

NOT IN OUR NAME



How to talk about the weaponisation
of violence against women and girls

A practical guide

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FOREWORD

We all want to live free from violence. As organisations defending the rights of women and migrant people in the UK, our work is grounded in this shared belief.

Every act of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an injustice, causing profound harm to individuals and communities. As we help victim-survivors to access justice, support and freedom from harm, we are also working to repair the wider damage this violence causes across society by helping to build safer communities rooted in dignity, equality, and respect.

The weaponisation of this violence threatens to pull us apart.

VAWG is not a tool for political point-scoring. It is not a justification for racism, xenophobia or hostility. And yet it is increasingly used in this way, wielded as a weapon to target migrant people, refugees, and people seeking asylum, and to make our communities less safe. In moments of national tragedy, misinformation and disinformation have been used to feed into an anti-migration rhetoric to divide communities and stoke further violence. This is not limited to isolated incidents – it is reinforced daily on social media, in the news, and even in Parliament.



The weaponisation of VAWG has spread rapidly, and if left unchecked, it will continue to fuel harm, deepen division, and undermine the respect and freedom of our communities.

VAWG has reached critical levels in the UK, with a woman being murdered by a partner or ex-partner every four days and nearly one in three women experiencing domestic abuse in her lifetime. This is happening against the backdrop of scandals exposing endemic abuse, widespread impunity, the normalisation of violent misogyny and the glaring holes in our justice and support systems. Instead of focusing on tackling the root causes of violence and abuse and investing in life-saving services, VAWG is increasingly being used as a key tool for political gain.

Our response to politicians, activists and journalists who weaponise VAWG to justify harm is clear: **not in our name.**

To build a world where women and girls are free from violence, we need to tackle the misinformation, hostility and racism that put us all at risk. If we don't, we make all women more vulnerable to abuse. Ending VAWG requires collective action – a responsibility shared by all of us. The UK government, media and public must act now and change the narrative. **This guide is designed to help us do just that.**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was researched and written by Kathryn Quinton. We drew on – and are indebted to – existing framing research and communications guidance, in particular, that by [Reframing Race](#) and [Zero Tolerance](#), and messaging work from IMIX.

WHY THIS GUIDE IS NEEDED

Deepening poverty and inequality, rising costs and cuts to public services are shrinking opportunity, agency and hope, and causing distrust, powerlessness and anger in our communities.



The right – and by that we mean anyone who has adopted hardline regressive views on issues like immigration – has stepped onto this fertile ground for division. They're blaming migrant people for everything that's wrong in people's lives for political gain. And they're using violence against women and girls as a powerful weapon in this campaign.

This tactic is nothing new, and its impact is devastating. It's reinforcing the 'stranger-danger' myth, taking political and public attention away from the real causes of and solutions to violence against women and girls. And it's increasing the risk of harm and marginalisation of Black, minoritised and migrant victim-survivors. Far from 'protecting' women and girls, it's making all women and girls more unsafe.

How we talk about this issue – to the media, with politicians, and with the people in our lives – is important. It sits alongside the other strategies we use and the actions we take to respond effectively to what is happening in our communities.

The right understands the power of the words they use. And they choose them carefully to rally support. As progressive communicators and people who care about equality and social justice, we need to do the same. There's a science to this – and that's where framing comes in.

This guide aims to equip you with the knowledge and tactics you need to communicate about this issue persuasively. That doesn't mean watering down the hard truths about what's going on – it's about framing these truths in a way that maximises the chances they'll be heard, considered, and acted on.



WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is for anyone who is alarmed by – and wants to have more effective conversations about – how some politicians and groups are using violence against women to stoke division for political gain. For example, campaigners and communicators, frontline and community workers, and journalists.

WHO THE MESSAGES ARE FOR

The main target audience for the approach and messages is the ‘persuadable public’ – people who care about the issue, but who are relatively uninformed and vulnerable to unintentional and deliberate inaccurate information. What this sizeable segment of the public thinks and feels has a considerable influence on political thinking and policy choices.

You can also use the approach and messages with Government decision-makers. They have the power to enact the solutions needed. And, as they’re people, too, and part of wider culture, they can be and are influenced by the dominant narrative about social issues.



TEN KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR IF YOU'VE ONLY GOT A FEW MINUTES...



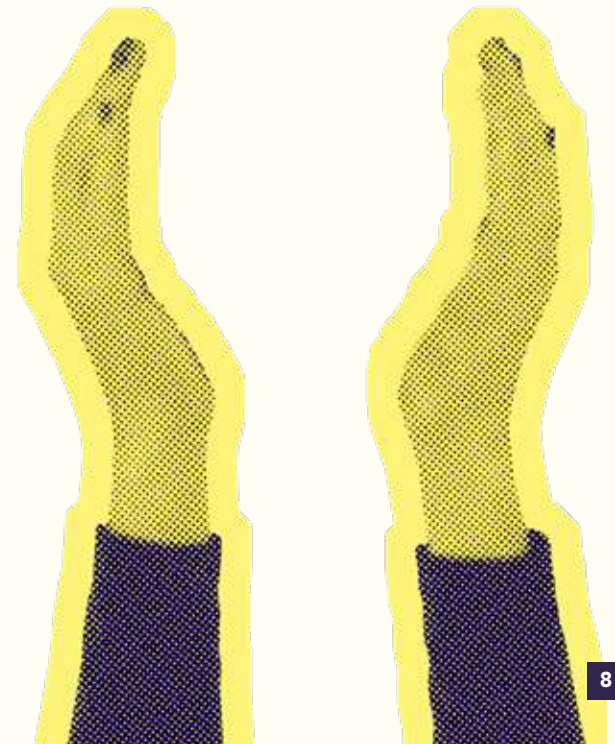
- 1. Remember most people are kind.** Most people are kind, compassionate and trying to do their best. But they might be relatively uninformed about violence against women and girls and about immigration, and exposed to and swayed by the harmful and regressive views on these and other issues that they're exposed to day after day.



- 2. Find common ground.** Effective conversations are about finding common ground and appealing to people's better selves, not winning an argument. That means listening to understand and asking open questions to establish rapport and trust.



- 3. Facts alone don't work.** Our hearts rule our heads (even if we think they don't). So, avoid making the mistake of trying to convince people of the truth about violence against women and girls or about immigration by telling them the facts alone. If those facts jar with what people already believe deep down, they'll ignore or reject them.





4. Lean into 'good' values. Frame facts with the 'good' values we all share instead. Values like freedom (from harm; to live), mutual care and concern, community, equality and justice, and appealing to our common humanity. When talking about violence against women and girls, avoid naming the values of 'safety' and 'protection' that have been co-opted by the right. And avoid the value of 'fairness' when talking about migrant people, as this can lead people to think in terms of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and reinforce the 'good migrant/bad migrant' narrative.



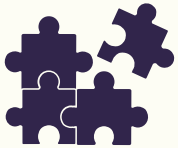
5. Tell a new story. Always tell or pivot to the new story – the truth about violence against women and girls and the reality for migrant people – using your own words, instead of reinforcing the harmful story by repeating it. If you don't have control over the story – for example, in reactive communications – you can use a 'truth sandwich' instead. That means starting with the truth, indicating the lie and ending with the truth. This helps make sure that the key takeaway message is the truth not the lie.



6. Be clear and on point. To maximise the chance people will pay attention to your message, use plain language, avoid jargon and explain complex terms – like racism and misogyny – rather than assuming people understand what they mean. And focus on the issue and resist engaging too much with diversions from the original point.



7. Foreground hope. Remember that hope is a powerful motivator. And fear can cause us to look for simple answers to complex problems (for example, wrongly blaming migrant people for everything wrong in our lives). Avoid crisis talk and focus on the good future we want rather than the bad things we want to get rid of.



8. Offer concrete and realistic solutions so that people can see and believe that change is possible. And name the villains and heroes – the people and things responsible for both causing and solving the issue.



9. Tell the structural story. When you use personal stories to bring the issue to life and create an emotional connection, make sure you tell the structural story behind the personal one, so that it's not dismissed as a one-off.



10. Be careful with metaphors. Avoid (inadvertently) using or repeating harmful metaphors that dehumanise people. For example, water metaphors, like flood (of), and rise (in numbers) that are commonly used in relation to migrant people.

WHAT WE MEAN BY FRAMING

Framing shapes how people make sense of what they hear. The science of framing recognises that our heart governs our head (even if we think it doesn't) and shows us how to communicate in a way that persuades people to think differently about the issues we work on.

Everything is framed. The frame through which we view something has huge implications for how we think and feel about that issue, the actions we take and, crucially, the solutions we support.

In practice, framing is being intentional about what we say and don't say about an issue. And there are some key principles of framing we can apply to talking about this issue.



PUTTING FRAMING INTO PRACTICE ON THIS ISSUE

Below are some things to do and things to avoid, with examples of what this looks like in practice. The examples are message parts, not complete messages.

- What makes us human
- A new and truthful story
- Hope, solutions and agency
- A bigger 'us'
- Be plain and explain





What makes us human



	What this looks like in practice
<p>Lead with the 'good' values of freedom (from harm; to live), mutual care and concern, community, equality and justice that we all share to connect this issue to things people care about.</p> <p>This shows how the issue goes against these values and opens the door to the facts being heard and acted on.</p> <p>That includes appealing to our common humanity – things like respect, dignity and kindness.</p>	<p>“ We all want to be free from harm and to choose how to live our lives. But too many women live with the daily reality of violence from someone they know. In fact, two women a week in the UK are murdered by their current or a former partner.”</p> <p>“ Most of us want to live in communities where we get along and look out for one another. But some politicians and groups are turning us against each other. And the more they divide us, the more we stand to lose.”</p> <p>“ Freedom, equality, respect. These are things we stand for and are proud of and that we teach our kids at school. But anti-migrant attitudes are causing fear in our communities and driving an increase in violence against Black, migrant and minority ethnic women.”</p> <p>“ Compassionate, kind, decent. This who we are. The increase in violence against migrant people demeans us all.”</p>
<p>Centre the dignity, agency and personhood of women who have experienced violence.</p>	<p>“ Women who have experienced violence want access to specialist support.”</p>



What this looks like in practice

Avoid leading with facts alone as these will be ignored or rejected outright if they don't fit with people's existing (often unconscious) deeper beliefs about the world.

“ Too many women live with the daily reality of violence from someone they know. In fact, two women a week in the UK are murdered by their current or a former partner.”

“ Some politicians and groups are trying to divide us, stirring up fear and hate for political gain.”

“ There has been an increase in violence against Black, migrant and minority ethnic women.”

Avoid the values of 'protection' or 'safety' and talking about 'protecting' women or keeping women 'safe' as this risks:

“ We all want to feel and be safe.”

“ The Government should make protecting women and girls from violence a political priority.”

- reinforcing the right's framing
- tapping into some men's fears and anger about no longer being able to be a provider and protector of women and children (a role that has traditionally conferred status and power)
- reinforces the power imbalance between men and women.



What this looks like in practice

Avoid the value of 'fairness' as this can lead people to think in terms of 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. This is particularly harmful for migrant people as it can reinforce the 'good migrant/bad migrant' narrative.

“ Most of us value fairness and want to live in a fair society. And migrant people deserve that, too.”

Avoid centering the victimhood of women who have experienced violence, as this risks taking away their dignity, agency and personhood.

“ Victims of violence struggle to receive the support they need.”



A new and truthful story



What this looks like in practice

Tell a *new* story – the truth – about the issue, using your own language.

“ Men of all backgrounds and walks of life harm women.”
“ Violence against women and girls is caused by inequality between men and women.”



What this looks like in practice

If you can't avoid repeating the lie – for example, in reactive communications – try using a 'truth sandwich'.

Truth sandwiches are a technique developed by cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, to counter misinformation without spreading it.

People tend to recall the first and last information they hear. So, you start with the truth, briefly indicate the lie and end with the truth.

What this looks like in practice

“ Violence is committed predominately by men known to the women they harm and by men from every background and walk of life.

There's no evidence that migrant men are more violent than anyone else.

90% of perpetrators are known to their victims. They're brothers, fathers, partners and friends.”



What this looks like in practice

Avoid repeating the lie. This reinforces it in people's minds, which is why myth-busting backfires.

And avoid words like 'not', 'isn't' or 'doesn't' to refute something as this falls into the same trap.

Avoid using a 'truth sandwich' unless you really need to.

What this looks like in practice

“ Violence against women is also perpetrated by migrant people.”

“ Violence against women and girls isn't down to a few bad apples.”

“ Migrant people aren't a drain on our economy.”



Hope, solutions and agency



	What this looks like in practice
<p>As hope motivates, centre it and focus on the future we want.</p>	<p>“ We know unity and kindness are more than possible – we see it in communities across the UK.”</p> <p>“ We want a world where women can be free from harm and choose how to live their lives.”</p>
<p>Give concrete and realistic solutions for achieving the desired future. When you do this, people are more likely to believe it’s possible and get behind them.</p> <p>These can be short-term practical solutions to reduce harm and long-term solutions to prevent it happening in the first place.</p>	<p>“ There are lots of ways to prevent violence against women and girls and to support those who have already been harmed. We can teach children about respect, hold tech companies to account, and make sure specialist support is available for all women who are harmed.”</p>
<p>And show how we’ve achieved progress on this issue in the past to make it feel tangible and possible.</p>	<p>“ The increase in public outrage about violence against women. The Government funding safe homes for women. Employers adopting domestic abuse policies. And proposed changes to the law to improve the treatment of victims in rape trials. These things and more show us that progress is possible.”</p>



	What this looks like in practice
When you suggest policy or legal solutions, talk about the difference these will make to bring them to life.	“ We need proper funding of specialist support services, so every woman who needs it receives support to recover and heal from trauma.”
Show and explain the structures and systems behind personal stories to avoid them being dismissed as ‘one-offs’ – down to individual characteristics or circumstances. And show that those systems and structures can be changed.	“ Harry’s abuse of Hannah has its root in centuries of men’s dominance of women.” “ Racism is a system of ideas, laws and ways of doing things that limits people’s freedom and chance at a decent life.”
Name the people or groups with the power and responsibility to make changes to solve the issue.	“ ‘The Government needs to stop people spreading inaccurate information about violence against women deliberately.”



	What this looks like in practice
Avoid talking in terms of crisis or focusing on the things we want to stop. Crisis framing leads to fatalism – feeling like an issue is just too big or complicated to solve so there’s no point in trying.	“ We’re experiencing a huge increase in violence against women and girls. This needs to end.”



	What this looks like in practice
Avoid just talking about the problems without offering credible solutions.	“ Violence against women is one of society’s most serious and urgent problems. Around 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime. And violence against women makes up nearly 20% of all recorded crime in England and Wales.”
And don’t focus on the long-term vision alone because it can feel unrealistic and unreachable.	“ We will solve violence against women.”
Avoid talking about the policies or legislation alone.	“ We need legislation to make gender-based harassment in public an offence.”
Avoid focusing on the individual story alone.	“ Harry abused Hannah.”
Avoid making assertions about structures and systems – like racism and misogyny – assuming people will understand what you mean.	“ ‘Racism and misogyny are the reason for the increase in attacks against migrant women.’”
And don’t be vague about how an issue came about and who’s responsible for addressing it.	“ Hostility against migrant people is on the rise in our communities.” (NB. ‘Rise’ is a metaphor that suggests what’s happening is a naturally occurring phenomenon rather than intentional harm.) “ People who intentionally spread misinformation need to be held to account.”



A bigger 'us'



	What this looks like in practice
Expand the sphere of concern to promote unity and bring everyone in.	<p>“ Most of us want to get along with one other. When someone in our community is harmed, it harms us all.”</p> <p>“ When women are harmed, whole communities suffer. Equality lifts all of us up.”</p>
And show how men can be part of the solution of ending violence against women. The positive role they can play in building a more just and equal world for all.	<p>“ Both men and women have a part to play in ending violence against women. To be positive role models for our sons and create healthier and more equal communities.”</p> <p>“ Ending violence against women and girls is everyone’s business. Men and boys have an important role to play.”</p>



	What this looks like in practice
Avoid (inadvertently) reinforcing 'us and 'them' narratives.	<p>“ We need to help migrants to settle into our communities.”</p>
Avoid sidelining or downplaying the role that men can and do play in ending violence against women and girls.	<p>“ Men can help to end violence against women, too.”</p>



Be plain and explain

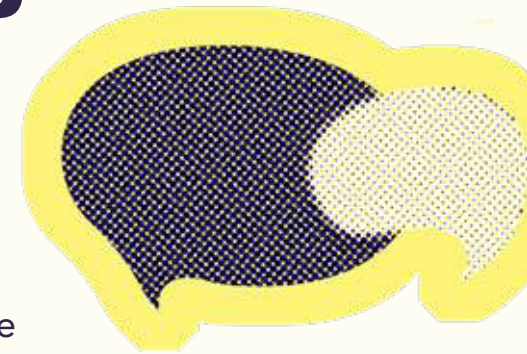


	What this looks like in practice
Use plain language.	“ Men can be violent towards any woman. But some women – such as Black, Disabled and migrant women – face abuse more than other women. The Government needs to address this.”
Use metaphors to explain complex concepts simply and compellingly – ideally ones that have already been tested with the public. For example, this effective metaphor for explaining systemic racism from Reframing Race .	“ Underlying racism is a system of ideas, laws and customary ways of doing things. Together this system is like a birdcage. Each wire of the cage represents one aspect of how society limits key opportunities and freedoms – such as whether someone can leave school hopeful about the future, live in a decent home, or get a good job.”



	What this looks like in practice
Avoid using jargon and complex language or terms unless you're confident the audience will understand them, as this can get in the way of the message being heard and understood. For example, many people will not be familiar with the term 'minoritised'.	“ The Government strategy should incorporate policies and targets to address the disproportionate victimisation of Black and minoritised, migrant and asylum-seeking, Disabled and LGBT+ survivors.”
Avoid using metaphors unthinkingly as they can dehumanise people. For example, water metaphors – like 'flood' (of), 'flow' (of) 'waves' (of) and 'rise' (in numbers) – that are commonly used in relation to migrant people.	“ Current Government policy to stop the flow of people moving to the UK is inhumane.”

RESPONDING TO CONVERSATIONS AND NEWS IN THE MOMENT

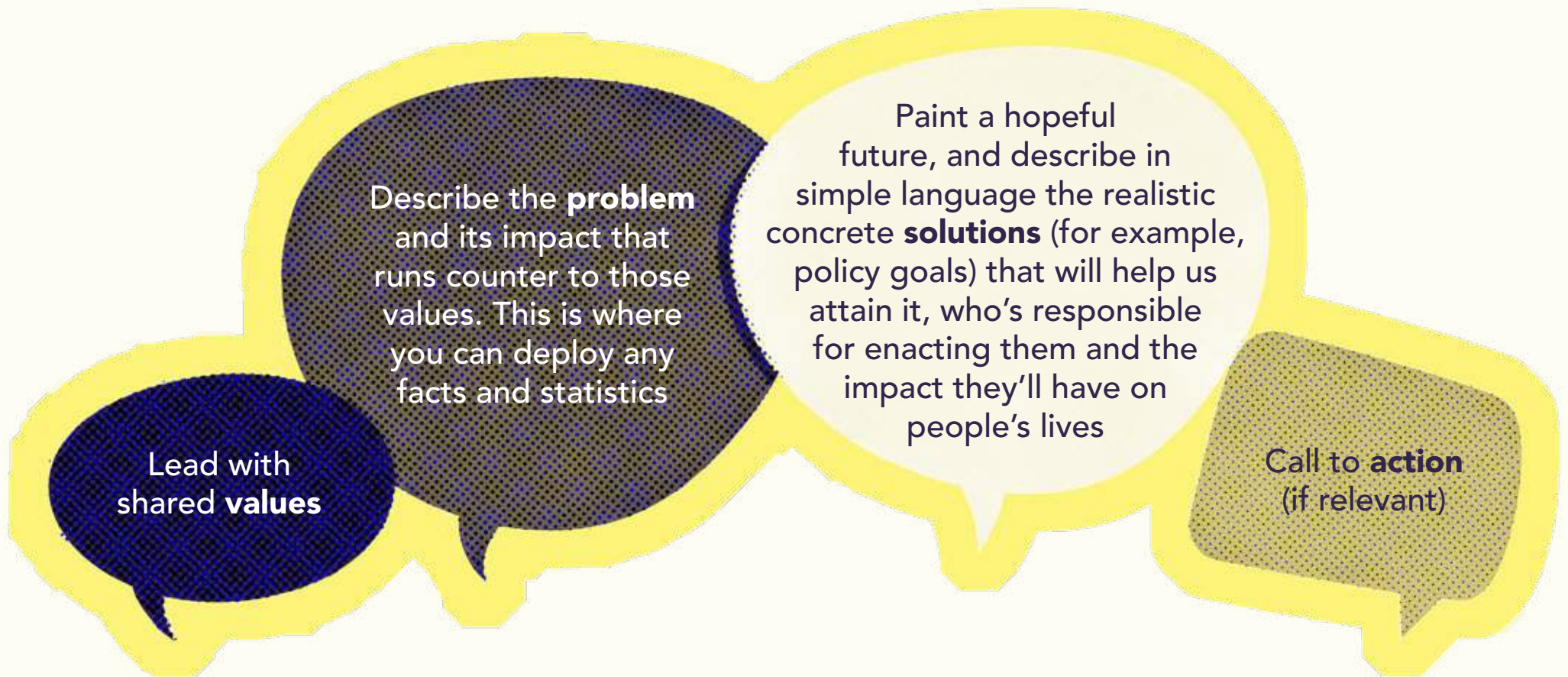


Often, we must respond to something in the moment. That might be a news story, a challenging question from a constituent if we're a politician, or a conversation with a colleague or friend. Here are some tips on how to do that effectively.

- 1.** Approach a conversation as an exercise in finding common ground rather than winning an argument. Listen to understand the other's fears, concerns, needs, and hopes. And ask open questions to encourage them to open up, and to establish a rapport and trust.
- 2.** Share any personal stories you know – anonymously, with care and with the person's consent – to build a more human and intimate connection with the issue. And remember the importance of highlighting the structural nature of those stories.
- 3.** Always give prominence to the story you want to tell. That means shifting the focus from the inaccurate to the true story about the issue as soon as you can, leaning into shared 'good' values, like community, equality, freedom and mutual concern, and avoiding any jargon or complex terms.
- 4.** If you use facts in a conversation, do so gently and with care, and only after building some trust and rapport.
- 5.** If you spot any inconsistencies in the other's views, point these out lightly and kindly to encourage them to think more about the issue.

BUILDING OUR MESSAGES

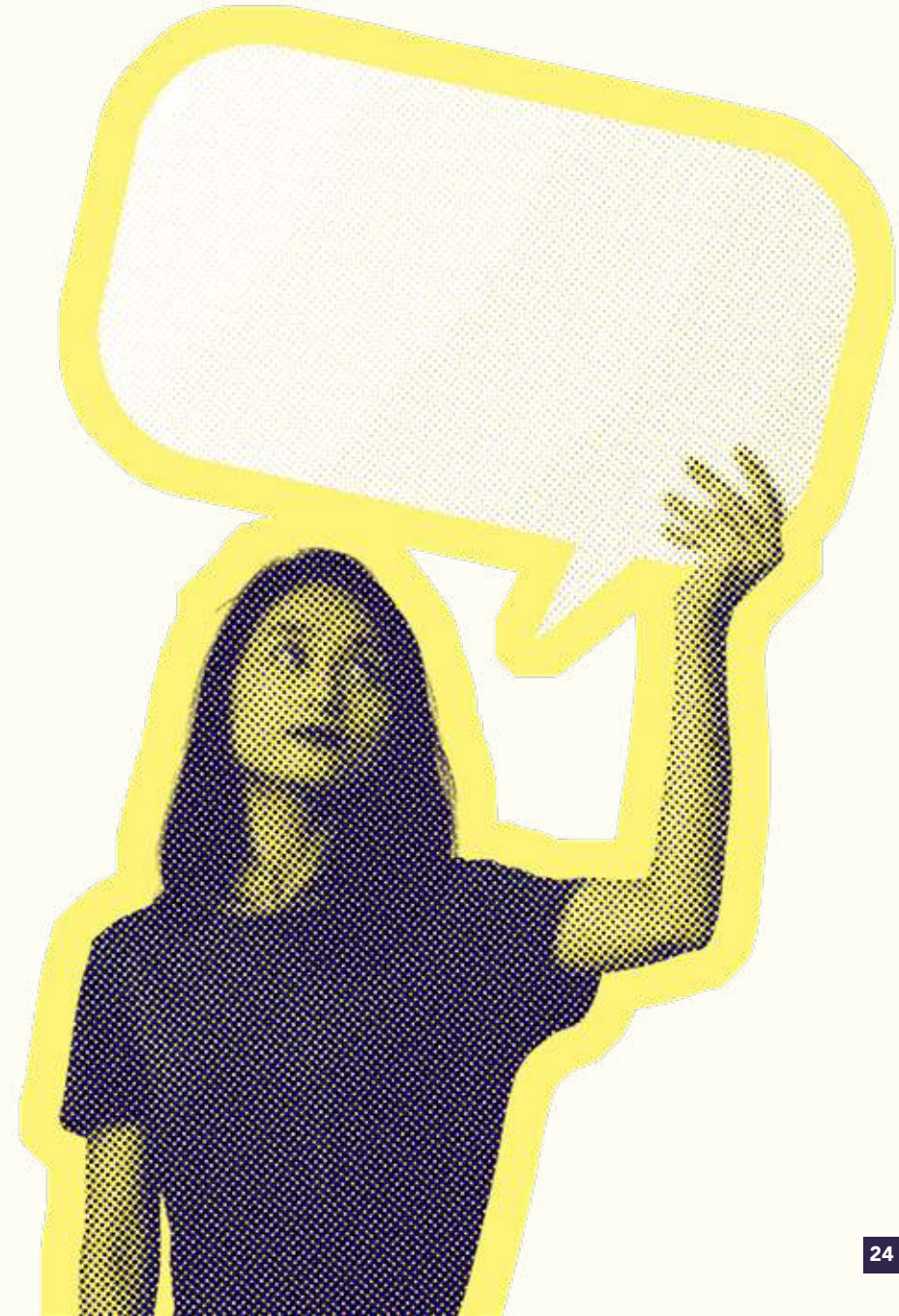
Below is a simple general formula for structuring messages in a way that maximises the chance they'll be heard and acted on.



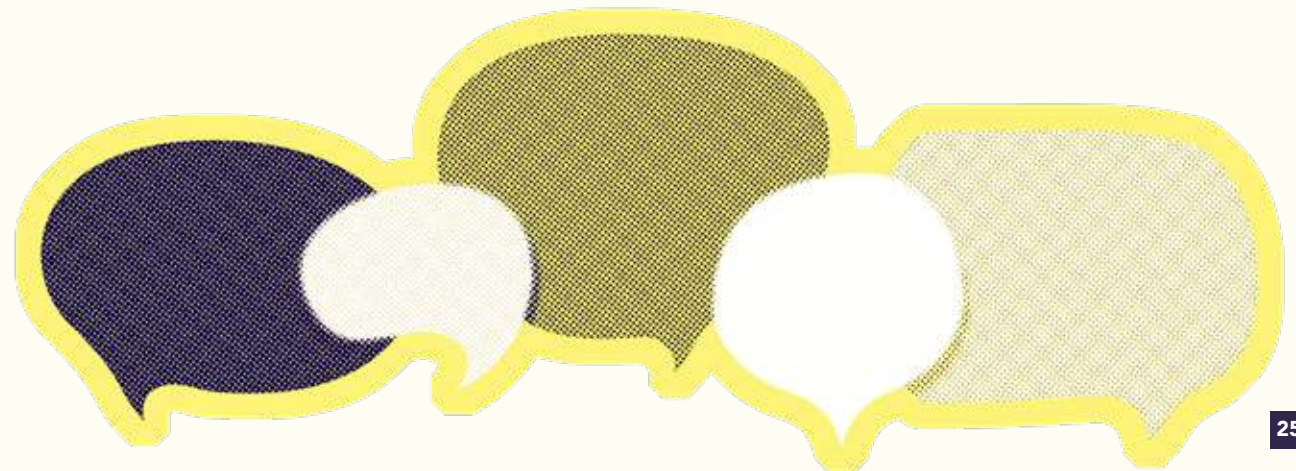
KEY MESSAGES

Below are some key messages to use and adapt for different purposes and channels. There are full messages and shorter versions of these. They're designed to:

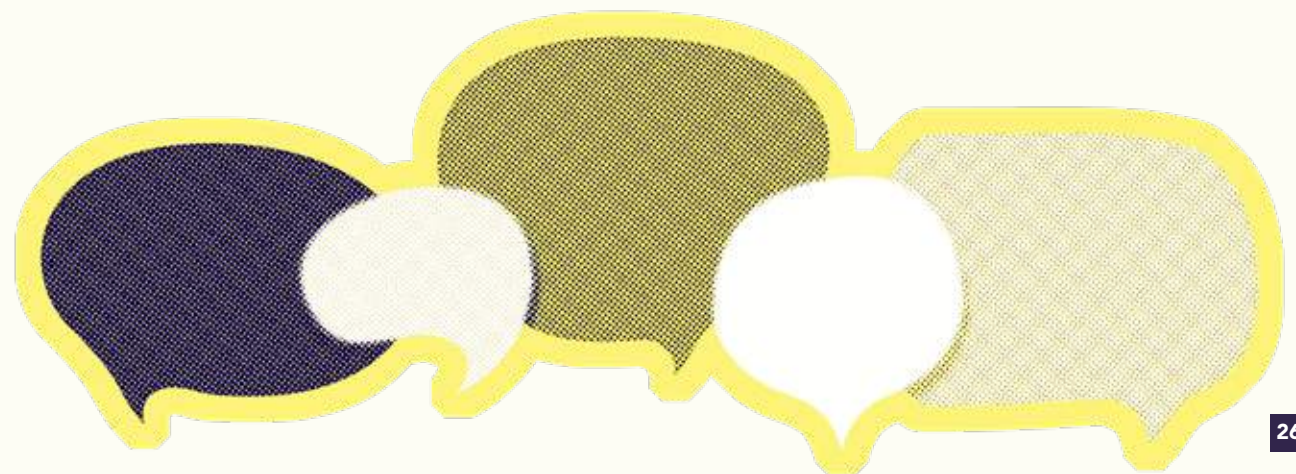
- expand understanding of the issue
- surface the real causes of division in our communities
- show that positive, progressive change is possible and what that looks like
- foster unity, mutual care and concern, hope, and the motivation to end violence against women and girls.



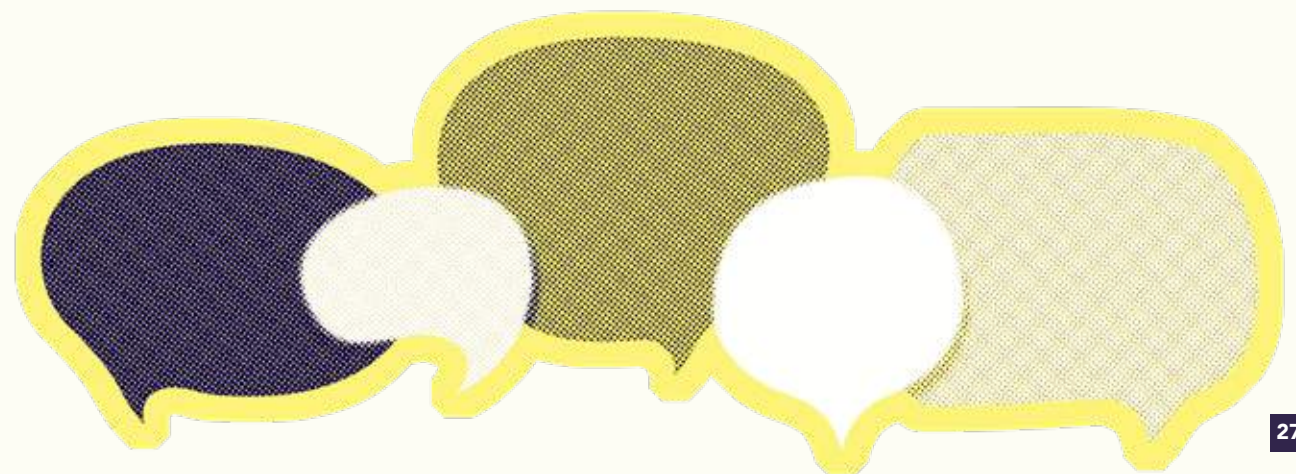
Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To surface the real causes of division and hate in our communities.</p>	<p>We all want a chance at a decent quality of life. And a big part of that is about kindness and getting along with one another.</p> <p>But lots of us are struggling right now. And that's because government choices over many years have run down our schools, hospitals and communities. And made it harder for many of us to afford even some of the basics in life.</p> <p>This situation has left many of us feeling frustrated and powerless, and it's causing division and blame in our communities. None of us want that.</p> <p>By creating opportunities and choosing to invest in people, our communities and the public services we all rely on – to invest in hope – the Government can give us all a better chance at a decent life.</p>	<p>We all want a decent quality of life. But government choices have run down our services and communities and made it harder to afford even the basics in life.</p> <p>None of us want or benefit from the division this is causing.</p> <p>By believing and investing in us and the services we rely on, the Government can give us all a better chance at a decent life.</p>



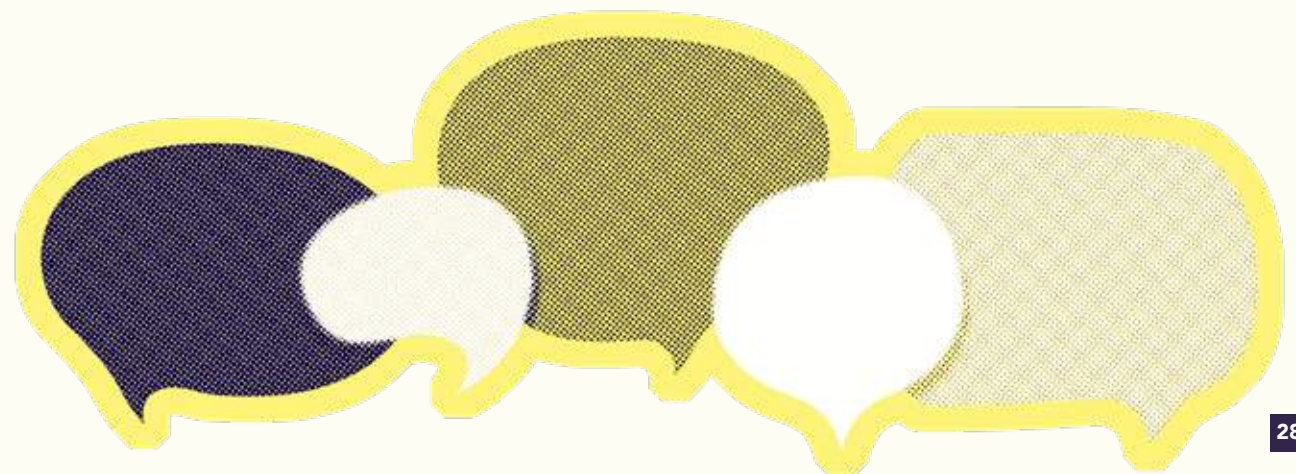
Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To show how the rhetoric and actions of some politicians and groups go against our shared values.</p>	<p>Compassion, community and kindness. This is who we are. But some politicians and groups are turning us against each other for their own gain. And the more they divide us, the more we stand to lose.</p> <p>Looking out for each other and helping each other when we're in need – this is the beating heart of communities. It's what makes them strong and places where we all belong.</p> <p>We're proud of our tradition of mutual respect. And we know we can be proud of it again because it's always been there in our communities. Let's stand together for unity and hope.</p>	<p>Compassion, community and kindness are who we are and are proud of. But some politicians and groups are turning us against each other. And the more they divide us, the more we stand to lose.</p> <p>Let's stand together for decency, unity and hope.</p>



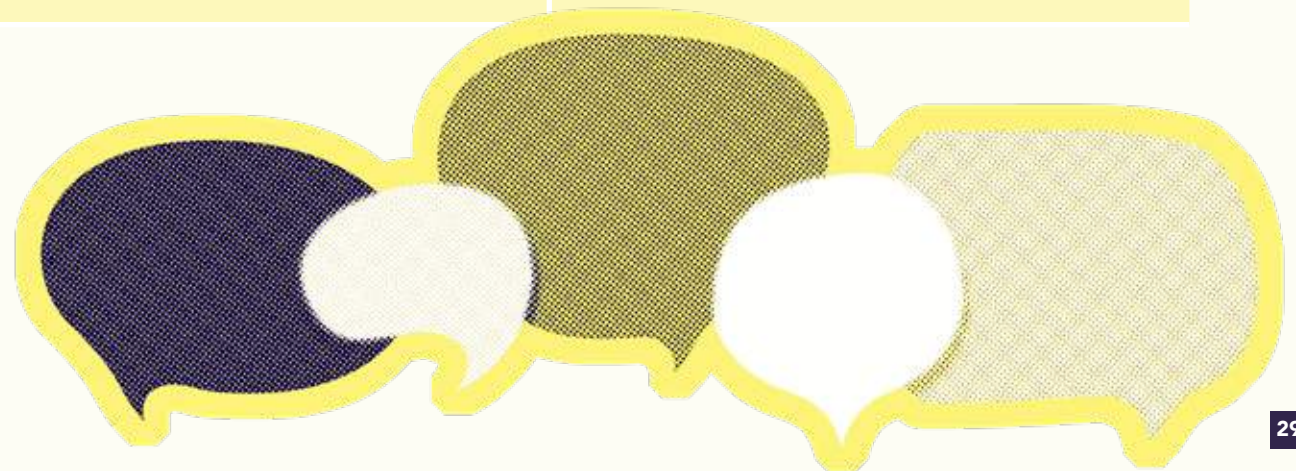
Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To explain why some politicians and groups are spreading false messages about violence against women and girls.</p>	<p>Most of us value honesty. We expect our politicians to be truthful and fair and to have our best interests at heart.</p> <p>But some politicians and groups are exploiting our fears about violence against women and girls and spreading lies about who's responsible for this violence to gain popularity and to divide us.</p> <p>The truth is most abusers are already known to the women and girls they harm. They're brothers, fathers, partners and friends.</p>	<p>Most of us value honesty and expect our politicians to be truthful and have our best interests at heart.</p> <p>But some politicians and groups are spreading lies about violence against women and girls to divide us, even though the truth is that women are mostly harmed by people they already know.</p>



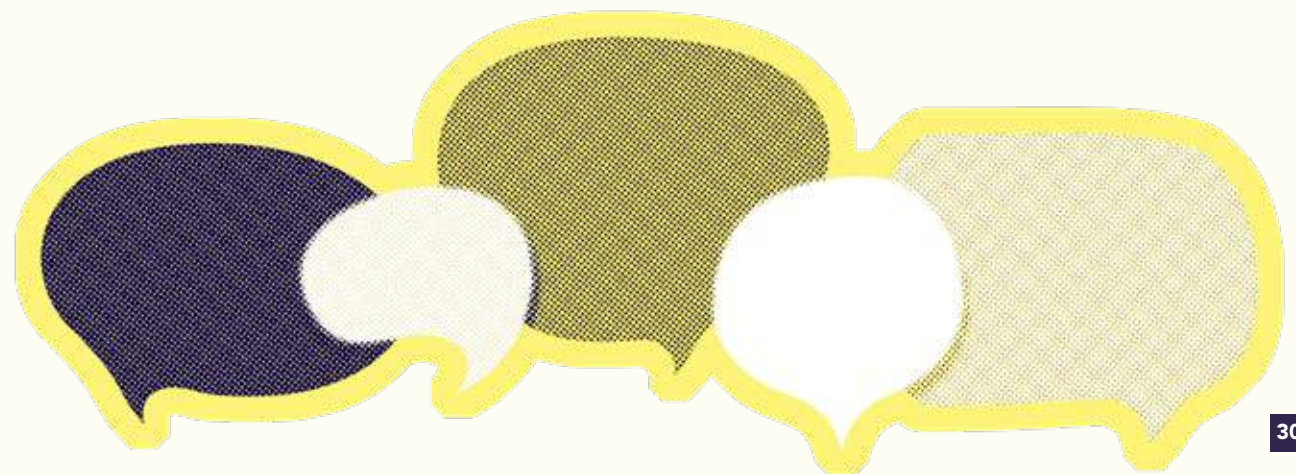
Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To show how blaming migrant people for violence against women is impeding progress on ending violence against all women.</p> <p>The longer message is a 'truth sandwich'</p>	<p>We all want to live the life we choose and be free from harm. But too many women still live with the daily reality of violence from men.</p> <p>It can be a difficult fact to swallow, but ninety percent of abusers are already known to the women they harm. They're brothers, fathers, partners and friends.</p> <p>So, it just doesn't make sense that some politicians are saying that migrant men are more of a threat to women. This false claim is putting all the women and girls in our lives at greater risk of harm because it's getting in the way of the real work to end violence.</p> <p>Most men are already known to the women they harm. The Government needs to step in when people are spreading inaccurate information about violence against women so we can work together to end it.</p>	<p>We all want to live the life we choose and be free from harm. But too many women still live with the daily reality of violence from men.</p> <p>Most men are already known to the women they harm. The Government needs to stop people spreading inaccurate information about who's responsible for this harm so we can work together to end it.</p>



Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To explain the facts about violence against women and girls – the who and the why.</p>	<p>We all want to choose how to live our lives, to be equal and free from harm. But too many women live with the daily reality of violence from men.</p> <p>These men come from all backgrounds and walks of life. And it's a hard fact to swallow, but 90% are already known to the women they harm – they're people's brothers, fathers, partners and friends. In fact, two women a week in the UK are murdered by their current or a former partner.</p> <p>Men's violence against women is caused by things being unequal between men and women. That inequality comes from an enduring belief that men are superior to women and should have power over them.</p> <p>What harms women harms us all. Equality is good for everyone. It goes hand in hand with respect, and it lifts us all up.</p>	<p>We all want to choose how to live our lives, to be equal and free from harm. But too many women live with the daily reality of violence from men.</p> <p>These men come from all backgrounds and walks of life, and most are already known to the women they harm.</p> <p>Men's violence against women is caused by things being unequal between men and women.</p> <p>What harms women harms us all. Equality is good for everyone.</p>



Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>To show how anti-migrant attitudes are causing an increase in violence against Black, minoritised and migrant women.</p>	<p>Freedom, equality, respect, tolerance. These are the things we stand for and that we teach our kids at school.</p> <p>But anti-migrant attitudes are causing fear in our communities. And this is driving an increase in violence against Black, migrant and minority ethnic women, who are being attacked in the street and outside their homes simply for who they are.</p> <p>This is not who we are or who we want to be. What harms some people harms everyone. And anti-migrant attitudes and behaviour are getting in the way of the real work to end violence against women and girls.</p> <p>Let's be better role models and show each other the respect, tolerance and kindness we all expect.</p>	<p>Freedom, equality, respect, tolerance. These are the things we stand for and that we teach our kids at school.</p> <p>But anti-migrant attitudes are leading some people to attack Black, migrant and minority ethnic women in the street and outside their homes simply for who they are.</p> <p>Let's be better role models and show each other the respect, tolerance, and kindness we all expect.</p>



Message purpose	Full message	Shorter message
<p>Show that it's possible to end violence against women and girls by highlighting progress that's already been made and offering tangible and achievable solutions.</p>	<p>Most of us care about one another and want to live our lives freely.</p> <p>Violence against women and girls harms us all and we all have a role in ending it. For example, we can question harmful comments we might hear and be better role models to our kids and each other.</p> <p>And we can demand that the Government do things like make sure that our kids are taught about equality and respect, regulate the social media that's putting women and girls at risk, take action to prevent abuse, and give all women who are harmed the specialist support they need.</p> <p>Because we've already made some progress on ending violence against women and girls – for example, increasing public awareness and outrage and improving the treatment of victims in rape trials – we know it's possible for us to end it once and for all.</p>	<p>Most of us care about one another and want to live our lives freely.</p> <p>We all have a role to play in ending violence against women and girls. And we know it's possible because we've already made some progress.</p>

Contact us

To get in touch about this guide, visit each organisation's website for contact details.

