Core Principles

The work of Men Stopping Violence (MSV) is supported by its seven Core Principles which have been developed, reviewed and refined over three decades of working to end violence against women.

1. Women's voices and experiences must be central to our work with men.

If we are to hear important truths about male violence against women and how it affects us, we must seek out women's voices and experiences. But which women? Not all women are in agreement on issues regarding gender-based violence. Also, men do not have to agree with everything women express, but to be effective in ending violence against women, they must be willing to hear and see the experiences of women across divisions of class, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation. Women are not only experts on their own lives but on the lives of men as well, since the threat of male violence requires them to study men closely to stay safe. We can learn about women's experiences by reading, by embracing their artistic expressions, and when we are willing, by listening to women's voices.

2. Race matters.

Although race is a social construct, it has meaning for how we are treated, how we treat others and how we view ourselves. Our society, influenced by the concept of race, is organized in a hierarchical social structure that situates whites at its apex. This hierarchical social structure fosters the oppression of communities of color and reinforces the daily tensions and conflicts between whites and people of color. Also, it creates complex power struggles within communities of color as they work to resist the *divide-and-conquer* traps. When working to end male violence against women, it is important to remember that the history of women of color and the history of white women are not parallel. Strategies that work for white women may not work for women of color. Although the battered women's movement involves all races and classes, the white middle-class narrative has usually dominated.

3. Intersectionality (gender, class, and sexual orientation) matters.

All forms of oppression are interconnected. *Intersectionality* speaks to the relationship between oppressions, including those based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Intersectionality can be a difficult concept to put into practice because of our training, and sometimes desire, to be single-issue-focused. For example, when addressing male violence against women, we tend to focus almost exclusively on gender at the expense of race. Each oppression reinforces the others, and therefore, attempts to create a hierarchy of oppression will prove futile. An example of how we might practice intersectionality is, that when we make decisions, whether policy, research, funding, etc., we filter them through the prism of class, race, sexual orientation, gender, etc. In other words ask, "What are the class, race, sexual orientation and gender considerations and implications of my actions?" Addressing intersectionality in our work will make us more effective in responding to the needs of victims and holding perpetrators accountable.

4. Community accountability is key to ending violence against women.

Holding men accountable for their violence is an essential prerequisite for pursuing safety and justice for women. Currently we rely primarily on the criminal legal system to arrest, prosecute, and impose consequences on perpetrators. However, the criminal legal system can be problematic for many women because it frequently imposes consequences on him that do not work for her. For example, arrest and jail may result in his loss employment, thereby producing economic and safety challenges for her. For accountability to work for victims we must grow the number of community partners and institutions that send a clear message that violence against women is unacceptable and that when a man in that community abuses a woman, he will experience swift and meaningful consequences. Key community partners, such as faith-based communities and businesses, can set policies and procedures that will impose limits and consequences for offenders while providing opportunities for safety and empowerment for victims. In doing so, we aren't reducing the role of the criminal legal system; rather, we are expanding the number of community gate keepers and stakeholders who can cooperatively work to promote community accountability.

5. Organizing men to end violence against women takes precedence over intervening with batterers.

Although well intentioned, the emphasis on rehabilitating batterers is shortsighted, and has done little to transform the culture of violence against women. Only a small percentage of abusive, violent men enter intervention programs, and the jury is still out about the effectiveness of these programs in creating safety for women. And even if every man who completes an intervention program is successful in stopping his abusive behaviors, there would be little change to community norms that reward men for sexist, abusive, and violent behaviors. It is often difficult for some men to see how their beliefs, actions, or inactions might condone violence against women. A man may think, for example, that if he witnesses a man abusing a woman, it is inappropriate to interfere. By mobilizing *all* men to prevent violence against women, we stand a better chance of ending violence against women.

6. We are the work.

To change the world, we must become aware of how we move within it. For example, we need to be conscious of how we use our power. Thus, organizing for change begins with examining our part in maintaining and undoing social inequities. When we see how we are part of the problem, we can make an informed decision to be part of the solution. Without this kind of self-examination, we are likely to deny and minimize our abusive behaviors, as well as others'. We must make the connection between ourselves and the culture of violence by drawing on our own experiences – as victims and as perpetrators. This work is ongoing, and it better prepares us to challenge individuals and institutions that promote violence against women.

7. Patriarchal violence must be addressed.

Violence against women cannot be fully addressed without understanding patriarchy, which author and scholar bell hooks describes as "A political-social system that insists that male are inherently dominating, superior to everything and anyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence." Patriarchal violence, which includes domestic and sexual violence, is used to maintain that system. Patriarchy also requires that boys and men adhere to codes of masculinity that are self-destructive and destructive to others. The overwhelming majority of domestic and sexual violence victims are women and the overwhelming perpetrators of that violence are men. Until we as a culture acknowledge that violent men are operating within a system that condones and encourages their violence, we will not end male violence against women.