

Counsellors Corner

Respect for women and girls

From the parliament to the schoolyard and everywhere in between, questions around respectful relationships have come to the fore: specifically, about the mistreatment of women and girls.

Whether this does turn out to be a turning point, an inflection, a change of mindset, a breakthrough, a reckoning – none of that is clear. Whether the momentum will last is unknown. But the importance of cultivating respectful relationships, and challenging disrespect, remains.

Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins, Chanel Contos – these women have drawn national focus on how we relate to one another, and specifically on how boys and men relate to girls and women, in schools and workplaces, families and institutions, businesses and streets, in person and online. Many issues have been identified in discussion about what's needed: holding people to account, change of culture, calling out misbehaviour, better education, improved legal processes, principled leadership, and more.

Against a background of ongoing domestic and family violence, including coercive control, resulting in trauma to many and even death to some, the need for change is clear, and women have recently marched in protest, sick of disrespect continuing.

Chanel Contos, whose inquiry among her peers about unwanted sexual encounters during their school years was inundated with thousands of examples, has focused on the need for better education on consent.

In forming our youth, the influence of pornography in shaping male attitudes is a concern, given that mainstream porn portrays stereotypes about women, men, power, and aggression in a bubble where consent is non-existent.

<https://itstimewetalked.com/parents/>

Catholic Schools NSW has tasked a three-person panel to examine how sexual consent and respectful relationships are taught, and the views of parents/carers will be included. Education about sex needs to extend beyond "bugs, babies and bodies".

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/catholic-schools-to-review-how-sexual-consent-is-taught-in-religious-context-20210312-p57a8i.html#sections>

At school we must do our part, but Briony Scott, principal of Wenona School, writes that "none of what we do in schools can counteract the flow of passive leadership and wilful blindness at a community and national level."

<https://www.smh.com.au/education/schools-can-t-end-the-scurge-of-sexual-assault-adults-behaving-like-adults-can-20210222-p574qz.html>

We all, men and boys especially, must do better.

Martin Graham
School Counsellor