

Mark Knight



For many families it's a season of fear, not cheer

As the year draws to a close, families across the country are getting ready to wind down and celebrate. However, for many people, the holiday season is a time filled with fear.

Year after year, December is one of the most high-risk times for people experiencing family violence, with the period between December 25 and January 1 often being well above the yearly daily average for family violence incidents, according to Crime Statistics Agency data.

Their figures show that during December 2023, there was an average of 279 family violence incidents per day recorded by Victoria Police. This average increased by 33 per cent on Christmas Day, with 372 family violence incidents recorded. That's an average of one incident every four minutes.

This is also a very busy time for frontline support services, who remain open and ready to assist people experiencing violence over this period.

As we brace for another spike over the holidays, I want to emphasise that one woman lost at the hands of men's violence is one too many. This year, at least 98 women have been murdered – and these are only the known cases. There is no official count of family violence homicides, and many victims remain invisible – meaning the true number of deaths is likely much

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higher than we know. This is the tragic tip of a much larger iceberg.

Family violence is complex – there's no one particular reason why we see an increase in incidents over the holidays. Some exacerbating factors include increased time at home with the perpetrator, increased use of alcohol and other drugs, and increased levels of financial stress.

However, it's important to remember that while these things may exacerbate family violence, they are not the underlying cause. Violence is always a choice.

But it doesn't have to be like this. Family and gender-based violence is preventable. It's everybody's business, and everybody's responsibility, every day of the year – we all have a role to play here.

We know that many people experiencing family violence will never contact the police or reach out for support on their own. Often, it is the people closest to them – their friends, family, neighbours or colleagues – who will be the only ones to notice something is wrong. It's crucial we all know how to recognise the signs and respond if someone we know is unsafe.

Family violence can take many forms – physical, emotional, financial – and it's common for a victim survivor to experience several of these. Certainly, physical signs – like unexplained cuts and bruises – are a big red flag, but there are other, more subtle things to look out for.

Your loved one may be hard to contact, or seem withdrawn and depressed. They may seem particularly on edge or anxious when their partner is around. That person may be controlling and jealous, or might call and text your loved one incessantly.

The main thing is to trust your gut. If you feel like something is wrong, don't ignore it.

Find a way to speak with your loved one alone, away from their abuser. Gently share what is worrying you, and ask them if they feel safe.

If you're unsure what to say, this

conversation guide is a handy tool.

Importantly, always approach with kindness and compassion. Don't judge or blame, and don't tell them to "just leave". There are many reasons why someone might be unable to leave an abusive relationship. Respect what they're willing to do and focus on what they need from you.

If they're not ready or willing to talk, that's OK – just let them know you'll be there for them whenever they need you.

If they do need help, some practical things you can do include helping them connect with a specialist family violence service. If you're unsure of what services are available, a good place to start is the list of Victorian services on the Are You Safe At Home? website.

You can also create a safety plan together, which might include agreeing on a code word or signal they can use if they're in danger, and keeping copies of important documents at your home in case they need to leave quickly. Even offering things like childcare or assistance with errands can be incredibly helpful and can give them the space to make a plan.

Knowing someone you care about is experiencing abuse can be deeply upsetting, and it can be hard to know what to do. But you certainly don't need to be an expert – even the smallest steps can have a huge effect.

Tania Farha is CEO of Safe and Equal

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Zealots make no sense

Patrick Carlyon



Are we doomed to yet another federal election about claims that have no basis in fact, science or logic?

For years now, Energy Minister Chris Bowen has fought valiantly against debate, reason and common sense.

He defended an ALP ad last week announcing that nuclear energy increased the risks for heart attacks, cancer and strokes.

Here was mischievous politics at its worst. Yes, radiation causes cancer, much as sunlight causes cancer. Water is another evil, of course. It causes drownings.

Never mind the dearth of evidence for these claims. And never mind the dozens of countries clambering to join the dozens of countries that already use nuclear power.

They're all mad, obviously, or to use Bowen's take on an Australian nuclear future, they have "gone down a road of slippery assumptions and conscious mistruths".

Australia is ill served by a nuclear debate that falls along party lines. Other countries moved past such divides last millennium.

One party here argues that nuclear is illegal, much like rape and murder, while the other points to the grand uptake of nuclear energy by industry giants such as Google and Microsoft.

Bowen posts many messages about the perils of nuclear. His battery never runs out. A Christmas toy, he has only one setting – bloody loud.

He talks about "fantasies" and "wildest dreams" in blathers of preachiness matched only by his colleague, Penny Wong, and (to borrow from Bowen's script) her slippery assumptions and conscious mistruths about Israel.

They're both zealots. They wage simplistic debates on complicated issues with a religiosity of passion which overwhelms any fact-check service.

Political pulpits will multiply in coming months.

Both sides will "fix" the cost-of-living crisis. Both sides will "lower" power bills. Both sides will "build" more houses, even if there are not enough tradies in Australia to knock up a cubbyhouse.

And both sides will "solve" energy, lest the other side enact their devilish plan to destroy the nation one power station – or transmission line – at a time.

Enjoy the holidays. What follows will be an onslaught of exaggeration that appears set to be more dishonest than any other federal election.

And stay away from radiation, sunlight, and water. They can kill you, you know.

Patrick Carlyon is a Sunday Herald Sun columnist