



**BEING MUSLIM**  
**BEING ME**



Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights  
*Equality without Exception*

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) would like to thank all the young people, parents and professionals for trusting us with their stories and sharing their lived experience through the many consultations and workshops throughout this project.

Their invaluable contribution has been fundamental to the development of this book and we hope this resource will help parents and children navigate important conversations and difficult situations, and most of all be proud of their identity.

AMWCHR recognises that gender, race and religion intersect to create multiple forms of discrimination and violence against Muslim women. It also recognises that preventing prejudice in all forms is bound to the struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and before we can successfully tackle issues within our communities, we must address the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism and bigotry in this country.

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our centre is located and where we conduct our work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. AMWCHR is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.



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# BEING MUSLIM

# BEING ME

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SALAAMS!



I'm Aliya!

It's Friday and I'm so excited!

It's 'out-of-uniform' day I have my new purple hijab with bright green turtles on it.

Yes, I have a thing for turtles, I love those cute little heads!



Oh, and my sparkly unicorn bag ✨ which goes with me everywhere! ✨



My brothers Kaleem and Ali are already up, chasing each other around the kitchen playing tag.

How they have so much energy in the mornings, I just don't get.

***How are we even related?***

Kaleem wants to ride his skateboard to school but Baba says it's too far.

So we quickly eat breakfast, and race each other to the car!



Mum is already in there, waiting impatiently.

She doesn't like being late for her work at the hospital.

At break time I see Ranya, sitting alone and staring at the ground.

That's unusual, I think.

She's younger than me and always surrounded by her group of rather loud friends.

But today she seems a bit lost, like she doesn't want to be here.

I walk over and ask her what happened.

"Nothing," she says at first, but I sit down and ask again.

She looks up, her eyes red and puffy, and she says

"It was Anna's birthday and I didn't eat the ham sandwiches she had served cause my family only eats food that is halal."





Then Dan, a boy in my class, started making fun of me, calling me Ms. Piggy again and again!

I really didn't like it and told him so many times to stop.

I said it was rude and mean, but he just laughed."

Ranya begins to shake, I can see she's really upset and angry.

"But there is nothing I can do about it, and I just want to go home now," she says.



I give Ranya a great big hug.  
Ugh, that's awful and isn't right!

"Are you going to tell anyone?  
Your teacher, your older sister,  
your parents?"

Ranya shakes her head.

"How will that help? Some people are  
just rude, you just have to walk away  
sometimes, don't you?"

I don't answer because I'm not sure  
myself.

**Yeah sometimes you need to walk away  
when people say silly and mean things,  
but what if someone makes fun of  
something you believe, something that  
is important to you and your family?**

*Do you just ignore it or do you stand up  
for yourself, I wonder?*

SHOULD YOU TALK TO SOMEONE?  
SOMEONE YOU TRUST?  
IT MIGHT MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER



"Ranya, maybe you should tell someone? Someone you trust?" I say. "It might make you feel better."

Ranya thinks for a minute and then makes up her mind.

"OK," she says "I'll talk to my mum tonight."

"Great idea," I say.

"My parents always tell me *'it's important for adults to know when someone hurts us so that they can keep us safe'*, so yeah give it a shot."

"Thanks Aliya," says Ranya, smiling a bit, her old self coming back a little.

"I feel better already after talking to you. Want to share some of my cake?"

The next day Ranya tells me that she did tell her Mum about Dan.



Her mum was so glad Ranya told her.

"I am so proud of you that you stood up for yourself. What he did was wrong, and this is the kind of thing you need to tell us. How do you feel now?" her Mum asked.

Ranya thought about it.

"At the time I felt embarrassed, but later it made me angry!" Mum nodded. She understood.

She held Ranya close.

"It seems that boy doesn't understand that people have their reasons for eating or not eating things or for doing things their own way, and maybe he doesn't understand people who are different from him. This is not your fault, and there is no need for you to ever feel bad for doing things your way and being **YOU**."



“So many people in Australia make choices about what they eat, how they dress, what languages they speak or even what kinds of festivals they have.

Don't you think that's what makes a country so special and beautiful?

Sadly, some people don't get that, Ranya.



I'm sorry this happened to you, and if anything like this ever happens at school again, tell a teacher you like and trust. It is important to involve adults so that this behaviour comes to a stop.”

Ranya nodded, but she had a question too.

“How can I tell whom to trust?”

“Good question!” said Mum,

“You can trust someone if they treat all children in the class equally, you feel they listen to you when you talk, believe what you’re saying, and they don’t say things that make you feel bad about who you are.”

“Oh ok,” said Ranya, cheering up suddenly.

“I’ll tell Ms. Carey then! She’s my favourite.”





I am glad Ranya told her mum and that she will talk to her teacher!

But that same evening, more questions came into my head.

I'm in the living room with my brothers, doing our homework, while Mummy and Baba are watching TV.

Suddenly I hear on the news that some people are angrily shouting 'Go back to where you came from! Muslims are terrorists!'

I walk over to my parents.

"Mummy, Baba, what are they saying about Muslims?"

Are we terrorists? I don't understand."

Mum and Baba look at each other,  
and then call us all over and sit us  
down.

"Of course not!," Baba says.



"Terrorists are bad people who hurt others.

They are people who commit violence and hurt a lot of people to get what they want.

They can be from anywhere, of any background, colour or religion, and they only speak for themselves.

I remember someone shouting that at me once when I was coming back from prayers.

That person, like the people shouting on TV, think that because a small group of people do something bad, that everyone from that same background are all bad too.

Hmm...let me explain it to you another way.



Now you know how you and your friends Ruby and Laura make this strange thing where you mix vanilla ice cream with strawberry jam?

Now imagine if the boys in your class saw you and said, 'All girls like to have strawberry jam with ice cream!'

Would that be true?"

I smile and shake my head as I imagine the delicious gooey ice cream in jars of strawberry jam, a delight invented by me and my friends.



"No Baba, it just means the three of us like ice cream with strawberry jam!"

Baba laughs, "Exactly, Aliya! So in the same way, this isn't about Muslims," Baba said.

"it's very important that if someone says anything to you like this because you're Muslim, you can speak up to them, tell us, or a teacher at school that you like and trust. It's not right for anyone to make fun of or be mean to someone because of their religion."

Later I go to bed, but lie awake for a long time, so many thoughts racing around in my head. It's been an interesting few days, I think to myself.

I remember all the things Baba said and how important it is that we feel safe and can be who we are without being made to feel bad.

It makes me also appreciate all my friends at school and my neighbourhood who are different from me in so many ways.

We all get along, celebrate with one another, and it makes me happy.

I'm going to ask Mum if I can have a playdate with Ranya tomorrow.

Then I am going to have some ice cream (with strawberry jam of course!), watch a movie with my brothers, and just have some fun the way we like!



Remember,  
it's more than ok  
to be you!



# **Information for Parents and Children**

# Information for Parents: Supporting your child

Discrimination is when someone is treated unfairly for any reason, including their race, religion, gender, or social class.

If your child experiences discrimination or sees discrimination (towards another person or in the media), you can talk to them and support them in the following ways:

- ASK:**
- What happened?
  - How is this affecting them?
  - What do they already know about the issue?
  - What would they want to know about the issue?

- DON'T:**
- Ignore it
  - Brush it off
  - Downplay it
  - Blame them
  - Make promises that can't be kept

- VALIDATE  
& AFFIRM:**
- Praise them for noticing the situation and raising it
  - Affirm what they have experienced (or heard or seen) is not right
  - Stress that reacting with aggression or violence is not the answer.
  - Highlight that there are laws to protect them.
  - Highlight that action against discrimination can be taken in a proper way.
  - Highlight that it is important to take a stand against discrimination wherever it happens.
  - Assure them of their safety in the family.

# Coach your child on how best to respond regarding:

## INFORMATION:

- Give them accurate information
- Correct any misinformation.

## LARGER CONTEXT:

- Emphasise that often ignorance, misunderstanding and bias is the source of such behaviour.
- Discuss anti-Muslim attitudes in a larger context, for example, discrimination occurs across many other communities as well (Indigenous people, people of colour etc)

## IDENTITY:

- Coach them on how to answer difficult questions about their faith and identity in age appropriate ways.
- Help them sort through any concerns they have about being a Muslim or part of their ethnic group.

## ACTION:

- Encourage them to let you or their teachers know if they feel uncomfortable again.

# Seeking support for religious and racial discrimination

## FOR CHILDREN/TEENAGERS:

In Victoria it is against the law to physically hurt or threaten someone because of their race, class, gender or religion. Sometimes children get targeted for what they are wearing or for their skin colour. This is against the law.

It can be both helpful and important to speak to someone, whether this is a trusted friend, parent, teacher, family member, or a professional who works in this area. Having information regarding your options can help children make an informed decision about how to report and stay safe.

Here is list of services that can provide different forms of support. This list is to help you get started. Sometimes getting help can be scary but it is important to tell someone so that you can be safe. It is your right.

### What to report:

If something ever happens where you or someone you know has been targeted, it can help if you remember certain details. If you don't remember, that's ok too. Sometimes it's hard to remember things during a stressful time.

#### It can help if you give the following information:

- How you were attacked or what you saw
- Where and when it occurred
- The identity of the attacker and where they live, if you know it
- What the attacker looked like. what they were wearing and what the attacker said, particularly anything insulting about your race or religion
- The nature of any injuries you or someone else had
- Whether anyone else was attacked
- The names and addresses of any witnesses
- Whether you have been attacked before

## In School:

If you or someone else have been discriminated against, you can let an adult, who can help you, know about it.

You can also ask your parent to come with you and support you when you talk to someone in your school.

### **This could be:**

- Class teacher or teacher you trust
- Yard duty teacher
- Coordinator or Principal

## Accessing Counselling Services:

Sometimes when children have been targeted or attacked, it can lead to constant worry and stress about being targeted again, not feeling safe when they are out or at the place that the incident happened.

Counselling and talking to a professional can help people to recover more quickly and make sense of what happened before it affects our mental health. Counselling is a confidential service which means whatever you discuss stays between you and your counsellor.

### **Kids Help Line 1800 551 800**

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.



# Seeking support for religious and racial discrimination

## FOR ADULTS/PARENTS:

In Victoria it is against the law to physically assault, hurt or threaten someone because of their race, class, gender or religion. It is common for adults and children to get confused and fearful about how to respond. Most people feel grateful to be in Australia and don't want to cause any trouble. Islamophobic assaults are racial vilification and are against the law.

It can be both helpful and important therefore to speak to people, whether this is a trusted friend, parent, teacher or family member, or a professional worker with expertise in these areas. This is an important first step. Additionally, having access to information regarding the various options available can help adults and children make an informed decision about how to report and keep them safe.

Here is a list of services that can provide different forms of assistance. This list is designed to help you get started. We acknowledge that seeking help can be a daunting experience. We are here to offer confidential support and service in helping you with information or finding the appropriate service for your needs.

### What to report:

It will help if you can give the following information:

- How you were attacked or what you saw.
- Where and when it occurred.
- The identity of the attacker and where they live, if you know it.
- What the attacker looked like and/or what they were wearing.
- What the attacker said, particularly anything insulting about your race or religion.
- The nature of any injuries sustained.

- Whether anyone else was attacked.
- The names and addresses of any witnesses.
- Whether you have been attacked before.

## Children in Schools:

If children are targeted in school, it is important that they or the parents inform one of the following adults:

- Class teacher or teacher you trust
- Yard duty teacher
- Coordinator or Principal

### **Speaking to the School**

**(eg. Teacher/Welfare Coordinator/Principal)**

- Share the incident as reported by your child and its impact on your child
- Get an action plan to address the matter from the school and the timeframe that they would need for it
- Follow up when the time given is due

When children see their parent take action on the matter – it raises their confidence and their sense of right and wrong

## Emergency Services:

You can call the police or ambulance in a situation of emergency or if your immediate safety is at risk

- Emergencies call 000
- Local stations and specialist units  
[www.police.vic.gov.au/content](http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content)
- Police Assistance Line on 131 444 or submitting an online report. You can report some non-urgent crime and events anytime

## Accessing Counselling Services:

Severe cases of discrimination can be traumatic. Common symptoms of trauma can include:

- Constant worry about being attacked again
- Not feeling safe when you are on the street
- Feelings of anxiety that were not there before
- Feeling like you want to avoid going out or avoiding the area where the attack occurred
- Replaying the attack in your mind.

Counselling can help victims of crime to recover more quickly and prevent the further decline of your mental health. Please note that counselling is a confidential service.

## **The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal 1800 819 817**

They can provide victims of crime with funds that go towards counselling expenses. You can choose the counsellor you wish to see. You can also get more information from a police station or by visiting [www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au](http://www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au).

## **LIFELINE**

**13 11 14**

If you want to talk to someone quickly and confidentially about your feelings of distress, don't hesitate to contact LIFELINE.

## **Kids Help Line**

**1800 551 800**

Encourage children to call Kids Helpline, which is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 if they need support or want someone to talk to.

## **Parents Line**

**13 22 89**

A free telephone support service for parents with qualified counsellors to:

- talk about any issues to do with parenting and relationships with your child, to help you with ways to cope and be a positive parent
- help with your family's wellbeing and resilience
- connect you with services in your area.

## Seeking Legal Advice:

- You can contact your local community legal centre which can provide free advice and support. You can do a web search for your local community legal centre in your suburb or contact your local Council.
- You can contact the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) that supports people who have been affected by discrimination:
  - Enquiry Line: 1300 292 153 or (03) 9032 3583 (Monday to Friday)
  - Email: [enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au)
  - Online complaint:
    - <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1132135/Online-Complaint-Form>

## Other Support Services:

- Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV):
  - (03)93282067
- Islamophobia Register Australia:
  - [www.islamophobia.com.au](http://www.islamophobia.com.au) where you can register the incident and seek support
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
  - (03) 9481-3000

