

Promoting Healthy Masculinity: Beginning the process of engaging men in sexual violence prevention

Prevention, at its core, is about changing social norms and beliefs that make violence acceptable in society. Sexual violence is connected to all forms of oppression, but sexism (or the belief that women and girls are less valuable than men and boys), is one of the strongest forces. Although the anti-sexual violence and feminist movements have done tremendous work and education around sexism and how harmful it is to women and girls, men and boys have not historically been part of this conversation.* This Technical Assistance Bulletin will offer suggestions and provide resources for agencies looking to engage men as part of sexual violence prevention.



Working with men and boys is sexual violence prevention

As the anti-sexual violence movement progresses, engaging men as activists will further the work around promoting new models for healthy masculinity. Sexism, rigid gender norms, and homophobia limit the ways in which men and boys can relate to one another and the world around them. For example, when a boy or young man acts in a way that is not acceptable or in line with gender norms, he is called any number of degrading names or threatened with physical violence. The names he is called are connected to beliefs that anything feminine /female or any desire other than heterosexual is bad.

Engaging men as activists and allies in anti-sexual violence work will provide opportunities to help beyond their interpersonal relationships with women and girls. Men will be able to model respectful, healthy masculinity for the boys in their lives.

“Mentors (a great role for male allies) need to continue challenging and supporting men in moving beyond ‘I do it for her,’ or ‘I do it for them’ to eventually understand the interconnectedness of even his own suppression within patriarchy” (Grove, 2011, p.8).

* Within this resource, discussions of men and boys will use traditional understandings of men and masculinity. PCAR acknowledges the contributions of male allies, as well as how men who identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender have worked tirelessly in ending sexist oppression for decades.

What is healthy masculinity?

One of the ways we can do this work is by promoting a model for masculinity that encourages social justice and action. Patrick McGann, Director of Strategy and Planning at Men Can Stop Rape, [posted a working definition of healthy masculinity on the organization's blog](#). His definition is one that may serve as a starting point for thinking about the evolution of men and boys engaging in sexual violence prevention (McGann, 2011). Each of these components requires training, support, and behavior change – all necessary for changing social norms.

Healthy masculinity is...

- Recognizing unhealthy ways in which masculinity is defined or acted out in his community – ways that are harmful to the self and others.

EXAMPLE: *A young man realizes that the tradition of calling male members of the chess club “wussies” or other hurtful names is connected to negative ideas about what is masculine.*

- Actively working toward replacing unhealthy and violent masculine language and actions with nurturing behaviors and attitudes that benefit men and others.

EXAMPLE: *A group of male high school students get together to mentor middle school boys around friendships, healthy relationships, technology, school and planning for the future, and being a good community member.*

- Visibly supporting gender equity and other forms of equity.

EXAMPLE: *A local business owner writes to the newspaper about sexist advertising used to market an upcoming event or product.*

- Practicing social and emotional skills that positively challenge unhealthy masculine attitudes and behaviors.

EXAMPLE: *A man speaking up at a local bar or get-together where sexist or harassing comments are made about women's bodies.*

Next Steps

Creating or expanding opportunities for men to help is a great first step when an agency is interested in engaging men as activists and allies in the anti-sexual violence movement. There are a number of organizations who focus on engaging men and boys and promoting healthy masculinity. The following online resources have a number of free downloadable toolkits and materials for use in local communities.

Coaching Boys into Men

Futures Without Violence, formerly the Family Violence Prevention Fund, developed *Coaching Boys into Men* as a strategy for using the unique position and influence men have in their communities to prevent domestic and sexual violence.

Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Transformation:

The Group Education Manual

The ACQUIRE Project/EngenderHealth and Promundo put together a comprehensive guide for educating young men and boys about social justice. The guide covers topics such as gender norms, healthy sexuality, healthy relationships, and healthy conceptualizations of fatherhood.

Men Can Stop Rape

Men Can Stop Rape's (MCSR) Men of Strength clubs are prevention programs focused on giving young men the space to explore masculinity and discover new models for healthy interactions and community engagement. MCSR also has a public norms campaign, Where do you stand?, that encourages bystander action and ally behavior. The Where do you stand? Campus programming guide is also available on the MCSR [website](#).

Where Our Boys At? Involving Young Men as Allies to End Violence against Girls

The Rogers Park Young Women's Action Team's toolkit offers tools and resources developed through a multi-year program development process. Resources offered include discussion guides, workshop outlines, and a reading list.

This Technical Assistance Bulletin was created by PCAR's Engaging Men Workgroup and authored by Liz Zadnik, Education and Resource Coordinator.

References

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