

The Story of the White Ribbon Campaign

Long before you were born, on December 6, 1989, a terrible act of violence took place in Canada. It was an act of violence by one person. 14 women were murdered. The 14 women were all students learning to become Engineers so they could build big office buildings, mix chemicals to make new materials or know how to program computers so they can make new video games. None of them would have ever thought that today was the day they were going to die. A man with a gun went to their university. He went into several classrooms and he said, "You (gesturing to the women) have no right being here." He separated the women from the men and then he shot and killed the 14 women. After he did this, he shot and killed himself right there on the spot. This terrible act of violence was called the Montreal Massacre. The man who killed these 14 women blamed them for his problems and thought that women were men's servants. He didn't know these 14 women but he was very, very angry at them. He was prejudiced against them. This man believed that women were not worth as much as men and all women were somehow taking over things when men should be in control.

In 1991, the Canadian Parliament proclaimed this day, December 6th, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women so that no one would forget what the Montreal Massacre was about. Every year, in towns and cities all over Canada, a remembrance ceremony is held to remember the 14 women engineering students. This day is much like how we remember Veterans who fought and died on Remembrance Day on November 11th.

The way that this gunman felt, that women are not worth as much as men, is the way abusive men can think about their girlfriends, wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties, nieces and daughters. Men who think this way might not ever kill women, but they hurt them everyday with put-downs, verbal abuse and violence. After awhile, the girls and women begin to believe the put-downs and they find it hard to be free. What the gunman did is an extreme example of hating girls and women. Abusive men can be hard to see at first but if you listen closely to what they say and do, you can usually discover that they have less respect for girls and women because they treat them differently or badly.

Most men do not think the way that gunman did. A lot of men and women heard about the Montreal Massacre and they felt very sad about what had happened. All over Canada there were lots of Women Helpers who would help the girlfriends, wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties, nieces and daughters to become free from abusive men. Three men in Canada felt so sad about the Montreal Massacre that they decided to join these Women Helpers. These three men, their names are Jack, Ron and Michael, started the White Ribbon Campaign. They decided that the white ribbon would become a special symbol that boys and men would wear. The white ribbon is a promise that boys and men will never be abusive men and that they will help Jack, Ron and Michael and all the Women Helpers to say that being an abusive man is wrong. The white ribbon is also a promise that boys and men will tell girlfriends, wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, nieces and daughters that they don't deserve to be treated badly.

In 1991, so many boys and men agreed with the Women Helpers, Jack, Ron and Michael that over 100,000 ribbons were worn by boys and men across Canada. Every year, more and more boys and men start to wear a white ribbon to remember the 14 women who were murdered. Today there are over 50 countries in the world that have a White Ribbon Campaign.

Your White Ribbon Campaign

Section 1: Summary of possible White Ribbon Campaign activities

Think how your White Ribbon Campaign can reflect the energy, interests and diversity of your youth/student group. On the following pages are ideas about a variety of activities, but don't hesitate to come up with your own ideas. If you want to talk about your campaign ideas or if you want to find out what other groups are doing, please don't hesitate in contacting the White Ribbon Campaign national office;

The White Ribbon Campaign
365 Bloor Street East, Suite 203
Toronto, ON, Canada M4W 3L4
Phone: 416-920-6684 or 1-800-328-2228
Fax: 416-920-1678
Email: info@whiteribbon.ca
www.whiteribbon.ca

The purpose of these activities is to promote healthy and equal relationships. They are a way of getting out the message that our future has no violence against women. Remember that these activities can be done during White Ribbon Days (November 25 December 6) or any time during the year, such as around Valentine's Day, Father's Day, or whenever.

Many activities have a fundraising component. We want to encourage you donate the funds to local women's programs who provide services to girls and women who have experienced men's violence against women (e.g. local or regional women's shelters, crisis centres or women's anti-violence programs).

We want to post your hard work and dedication on our website. Send your photos and ideas to info@whiteribbon.ca

We discourage some traditional fundraising activities that end up being popularity contests - like paying to have candies, flowers or other gifts sent to particular youth.

Some White Ribbon Campaign action ideas

Here is a summary of some action ideas. If you need additional support in planning your event, please contact the White Ribbon Campaign national office at

1. White ribbon distribution

Make (or buy) white ribbons for distribution to parents/other youth/ or through a door to door campaign. If youth go door to door, a copy of the White Ribbon Campaign FAQ could be delivered along with a ribbon for a donation. This could be a fundraising and/or an awareness-generating activity.

2. White Ribbon in the name of love pledge dance

Encourage youth to gather pledges in support of the White Ribbon Campaign. Those with pledges amounting to more than a designated amount (for example, \$20) would get into the dance for free.

3. Guest speakers

Invite a representative from a women's shelter, crisis centre, university gender issues department or the White Ribbon Campaign, or a teacher or school board representative experienced in gender

issues to speak to your school/community group.

4. The great white ribbon sign-off

Several junior highs and high schools have created a giant white ribbon pledge sheet. Male youth are invited to pledge their commitment to ending men's violence against women by signing the ribbon.

5. Displays or tables

Invite local women's shelters, crisis centres, youth drop-in programs and White Ribbon Campaign volunteers to set up violence awareness tables in your school lobby or local community centre or shopping centre during lunchtime. This could be a large community presentation, collages of media or music representations, or a simple display of collected materials.

6. Posters

Create posters on the significance of your White Ribbon Campaign, gender stereotypes that challenge traditional men's and women's roles, or other issues related to violence against women. This activity could be a school-wide contest, a committee effort, or an art class project. You might also consider copying and putting up a White Ribbon Campaign poster or posters produced by local community groups.

7. Mural

One high school in Chelmsford, Ontario, created a mural for its foyer. This could be created by a small group of youth or your entire student population.

8. Play, skit or rap

Ask drama or music youth or other interested youth to put together a play, skit, or rap that addresses the issue of men's violence against women.

9. Film fest

Host a lunch-hour (alternatively weekend or after-school) film fest of videos on issues relating to dating violence, charging a nominal door fee or do it for free. Presentations should be followed by a discussion hosted by a facilitator. Call the White Ribbon Campaign national office for some suggested titles.

10. Announcements

Prepare information suitable for morning announcements that relate to the issue of men's violence against women. The announcements could take the form of songs, quotes and facts.

11. Banner

Create a white ribbon banner to be hung in your school/community group's front windows.

12. Discussion groups

Host a discussion group on issues related to men's violence against women. Youth could make classroom presentations or meet in small groups at lunch or after school.

13. Handouts

Distribute handouts as an activity itself or in conjunction with another activity. You may even want to prepare your own handouts that use material from this kit.

14. White shirt day

Designate a day that youth should wear a certain colour of shirt.

15. Bake sale

Invite interested youth or a class to prepare goods to be sold at lunch.

16. Handprints against violence

In the cafeteria at lunchtime, post a large sheet of paper with paint trays. Title the paper, "These hands will never be used in violence." Encourage male staff and youth to handprint the poster. This campaign material is also available through the White Ribbon Campaign website at www.whiteribbon.ca

17. Co-ed recreational activities

Host lunch-hour recreational games that encourage participation rather than competition (for example, beach ball, volleyball, badminton, basketball, etc.). Teams should be mixed male female. To participate, youth would pay a small door fee.

18. Item draw

Sell tickets for a chance to win a selected prize (for example, a romantic evening for two, including a limousine ride, dinner for two, and tickets to a semi-formal school dance). Local businesses might be willing to donate items or services for the draw.

19. Morning hot chocolate/donut sales

Sell hot chocolate and donuts before classes start in the morning. Local businesses might be willing to donate the supplies.

20. Fundraisers

Raise money for a local women's shelter or crisis centre by selling white ribbons or food (for example, chocolate bars, cookies, baked goods, hot dogs).

21. Poster Challenge

Ask youth to create a poster or work of art that depicts any of the following;

- One societal step that will help end violence against women;
- Imagine what our world will look like when our future has no violence against women;
- Imagine a world free of violence;
- Imagine a world of healthy equal relationships.

Section 2: Getting prepared

Here are key things to do as you get started:

1. Get approvals

As the resource person can help you identify what types of activities will require prior approval from school administrators/community organization leadership. Your campaign will get a boost if the school/community group supports your efforts.

If you would like to issue a press release, the White Ribbon Campaign national office can help you write the advisory and send it out to media contacts. Call 416-920-6684 for help. Most Ontario school boards require that any media advisory be approved by the Board office.

2. Consider the timing of events

- When planning events, it is important to ensure that your events do not conflict with other scheduled school activities, holidays, or exam periods.
- The timing of your events should be convenient for youth and should be planned to receive maximum exposure. You may want activities to take place over several days.

3. Publicize your committee and events

There are many ways to generate interest in your campaign and publicize your events. Aside from putting up posters and using the P.A. system, here are some things you might consider:

- Send notices about the campaign to representatives of school clubs or teams

4. Think about sponsorship

If you are organizing an activity that includes prizes or items that need to be purchased, consider approaching local merchants about sponsoring a campaign activity (for example, a grocery store might donate hot dogs and buns; a florist might donate helium-filled balloons.) Don't forget to ask your student council about arranging a small budget.

5. Develop ideas for White Ribbon Days and December 6

There is no single right way to organize a White Ribbon Campaign. Part of the spirit of White Ribbon is to encourage people in their own schools and communities to find creative and effective ways to involve more people and reach more people with the message about the type of future we want to live in.

The main focus of the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada is our White Ribbon Days, November 25 - December 6.

One of the things that happens in many schools is blending White Ribbon activities with December 6 commemoration. December 6 is Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. That day was chosen because it is the anniversary of the murder of 14 female engineering youth in Montreal in 1989 by a man who thought women didn't have a right to be educated. It is a day for men, young and old, to step back and listen to what women, young and old, have to say about men's violence against women. Men listen because women are the ones who are most affected by this violence. Men listen so they can learn. Men listen out of respect. Men listen because they care about the women in their lives. And men listen because we are dedicated to ensuring that our future has no violence against women.

Many schools hold memorial assemblies or do fundraising events on and around December 6. Often these will combine two symbols: For women in many parts of Canada, the symbol of that day is a red rose; in other parts of the country, it is a purple ribbon. (The YMCA produces a rose button.) Many schools distribute white ribbons and also use the red rose symbol on December 6.

We are often asked if women and girls should wear white ribbons. The white ribbon emerged as a symbol of men's and boys' opposition to violence against women. It is a pledge by males never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. But in many countries it has developed into a symbol of the deep concern among both men and women about violence against women. In many schools in Canada, both males and females wear a white ribbon, while in some schools only males wear them.

6. Share your successes with youth across Canada and around the world.

You can share your successes with youth in thousands of schools. Visit www.whiteribbon.ca. Send us photographs, a couple of paragraphs about your activities and the enclosed fundraising form, and we'll make sure to get the results onto our website. If you are a teacher, please complete our online evaluation for a free poster and also consider completing and sending us your two-page student evaluations so we can continue to develop and distribute educational activities that speak to youth.

Section 3: Attracting media coverage

As you decide what activities you want to hold at your school during White Ribbon Days, consider whether you want to try getting some coverage from your local media. This could help you spread the message of the White Ribbon Campaign, get other schools involved, and also attract community interest and recognition. There is an old song from the '60s with the line, "Teach your parents well." The media provide one way that youth can educate adults.

If your group is interested in getting some publicity, you should develop an activity that would most likely be of interest to the media. There is no way to guarantee media coverage, and try not to be disappointed if your activity doesn't get covered (it is particularly difficult in large cities). But the media are always looking for stories that are:

- Timely - for example, an event near December 6 makes for a timely story.
- Interesting or out of the ordinary - most often, what makes an event interesting is that it is both timely and unique. While handing out white ribbons to youth would probably not attract media interest, getting your entire student body to sign a huge white ribbon declaration might. (One elementary school made the national media when the principal had to kiss a pig because the youth had met a big fundraising target.)
- Highly visual - newspaper editors and television news directors look for stories that are visual. If, for example, you managed to get your entire school to wear white shirts and form the shape of a giant white ribbon, the media might consider covering the story. The story might also involve a guest speaker, school displays or youth willing to be interviewed.
- Have good sound bites or sound images - in the case of radio coverage, reporters look for stories that have a sound element. That way, they use background sounds from an event to tell the story, or have someone interesting to interview.

Break stereotypes and expectations - if your event or action breaks the media's stereotypes, that might get attention. (For example, in one Alberta town a local hockey team holds an annual fundraising drive for the local women's shelter. This goes against a common assumption about the ideas of athletes, and has gained a lot of local media attention.) If your event is to be timely, interesting and visual, you should plan the date, time and location of your activity, seek approval from your school administrators, and then prepare a news release for distribution.

A sample news release has been included in this section. It indicates, in square brackets, the information that your publicity team would have to add.

Your news release should:

- Be error-free and typed on school/community group letterhead if possible.
- Announce the event at the beginning and detail its newsworthiness.
- Include short, direct quotations from youth, if possible, which elaborate what is being said in the news release.
- Use action verbs in its description of what will be taking place.
- Be clear, to the point and concise (not more than a page).
- Answer the questions, who, what, when, where, why?

Your news release should be hand-delivered, faxed, or emailed to your local media outlets at least a few days before the event. For newspaper coverage, the release should be addressed either to a specific newspaper columnist who covers local issues or to the city editor. It's okay to send it to more than one person. For radio and television coverage, the release should be addressed to the news director.

In addition to a local newspaper, TV and radio station (or ones that serve your community from a neighbouring city), also send your release to any ethnic newspapers, other local publications, a local talk show host, your local cable television station or even to a community group that produces a newsletter. Aside from your major local media, you might also consider emailing or faxing your release to the White Ribbon Campaign national office at 416-9206684.

It's important to follow up your fax with a phone call a day before the event . Indicate who you are, where you are calling from, that you are calling about the event that will be taking place at your school tomorrow, and ask if any further information is required.

In small communities with a weekly paper, it's important that you contact the paper a few days before the event. (For example, if the paper comes out on Thursdays, you may have to contact them on Monday or Tuesday to be assured of getting in.) The previous week is even better.

We would really appreciate receiving copies of any newspaper coverage you receive. Please include your clipping(s) with your White Ribbon Evaluation Form, indicating the name of the paper and the date the article/photo appeared.

Sample media release [School/Community group Letterhead]

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Your school / community group name here]

Is taking an important step to say “Our future has no violence against women.”

[City -Month, Day, Year] - Youth at [your school name/community group name] will be [describe event] to launch the White Ribbon Campaign at their school/community.

At [give exact time] [detail what will be taking place and where]. More than [give number] youth will be participating in the event. [Your school/community group name] is located at [intersection]. [Add details that will be particularly attractive to the media.]

[Your school/community group name] is holding this event to create awareness among the student body about the commitment by youth that their future has no place for violence against women.

“[Add a short quotation from a youth on your White Ribbon activities organizing committee about what participating in White Ribbon means to him/her],” says [youth name and title if any].

[Your school/community group name] will be joining thousands of schools, community groups, unions, businesses and individuals across the country and around the world that are all participating in various White Ribbon events.

Launched in Canada in 1991, the White Ribbon Campaign has spread to almost 50 countries.
The media are invited to attend. Please sign in at the main office.

For more information, contact:

[Your name] or [facilitator’s name]

Student, White Ribbon Committee Member [his/her title] [Telephone #]

For more information about the White Ribbon Campaign, visit www.whiteribbon.ca or call the White Ribbon Campaign national office at 416-920-6684.

Section 4: White Ribbon Days activity checklist

1. Have you approached custodial staff about any equipment (tables, chairs, etc.) you might need during your White Ribbon Campaign?
2. Have you coordinated White Ribbon plans with events to commemorate December 6th?
3. Have you made arrangements with your school's/community groups's audiovisual club about any equipment you may require (VCR, TV, overhead)?
4. Have you booked the room, foyer, gym or other space that you will need to hold your activity?
5. Have you contacted your local media (television stations, radio stations, newspapers) about your upcoming events?
6. Have you contacted the White Ribbon Campaign national office to inform us about your school's White Ribbon campaign? We may be able to publicize your activities on the website or even to the national media. Please e-mail info@whiteribbon.ca, phone 416-920-6684 or 1800-328-2228, or fax us at 416-920-1678 with your plans.
7. Have you made copies of the materials you will be distributing? Have you made white ribbons for distribution?
8. Have you bought or made copies of the White Ribbon poster or created posters for display? Have you notified your school newspaper of your event?
9. Do you have the supplies you will need (straight pins, tape, scissors, paper, stapler)?
10. Are all committee members aware of their responsibilities, and are they aware of when and where activities are taking place?
11. After your White Ribbon Campaign, have you discussed and evaluated the outcome of your events, and gone to www.whiteribbon.ca to give us your feedback?