# Driver: Condoning of violence against women with disabilities

## This includes excusing or justifying perpetrator behaviour, shifting blame to the victim, trivialising and downplaying violence, and using deficit language.\*

### \*Deficit language is when disability is framed as a tragedy, a weakness, or an extreme and unusual way of existing. When used in the context of violence against women, deficit language imposes the idea that women with disabilities are ‘better off dead,’ or that violence against women with disabilities is inevitable, to be expected, or has a lesser impact.

Examples of condoning of violence against women with disabilities include:

* **Victim blaming:**
* Her disability makes her vulnerable to violence.
* Her disability causes her to have wild mood swings.
* She is too demanding about her needs.
* She is a burden.
* **Perpetrator excusing:**
* He was just experiencing carer stress.
* He’s actually a really devoted carer.
* He was depressed and overwhelmed from having to care for her.
* He’s such a great guy for looking after her.
* **Trivialising violence:**
* It was just a bit of rough handling.
* She doesn’t know how good she has it.
* It was for her own good.
* Sometimes you have to use a bit of force on someone like that.
* **Deficit language:**
* She is severely disabled and has high needs.
* She has the mentality of a 3-year old.
* She has a lower quality of life.
* She is “afflicted with” and “suffering from” her disability.

Men who hold such beliefs are more likely to perpetrate violence against women with disabilities, and both women and men who hold such beliefs are less likely to take action to support victims and hold perpetrators to account.

# Take Action: Challenge the condoning of violence against women with disabilities

Use anti-violence messaging and frame disability using a strengths-based model.

**Examples of anti-violence messaging include:**

* **Reduce victim blaming:**
* Women with disabilities have a right to safety, respect and equality.
* It’s not her fault.
* **Perpetrator accountability:**
* Lots of carers experience stress without becoming violent.
* Violence is a choice. He chose to use power over her.
* **There is no justification:**
* It’s not ok, ever.
* **Name the problem:**
* This is family violence. This is sexual assault. This is abuse.
* **Use systems of accountability:**
* This is unlawful.
* **Challenge minimising:**
* It’s a big deal, and it’s wrong.

**Frame disability using a strengths-based model:**

Use factual language that doesn’t reinforce stereotypes, imply weakness, alienate women or suggest disability is a reason for violence.

* Women with disabilities aren’t “vulnerable to violence.”

**Women with disabilities are *targeted* for violence.**

* She isn’t “bound to a wheelchair.” She is *enabled* by it.

**She uses a wheelchair.**

* She doesn’t “have the mentality of a 3-year old.”

**She’s an adult woman with an intellectual disability.**

* She isn’t “suffering from” or “struggling with” a disability.

**She has dementia.**

* She is not “dependent” on her partner. *All* relationships involve interdependence.

**Her partner provides her with support.**

* She doesn’t need others to do everything for her.

**If she needs help, she’ll ask for it.**

* She doesn’t have a “lower quality of life.”

**The presence or absence of disability is not what predicts quality of life.**

* She does not “have difficulty remembering.”

**She has a brain injury and understands information best when a written summary is provided.**

This resource was inspired by a speech in 2018 by Activist Sue Salthouse on disability and language in the media. Content adapted from Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia, Our Watch (2015).