 The boss of me

Suggested duration: 60 minutes

These activities have been adapted from Headspace, Is it just me? Find information: anger[[1]](#footnote-1) and are based on information from Assert Yourself [[2]](#footnote-2) Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

This is one activity in a sequence designed to investigate the issue of violence and extremism with a focus on the skills required to objectively consider these issues within a context of positive relationships, identity, rights and responsibilities and intercultural understanding.

The activities seek to empower students with the skills to critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts, including countering violence and extremism.

Students will develop their skills to recognise and respond appropriately to situations, which may be harmful to self and others. The activities introduce a broad range of scenarios involving violence through which students:

* understand the difference between violence and violent extremism
* analyse their own attitudes towards violence
* learn to identify warning signs and safely engage in upstander behaviour or exercise self-control
* strengthen skills in asserting oneself respectfully.

In exploring violence and extremism, the following key questions have been considered:

* what is violence and extremism? What does violence and extremism look like?
* could our assumptions about violence and extremism be false?
* what motivates individuals to act violently?
* what are the consequences of violence and extremism?
* how can we change attitudes and behaviours in relation to violence and extremism?

The knowledge and understanding developed through responding to these key questions can be validly explored through a range of violence related scenarios. These scenarios aim to equip students with the skills they need to critically analyse potentially harmful situations and act safely and timely to promote health, safety and wellbeing.

The activity sequence includes five lessons.

1. Why violence?
2. Where do you stand on violence?
3. What do we need in life?
4. The boss of me
5. Stitch in time.

Activity focus

Through this activity students will explore the difference between anger, assertiveness and aggression. Students will learn to recognise the signs and indicators of aggression and anger and develop strategies to calm the anger. Students will develop the skills to take an assertive stance in different situations.

Course outcomes

1.1 Assess personal strengths and skills to achieve a positive outcome in a range of challenging and changing situations.

1.2 Critically evaluate services and resources to identify sources of reliable information and support.

1.3 Build positive thinking, self-belief and a sense of empowerment to take action to promote meaningful futures for self and others.

6.1 Assess, adapt and apply skills to develop and maintain respectful relationships and successfully participate in education, work and community contexts.

6.2 Demonstrate behaviours that model positive values, beliefs and attitudes and promote inclusion and equity for self and others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Analyse the physical, mental and emotional signs of anger.
* Understand the difference between avoidant, assertive and aggressive responses.
* Develop a range of strategies for dealing effectively with the feeling of anger.
* Learn to deal with anger before reacting to a situation.
* Apply respectful assertiveness in resolving conflict situations.

Suggested content

| Learning context  | Content |
| --- | --- |
| IndependenceFocus: Building self-concept and independence | Self-management* responsibility for self and actions
 |
| IndependenceFocus: Preparing for participation in community, education and employment | Building and participating in community* respect and responsibility for others
* inclusive language
* inclusivity, equality and fairness
 |
| Mental health and wellbeingFocus: Developing self-efficacy and mental fitness | Building resilience* acknowledging controllable factors
* empathy

Self-awareness and self-regulation* emotional awareness and self-regulation
* perspective taking
 |
| RelationshipsFocus: Developing and maintaining respectful relationships | Applying relationship skills in differing contexts* appropriate expression of thoughts, emotions and opinions
* refusal skills in different contexts and situations
* communication skills
 |

Resources for preparation

* Post it notes
* Scenarios – printed for each pair
* Access to clip Being assertive: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSL1tFmgDc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSL1tFmgDc)
* Communication styles worksheet

Teaching notes

It is important for students to develop their understanding Through people learning to recognise their own feelings of anger, reframe thoughts and build skills to exercise self-control many violent situations can be prevented. This gives people the time to calmly and logically deal with the problem that angered them in the first place.

This activity allows students to explore the difference between anger, assertiveness and aggression. Students will learn to identify the tell tale signs of anger, and develop strategies to calm the anger. Students will explore three styles of responding to anger and role-play taking an assertive stance in different situations.

Teachers should consider culturally different ways of being assertive. For example, on the surface some ways of being assertive in other cultures may look passive to Western society. Assertive behaviours may not always be overt. In some cultures, assertiveness is not as valued as in Western society and indirect communication and passive responses are considered most socially acceptable. Confrontation, even when polite, is unacceptable in some cultures.

It is important to recognise the cultural influences on people’s attitudes to dealing with situations, and to carefully consider culturally appropriate action for each particular situation.

Teachers should be aware that the issues discussed in these activities may be confronting for some students.

It is important students know the appropriate places they can seek help. These include:

* [Headspace](http://www.headspace.org.au/) – a National Youth Mental Health Foundation helping young people with general health, mental health and counselling, education, employment and other services and alcohol and other drug services.
* [ReachOut.com](http://au.reachout.com/) – an online youth mental health service where young people can get the help they need, where and when they need it.

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* Making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* Being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* Enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Learning experiences

Activity one – What makes me feel angry? (5 minutes)

* In pairs, students discuss what triggers a young person to feel angry.

Activity two – What happens to me when I am starting to feel feel angry? (10 minutes)

* Individually, students list how they can tell they are starting to feel angry, e.g. they feel hot, they can’t think straight etc.
* Students form groups of four with a pad of sticky notes per group.
	+ Each group writes down one tell tale sign of anger per sticky note, writing as many as they can think of.
	+ Teacher explains that these signs can be classified as mental, emotional and physical signs, and records
	+ those headings on the board.
	+ Team member 1 from each team brings one of their signs and sticks it under the appropriate heading, mental, emotional or physical.
	+ Team member 2 does the same, but cannot repeat a sign that is already there.
	+ Team members 3 and 4 each take turns, again only sticking up new signs.
	+ The activity continues until all teams have finished sticking up each original sign under the headings.
* As a whole group, explore the range of mental, emotional or physical signs or indicators of anger.

Activity three – Avoidant, assertive, or aggressive response (10 minutes)

* In pairs, students read the scenarios and decide whether they are examples of avoidant, assertive, or aggressive responses to challenging situations or situations which trigger feelings of anger.
* As a whole group, discuss what makes a response avoidant, assertive or aggressive by inviting pairs to present their discussions and ideas to the class for one scenario they looked at.

Activity four – Deal with it! (10 minutes)

* Students analyse the ways people in the scenario acted assertively to resolve the problems.
* Students brainstorm ways of dealing first with the tell tale signs of anger from activity two, to assist them to calmly and logically approach the problem, that made them feel angry.
* Students might come up with such strategies as:
	+ go somewhere private and yell or cry to release the tension
	+ focus on slowing down breathing and heart rate
	+ exercise – run, box, walk, ride a bike, skip, jump
	+ relaxation exercises to release muscle tension
	+ counting to ten slowly
	+ take some deep breaths
	+ telling yourself everything will work out okay
	+ writing a letter or diary entry that you won’t send, just to release the initial anger.

Activity five – Respectful assertion (10 minutes)

Two different activities are provided here, teachers may choose one or the other, or time permitting, complete both.

There is a need to consider culturally different ways of being assertive. Both examples provided here are in the context of Western Society, where being assertive is valued. For some cultures, passive responses are more socially acceptable. It is important to discuss this activity in the light of taking culturally appropriate action in each context. Successful communication is about understanding how the listener will receive and react to your message, not just how you deliver it.

Version 1:

* Students watch the video, Being assertive: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSL1tFmgDc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubSL1tFmgDc)
* Students list characteristics of respectful, assertive communication, taking into account social and cultural variations, e.g.
	+ talk at a respectable volume and pace
	+ stay calm
	+ state what you want
	+ state the reasons
	+ express gratefulness of others’ change
	+ respectfully accept if situation cannot be changed.

Version 2:

* Students work in groups to complete the Communication styles worksheet, assisting their understanding of how to assert themselves respectfully.

Activity six – Stand up! (15 minutes)

* In pairs or groups of 3, students choose or are allocated one of the scenarios 1-4 from the previous activity to role-play.
	+ Students adopt a role and act out how they would take an assertive stance in their scenario.
	+ Allocate 3-4 minutes for each pair or group to act out the scenario. In each scenario one person will act as an observer or bystander.
* As a whole group, debrief the role plays by inviting each group to share information. Use the following questions to facilitate the discussion.
	+ What were your thoughts and feelings as you acted out the scenario?
	+ As an observer or bystander what did you observe? What thoughts and feelings did you have as the other members of your group acted out the scenario?
	+ What did you find challenging in the role you adopted? (characters or observer)
	+ What did you find easy about the role you adopted? (characters or observer)
	+ What could a bystander or observer of that scenario in real life do to de-escalate the situation or provide support for the characters involved?
	+ What strengths, skills or strategies are required for the bystander to do this effectively?

Scenarios

Scenario 1

Ethan has played an online game for three hours. In that time he has moved up to the top level and has gained 500,000 coins and three of the best weapons. A stronger opponent challenges him, he loses and the opponent makes off with his weapons and coins. Ethan starts screaming and swearing and throws his laptop against the wall.

Scenario 2

Kaitlyn does not agree with how her father talks to her. She feels he belittles her and treats her like a little child. When he refuses to let her watch the latest movie with her friends, because the rating deems it inappropriate for her age, Kaitlyn becomes sullen and withdrawn. When her father talks to her, she rolls her eyes or gives him blank stares, not responding to his questions.

Scenario 3

Rory is being harassed at school for not liking or playing sports. He has tried to watch sport and become interested, but it hasn’t worked. As he was getting on the bus in the afternoon, the same group of boys as usual begin to chant his name and taunt him with demeaning phrases. Rory puts in his earphones and hides his face to cover the tears.

Scenario 4

Isabelle’s friend borrows small amounts of money from her all the time, but never manages to pay her back. This afternoon the friend asked for $15 so she could go the movies with their group of friends. Isabelle only had enough for her own ticket and dinner. if she gives her friend the money for the ticket she won’t have enough left to buy herself something to eat for dinner. She lends the money to Isabelle, but feels angry that she probably won’t get the money back, and that now she won’t get to eat until she gets home later that night.

Scenario 5

Jackson referees junior touch football on the weekends. There is a strict no smoking policy on the grounds, for the health and welfare of the players. Parents all sign a form at the start of the season stating they are aware of this, and there are signs on the clubhouse and in the parking lot reminding everyone of the policy. Throughout the first half, Jackson grows increasingly annoyed, as he continually smells cigarette smoke coming from the sidelines.

When the half time siren sounds, Jackson takes a moment to slow his breathing, and unclench his fists. He walks over to the parent and calmly explains there is a no smoking policy, and the reasons for the policy, as well as the places the parent can go to smoke.

Scenario 6

Roslyn bought a pair of pants for her part-time job as a waitress. She wore them twice, and already the hem came down on the pant leg. When Roslyn returns them to the store, the assistant refuses to refund her money because they have already been worn and the tags have been cut off. Roslyn feels embarrassed and angry because she can’t afford another pair, and feels it isn’t right that she might have to pay for a repair. Roslyn calmly hands over the receipt, showing the date of purchase was only a few days ago, points out the good condition of the rest of the garment and explains that the sewing on that hem must have been faulty, as the other hem is intact. The assistant agrees to exchange the goods for being faulty.

Communication styles - answers

Adapted from Michel, F. (2008). Assert Yourself. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

|  | Avoidant | Aggressive | Assertive |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pace | hesitant, filled with pauses and rambling sentences | fluent, often fast | fluent, with steady, even pace |
| Tone | often dull, sing-song or whining | sarcastic, cold, harsh, condescending | clear, middle range, rich and warm |
| Volume | quiet, often dropping away | often shouting | voice appropriately loud for situation |
| Style | apologetic | threatening | factual, expressing own |
| Phrases | If it wouldn’t be too muchtrouble… I wouldn’tnormally say anything,but…I could be wrong… | You’d better watch out Ifyou don’t…You must be jokingWhy on earth did you…? | I like…I want…My experience is… I feel…when you…What do you think…? |
| Eye contact | averting gaze | staring the other person out | direct eye contact without staring |
| Posture | slouched | leaning forward or over intoother person’s space | erect, balanced, openbody stance |
| Hands | wringing hands | pointing, fist clenching | open, relaxed handmovements |
| Face | nervous grinning, tremblingjaw | sneering, scowling, clenched jaw | smiling when pleased, frowning when angry, relaxed jaw |

Communication styles - worksheet

Adapted from Michel, F. (2008). Assert Yourself. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

|  | Avoidant | Aggressive | Assertive |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pace | hesitant, filled with pauses and rambling sentences |  | fluent, with steady, even pace |
| Tone | often dull, sing-song or whining |  | clear, middle range, rich and warm |
| Volume | quiet, often dropping away | often shouting |  |
| Style | apologetic | threatening | factual, expressing own |
| Phrases | If it wouldn’t be too muchtrouble… I wouldn’tnormally say anything,but…I could be wrong… | You’d better watch out Ifyou don’t…You must be jokingWhy on earth did you…? | I like…I want…My experience is… I feel…when you…What do you think…? |
| Eye contact |  |  |  |
| Posture |  | leaning forward or over intoother person’s space |  |
| Hands | wringing hands |  | open, relaxed handmovements |
| Face | nervous grinning, tremblingjaw | sneering, scowling, clenched jaw |  |

Teacher notes – Violence and extremism

Violence has been defined by the World Health Organization as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”.[[3]](#footnote-3)

For the purpose of the Life Ready course and the following activities, violence includes domestic and family violence, relationship violence, assault, sexual assault, rape, underage or forced marriage, trafficking or coercion, harmful traditional or cultural practices including female genital mutilation or honour killings. Violent extremism is using violence to achieve goals on behalf of a group. Life Ready activities are not designed to explore the issues around state sanctioned violence, war, the use of the death penalty or violence as a sport. These examples of violence are outside the scope of the Life Ready course.

It is important for students to learn about violence and consider their own attitudes and the attitudes of others towards violence in our community. Childhood and adolescence is an important time for developing and maintaining respectful, non-violent relationships and learning to assert a non- violent stance.

In Australia only a very small proportion of the population supports the use of violence to try to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.[[4]](#footnote-4) Combatting violence is the responsibility of the whole community and is most effective as part of a whole school approach. The [Australian Government Living Safe Together website and toolkit](http://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation/what-is-radicalisation.aspx) provides information for schools to assist in building understanding of extremism and the radicalisation process and how to respond if they are concerned about a student or member of the community.

The development of a school ethos and culture that models respectful practices and is consistent in dealing with incidents of violence is as important a teaching tool as the formal curriculum.

Key messages

Domestic and family violence is a gendered crime.

* Females make up the majority of victims and males the majority of offenders.
* Although the research shows that males are the main perpetrators of violence against both men and women, most men and boys are not abusive in their relationships.
* Some men’s violence may give all men a bad name.
* Males can play a key role in helping stop violence, particularly against women.

Violence is a choice

* The use of violence is a choice: those who use violence choose where and when they do the violence; and, how they use the violence.
* Violence as a choice does not necessarily mean a considered choice. It should be noted that some individuals may react violently in specific situations, such as when their life is threatened or they act in self-defence.
* In some situations, an individual’s response may be affected by poor impulse control resulting from experiences of abuse or trauma or as a result of mental illness, clinical behaviour disorders, health conditions or disability. The teaching and learning activities provided do not seek to judge these actions.
* The activities aim to address violence broadly without specific reference to individual cases or specialised instances of violence, where an individual requires specialised counselling and support.

Violence can be learned and unlearned

* Research shows that violence, particularly violence against women is the product of learned attitudes and norms, and social inequalities.
* Just as violence-supportive attitudes can be learned, they can be unlearned.
* Communities and governments can change the social conditions that feed violence, replacing them with social conditions that encourage respect and non-violence.

There is no simple profile of a violent offender or extremist

* People who demonstrate violent behaviours, engage in acts of violent extremism or join violent extremist groups come from all kind of backgrounds and have various motivations.
* Teachers should avoid discussions that promote stereotypical views or exclusion of particular individuals or groups in society.

Education about violence, extremism and radicalisation is the responsibility of the community

* All forms of violence and extremism use fear and intimidation to change a situation rather than through respectful and peaceful means.
* It is our community and our responsibility.
* Australia’s diversity has given rise to a rich culture with a strong commitment to political and personal freedoms, respect for human rights and the rule of law.
* Regardless of their background or motivation, individuals who are prepared to commit or support violence against individuals or the community threaten our shared values.
* Community initiatives designed to address factors that can lead to violence and extremism and help at- risk individuals, can play an important part in strengthening our communities.

Additional resources

Australian Government, Living Safe Together Toolkit [www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation](https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation/what-is-radicalisation.aspx)

Domestic Violence NSW [domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au](http://www.domesticviolence.nsw.gov.au/)

White Ribbon – Australia’s campaign to stop violence against women [www.whiteribbon.org.au](http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/schools)

Building Respectful Relationships: Stepping Out Against Gender Based Violence (Vic DoE) [www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/Pages/respectrel.aspx)

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria [dvrcv.org.au](http://www.dvrcv.org.au/)

1. Headspace, 2015 Is it just me? Find information: anger [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au/is-it-just-me/find-information/anger)

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michel, F. (2008). Assert Yourself. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. World Health Organisation, Global campaign for violence prevention; last viewed 15 Feb 2016 [www.who.int/violenceprevention](http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Australian Government, [www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation](https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation/what-is-radicalisation.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)