and women.

Eighty-six per cent of Victorians surveyed believe that "local sporting clubs should play a community leadership role by encouraging respectful relationships between men and women."¹

Community sporting clubs have a responsibility to their members and the broader community to demonstrate leadership by addressing incidents of disrespect and violence against women that occur within their clubs.¹ This includes understanding how to appropriately respond to incidents of violence against women by creating and implementing appropriate harassment and/or grievance policies and procedures.

Cultures that promote male dominance

Some male-dominated sports may promote stereotypical versions of masculinity that encourage violence and aggressive behaviours, as well as cultures that endorse sexist attitudes and behaviours.¹ Sexist peer norms and cultures are a key risk factor for men's perpetration of sexual violence.²⁰

"One in three think it is natural for a man to want to appear in control of his partner in front of his male friends."²¹

Tennis clubs are well-placed to challenge peer relations between men and boys that foster disrespect towards women, and to work with children and young people to understand what healthy relationships founded on respect look like from an early age. Sporting clubs have a responsibility to role model respect and inclusion, normalising these practices for younger generations.

Sexism

Sexism is linked to a binary understanding of gender stereotypes and roles – certain beliefs about the characteristics and behaviours that are acceptable for men and women. Sexism continues to be prevalent in all aspects of Australian society with a deep impact for many men, women and gender-diverse people.

Consider sexism and harassment in the context of your tennis club:

- What kinds of practices can you put in place to prevent women from being exposed to sexism and harassment in and around the club?
- Do you have a sexual harassment and discrimination policy in place?

Many sporting clubs are workplaces, bringing together employees, volunteers and people from different experiences and backgrounds. As employers, sport clubs with paid staff must comply with anti-discrimination, sexual harassment legislation and have a 'legal responsibility to create safe work environments'.¹

Factors that contribute to a hyper-masculine culture in sport:²⁰

- **Male bonding:** The codes of mateship and loyalty in tightly knit male groups in some sports, albeit valuable for teamwork, may both intensify sexism and encourage individuals to allow group loyalties to override their personal integrity.
- **Aggressive sport:** Contact sports themselves have been seen as implicated in men's violence against women, in that they teach athletes physical aggression and dominance, extreme competitiveness, physical toughness and insensitivity to others' pain and they naturalise and glorify violence.
- **Sexualisation and subordination of women:** Some critics point to women's roles in some sports, either as sexualised props for men's performance (as cheerleaders), or as supporters and carers, as implicated in sexist norms.



Sexism can take many forms. It may take a less severe form, such as a sexist joke or comment, or a more extreme form, such as sexual coercion or unwanted sexual attention.

All forms of sexual harassment and sexism contribute to a social context where gender inequality is the norm.

“Nearly one quarter of Australians see no harm in telling sexist jokes.” ²¹

In action: Promoting respectful relationships

Scenario

Coach Smith usually discusses his weekend activities with his male colleagues at the tennis club he works at. He often talks about women he's been with and makes derogatory references or sexual remarks. He has these conversations in the common areas of the club, making colleagues of all genders feel uncomfortable, but no-one ever says anything. This issue has been ongoing for quite some time and continues to escalate as no-one is calling it out.

One day, Coach Smith makes an inappropriate remark to a female tennis player while they're alone on court. The player doesn't know what to do, so she laughs it off to diffuse the situation before reporting it to a member of the committee at the end of her session. When confronted, Coach Smith is confused by these allegations as he has never been told that this behaviour is not appropriate at the club.

Possible actions you can take as a committee:

- If you don't already have one, develop and implement a policy to protect members and the wider community from sexual harassment and discrimination. Tennis Australia has [policies in place](#) to protect members and should be used to support the development of individual club practices (see page 14).
- Refer Coach Smith to Tennis Australia's [Code of Behaviour](#) and the club's Code of Conduct or Mission Statement so that he understands the kinds of behaviours that are and are not permitted in the club environment.
- Implement [gender equity training](#) for coaching staff, volunteers and leaders within the club. Support practical changes to apply what is learned to the club environment.
- Show public support for the female tennis player who experienced harassment by taking her allegations seriously and referring her to support services as needed, such as [1800RESPECT](#).
- Implement a statement of commitment at the club, highlighting the club's stance on allegations of harassment and discrimination, and the actions that will follow any allegation at the club, or by a member of the club.





Conclusion

This handbook has outlined a multi-strategic approach to create inclusive tennis clubs, including the implementation of policies to protect members, changes to the physical, social and structural environment within the club setting to enable accessibility, and the introduction of new practices that celebrate diversity.

These strategies contribute to a whole-of-sport approach to the primary prevention of violence against women, where gender is applied to all aspects of the club – from game day operations, to maintenance, leadership and participation.

This handbook applies an intersectional feminist approach to consider inclusion from a range of perspectives, and to introduce you to new ideas for action in your local tennis clubs. Further information located in the resources section has been included to assist you in putting these concepts into practice to support clubs to assess where they're at and measure progress, from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

Not only can tennis clubs create opportunities for marginalised groups to participate in the game, but they have significant influence in the community. Sporting clubs can educate members and the wider community about important social issues, and model inclusive behaviours.

Additionally, tennis clubs are an ideal setting to practice bystander action and empower members to call out inappropriate and disrespectful behaviours at the club.

As this type of work is rooted in structural change, it is a long-term approach that takes time and requires concerted effort by many people at all levels of the organisation. Your commitment to being part of social change and taking the first step towards more equitable tennis club culture is to be commended. You are playing a part in creating a broader culture where women, girls and gender-diverse people from all backgrounds and abilities feel welcomed.

Community sporting clubs, including tennis clubs, are the heart of the community – and should be truly representative of the community.

Putting it into practice

Resources and templates



Bystander Action 101

How to be an active bystander in your sporting club

Share these pages with members of your club to start the conversation about bystander action.

It is understood that by the time people speak up and challenge sexist language, sex discrimination or sexual harassment in the club, they have gone through some quick thinking and decision-making.

STEP 1

Decide whether the behaviours or practices you are seeing or hearing are sexist, ableist, discriminatory and/or disrespectful.

- What do your club's policies and procedures say about them?
- Are they outside of your agreed or expected team behaviours?
- If you are not sure, check with a club leader, such as a committee member or coach.

STEP 2

Decide whether you feel safe to step in.

- Will you be supported by your coach or a club leader if you do? Would this be something your coach or a club leader would expect you to challenge?
- Has your team agreed to challenge this kind of behaviour?
- Is there a risk of aggression or escalation of the situation if you intervene?

STEP 3

Decide whether taking bystander action will be helpful.

- If you were on the receiving end, would you want someone to step in for you? Will it result in a positive outcome?
- Will it make a positive difference to a person's behaviour or to the club culture?

STEP 4

Weigh up the seriousness of the behaviour or practice to decide how you might step in.

- Follow club policies and procedures on how to safely intervene, as appropriate.

These decisions can be hard to make on your own or in the moment, and it is helpful to talk with your club and leadership about why bystander action is important for creating a safe, respectful and inclusive club environment, and how to best to take bystander action.

Bystander action can be taken:

- in the moment when you see or hear about the event, behaviour or practice; or
- after the moment when the event, behaviour or practice took place.

What to say in the moment:

- Ask questions, such as “Why do you say that?” or “Is that respectful?”
- “I think what you are saying may be sexist/disrespectful.”
- “I don’t think that fits in with our club culture here at [name of tennis club].”
- “Is anyone else uncomfortable with that joke/comment/picture?”
- “I don’t agree with that.”
- “I’m sorry I don’t find that funny” or “Is that supposed to be funny?”
- “That goes against our inclusion policy/harassment policy/code of conduct.”
- Describe how the sexist comment or jokes makes you feel e.g. “That makes me feel uncomfortable.”

What to say after the moment:

- “I have thought about what happened before and I’m not sure it fits with our agreed behaviours at [name of tennis club].”
- “I’d like to have a chat with you about something you said before...”
- “I feel uncomfortable about the joke you told earlier. We have agreed that those types of jokes are not on.”
- “That might not have been a big deal to you but I think it was inappropriate.”

Taking bystander action at any time is important, because doing nothing supports and encourages the behaviours and attitudes.



Bystander Action 101

How to be an active bystander in your sporting club

Some action examples are:

- telling a club member their behaviour is not appropriate in the club
- stepping in when a club member is behaving inappropriately to another person
- speaking up when someone tells a sexist joke or shows you sexist images
- telling your coach or another club leader when you hear of an incident of sexual harassment, disrespect or discrimination
- speaking up if club members or club practices reinforce gender stereotypes, such as women completing tasks in the kitchen or men's achievements receiving more accolades and attention than women's
- discussing with your coach or a club leader any language or content in your policies or procedures that you think may need to be updated or changed to promote inclusiveness
- talking to players, spectators or club leaders about the culture at the club
- supporting a player or coach who is making a complaint about discrimination or sexual harassment; and
- actively seeking opportunities to be inclusive, such as actively engage those from non-traditional sporting backgrounds to participate in the club. For example, women with disabilities may engage with clubs as participants, workers, volunteers and spectators, and discriminatory language and practices impact on these.



Social media checklist¹⁶

- ✓ The club's social media content and website communications reflect your club's commitment to inclusion and diversity.
- ✓ The club uses simple, direct language to convey social media messages.
- ✓ The club's social media and website is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, and text descriptions and/or captions are provided as alternatives to images and videos
- ✓ The club uses real images of real people from your club and community on your social media. Images do not reinforce gender stereotypes (bonus points if they challenge them!)
- ✓ The club's values are reflected in your social media activity. If you make a mistake, the club publicly acknowledges it, apologises (if appropriate) and moves on
- ✓ The club's social media content celebrates all parts of your club and community equally.



Further reading and useful links

Evidence base

- [Change the Story: National framework for the prevention of violence against women](#) (Our Watch)
- [A team effort: Preventing violence against women through sport – Evidence guide](#) (Our Watch)
- [How sport can help Change the Story: Preventing violence against women through sport](#) (Our Watch)

Implementing gender equality at your club – guides, checklists and templates

- [Doing Sport Differently: A guide for sports clubs](#) (VicHealth and Vicsport)
- [This Girl Can: Getting Women Active Guide](#) (VicHealth)
- [Recruitment and Retention Guidelines for Women in Sport and Recreation](#) (Change Our Game)
- [Women in Sport and Recreation: Communications and Marketing Strategies](#) (Change Our Game)
- [Quick wins for sporting clubs checklist](#) (VicHealth)
- [Equality and Respect in Sport: Implementation guide](#) (Our Watch)
- [Checklist for Gender Equality in Sports survey](#) (Sport North East)
- [Getting women to sign up for physical activity: A step-by-step guide from This Girl Can – Victoria](#) (Sign Up to the Supporters Hub to access)
- [Courageous Conversations Charter](#) (Women's Health Goulburn North East) (See page 2 for Example Statement of Commitment)
- [Courageous Conversations: Sporting Club Respect and Equity Policy template](#) (Women's Health Goulburn North East)
- [Gender Equality – Member Survey](#) (Tennis Victoria)

Other resources

- [Words at Work: Building inclusion through the power of language](#) (Diversity Council Australia)
- [Courageous Conversations – Resources](#) (Women's Health Goulburn North East)
- [Getting Women Active](#) (VicHealth)

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