



**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. We also recognise 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.

*AMWCHR 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.*



#### Copyright Information

© 2024 Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR).  
This material cannot be reproduced without the express permission of  
AMWCHR.

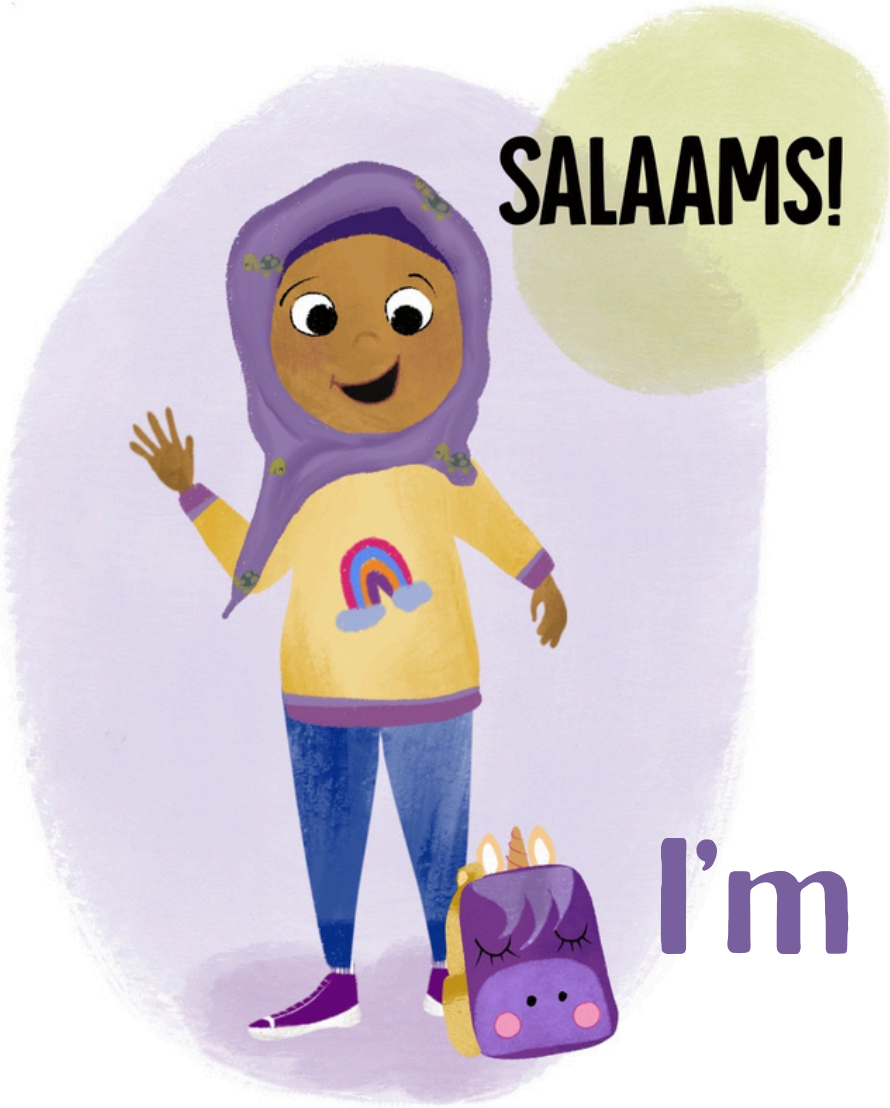
This publication was supported by the Victorian Government



# BEING MUSLIM

# BEING ME

Illustrated by  
Sumaya Asvat  
Content contribution by  
Asha Bedar and Ambreen Mirza

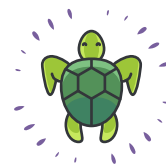


I'm Aliya!

It's Friday and I'm so excited!

It's 'out-of-uniform' day today. I'm wearing 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 I've also got my sparkly unicorn bag, which goes with me everywhere!







My brothers, Kareem and Ali, are already awake. They're chasing each other around the kitchen playing tag.

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

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

Kareem 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 served because 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?” I ask.

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.



“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 returning. “I feel better already after talking to you. Do you want to share some of my cake?”

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

Ranya's Mum was so glad she told her.

"I am so proud of you for standing up for yourself. What he did was wrong, and this is the kind of thing you need to tell us about. 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, holding Ranya close. She understood how Ranya felt.

"It seems that Dan doesn't understand that people have their reasons for eating or not eating things, or for doing things their own way. 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," she said, shaking her head.



“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?” she asked.

“Good question!” said Mum,

“You can trust someone if they treat all children in the class equally, if you feel they listen to you when you talk, believe what you’re saying, and if 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 homework while Mummy and Baba are watching TV.

Suddenly I hear some people on the news 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, 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...”



“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,” I say, “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 like this to you because you’re Muslim, you can speak up to them. You can also 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 are 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 in my neighbourhood who are different from me in so many ways.

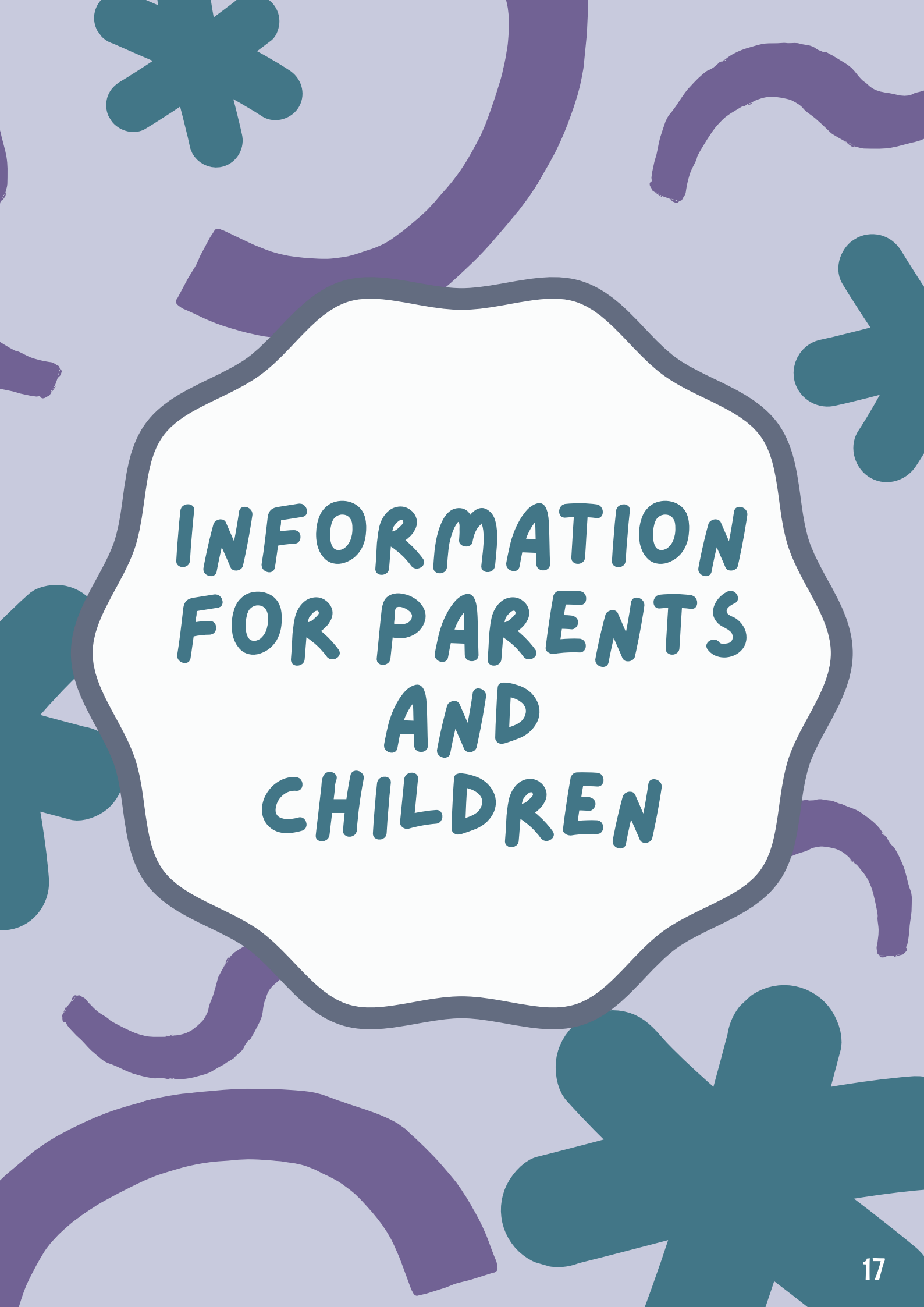
We all get along, share stories, and celebrate with one another. It makes me so happy.

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

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 CHILDREN

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; or
- Make promises that can't be kept.

## VALIDATE & AFFIRM:

- Praise them for noticing the situation and raising it.
- Affirm that 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.

# GUIDE YOUR CHILD ON HOW BEST TO RESPOND THROUGH:

## 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, disabled people, people of colour, etc).

## IDENTITY:

- Guide 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 unsafe or uncomfortable again.

# SEEKING SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

In Victoria it is against the law to physically or verbally attack 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.

Discrimination, hatred, and abuse based on race and religion is also against many school and workplace policies. This means that in public, in school, and in workplaces, everyone has a right to be safe and treated equally.

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. It's important to have information about all available options so that you can make an informed decision about what steps to take, such as reporting an incident or seeking professional support.

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.

## IF YOU ARE A STUDENT, CHILD, OR TEEN

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.

### **If you're able, it can help to give the following information:**

- How you were attacked or what you saw
- Where and when it occurred
- Whether the attack was physical, verbal, both, or other
- The identity of the attacker and where they live, if you know this information
- What the attacker looked like, including what they were wearing
- 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 targeted
- The names and addresses of any witnesses, if you have this information
- Whether you have been attacked before by the same or another person

## Telling someone about the racial or Islamophobic attack

If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, you should always tell someone. It is preferable to go to a trusted adult who can talk to you about your options, including how to make an official report.

If the attack happened in school, tell your teacher, welfare coordinator, and your parent/s about it. You can also ask your parents to raise a report to the school about the incident.

Racism and Islamophobia have no place in our community and society. The more you report and talk about these experiences, the easier it is for someone to support you and deal with the source of racism and Islamophobia.

## Accessing Counselling Services

It can be traumatic to experience a racist or Islamophobic attack. Sometimes the trauma can play in our minds. It may also make us feel less safe when we are out in the community or at the place where the incident occurred.

Talking to a professional can help you to recover more quickly and make sense of what happened before it impacts your mental health. Counselling is a confidential service, which means that whatever you discuss stays between you and your counsellor. Here is a place you can call to talk about your experience:

### **Kids Help Line | Ph: 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.



# IF YOU ARE A PARENT OR ADULT

## Children in Schools

If children are targeted in school, it is important that the school is informed. You or they can let the school know about the incident by talking to:

- their class teacher or another teacher you trust;
- the wellbeing coordinator or school counsellor; or
- the Principal or Assistant Principal.

### **Speaking to the School**

#### **(e.g., Teacher/Welfare Coordinator/Principal)**

- Share the incident as reported by your child.
- Tell the school how it has impacted your child.
- Ask the school to create an action plan to address the matter, and the timeframe that they would need to do this.
- Follow-up after that period of time to make sure they are addressing the issues.

When children see their parent take action on the matter it reassures them, raises their confidence, and confirms their sense of right and wrong.

## What to report if an incident happens elsewhere

If an incident happens outside of school, you can help your child report it by collecting the following information, if they are able to remember:

- How they were attacked or what they saw
- Where and when it occurred
- Whether the attack was physical, verbal, both, or other
- The identity of the attacker and where they live, if your child knows this information
- What the attacker looked like, including what they were wearing
- What the attacker said, particularly anything insulting about your child's race or religion
- The nature of any injuries your child or someone else had
- Whether anyone else was targeted
- The names and addresses of any witnesses, if your child has this information
- Whether your child has been attacked before by the same or another person

# IF YOU ARE A PARENT OR ADULT

## Where to Report:

### Police Assistance Line | Ph: 131 444 or submit an online report

You can report non-urgent crime at any time.

### Islamophobia Register Australia | [www.islamophobia.com.au](http://www.islamophobia.com.au)

The Islamophobia Register Australia allows you to report an incident to their register. They will also follow-up to provide support and assistance, if required.

### Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)

Ph: 1300 292 153 | Email: [enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au)

VEOHRC supports people who have been affected by discrimination. They will tell you about your rights and your options.

### Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) | Ph: (03) 9328 2067

The ICV has a register for reporting Islamophobic attacks. They will also provide you information on your rights.

## Emergency Services:

If the situation is an emergency or if your immediate safety is at risk, you can call the police or ambulance. **For emergencies call 000.**

## 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. Counselling is a confidential service. Some services that might be helpful are:

### **LIFELINE | Ph: 13 11 14**

If you feel anxious or distressed and want to talk to someone quickly and confidentially, contact LIFELINE.

### **The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal | Ph: 1800 819 817**

This service can provide victims of crime with funds to 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).

### **Kids Help Line | Ph: 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. Encourage your kids to call this service if they need support or want someone to talk to.

### **Parents Line | Ph: 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; and
- connect you with services in your area.

## **Seeking Legal Advice:**

You can contact your local community legal centre to access free advice and support. You can do a web search for your local community legal centre in your suburb or contact your local council.



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

**Ph: 03 9481 3000 | [www.amwchr.org.au](http://www.amwchr.org.au)**

This publication was supported by the Victorian Government