



Raise Respectful Boys Not Macho Men

The first question you probably asked yourself when you found out that you were going to be a parent was, "Will it be a boy or a girl?" This emotional and innocent question is loaded with many different ideas about what is expected of raising a son or daughter. That's why we aren't surprised when someone tells us that boys and girls were brought up very differently in his or her family. Brothers and sisters sometimes live under the same roof but in separate worlds, one for men and the other for women.



Even in the 21st century, we may raise our sons and daughters differently, based on what was considered feminine and masculine years ago. This kind of upbringing has been harmful to both men and women. The sad part is that we pass on such incorrect messages as:

- ◆ Women are passive and timid
- ◆ Men are rude and unable to cry
- ◆ Men don't dare express their feelings except to act aggressively
- ◆ Men are more powerful than women and that women should serve them

Unfortunately, those messages are still being taught. Unless we change the way we raise our children, they may very well pass these same messages on to their children. But we have the opportunity to stop this pattern and raise healthier, happier sons and daughters. It's never too late in life to change our attitudes and our way of thinking. Then, we need to change our conversation. It may not be easy, but as mothers, fathers, and teachers, we need to raise our children to respect themselves and others.

WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN?

As parents we can do many things to ensure that boys feel comfortable with their gender. Teach them not to live their lives in conflict with the opposite sex. Promote equality by encouraging boys to express their emotions--to let us know when they are feeling affectionate, angry, sad, or happy. Teach them to be patient, sensitive, and respectful. Our goal is to help them become husbands and fathers who respect their sons and daughters, their wives, those around them, and their community. To reach this goal, we must begin by understanding that men and women are essentially the same. Both need to give and receive emotional, as well as physical, affection.

Evaluate Yourself

You can start by asking yourself some questions:

- ◆ Exactly what does it mean for me to be a mother or father?
- ◆ Am I raising my son differently from my daughter?
- ◆ Am I being more lenient or stricter with my son than my daughter?

Remember, it's never too late to make changes.

Keep an Open Mind and Examine Your Actions

Being a parent is a constant challenge which requires daily thinking and learning. It also involves building a fair relationship with your children, depending on their ages and needs. Remember that today's ideas about raising children may not be the same ones that your parents used in raising you.

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Set a Good Example

One of our basic purposes as parents is to teach children how to get along with others, both within and outside of the family. If children see their parents setting a good example at home, they will be more likely to grow into respectful adults. Emphasize a positive attitude, respect for others, principles of responsibility, and love of learning.

Avoid Arguments in Front of Your Children

Aggressive words and actions signal a lack of love or respect. From the time they are babies, children are very receptive. They react in a certain way when their parents set a positive or negative example. Children are not born violent; they learn through imitation. If shouting, hitting, or other violence occurs in your home, don't be surprised if your son acts the same way with his sisters or female classmates. In order to create a peaceful environment, parents need to learn how to disagree with each other respectfully and avoid aggressive actions.

Express Your Love for Your Children Freely

Remember that you, mom and dad, are the first ones to model affection for your children. A child who grows up surrounded by his parents' love will have strong self-esteem and will show affection. Teach boys that men can also be tender and loving. Frequently tell them how much you love them. When dad gives his sons a hug, a kiss, or caress, they learn that a father who kisses his son is not less of a man.



Help Him to Express His Feelings

Boys must learn from their parents that feelings are neither "feminine" nor "masculine." Fear, sadness, and anger are human emotions and it's healthy to express what you feel, no matter how old you are, or whether you're a man or a woman. Keep repeating to your children that crying is not just for girls--as our grandparents taught us--and that being a man doesn't mean being rude or aggressive. Let your son talk about his fears without labeling him "weakling" or "sissy." Doing this can help him become a healthy man who will respect the feelings of both men and women.

Teach Him to Get Along Well with Others

Pay attention to the way your son treats others. Besides saying "don't make fun of your sister" or "don't hit her," help him think about how his sister feels when she is teased or hit. Never use words like "you act like a girl" or "your sister is better than you." That will only make your son more aggressive and competitive towards the opposite sex. Be sure to support his good behavior when you see it.

Finally, remember that your goal is to raise a respectful man, and not a macho man. A man can express his feelings appropriately. He can show tenderness, warmth, weakness and strength. He is sure of himself at times, but may even be afraid in some situations. He can enjoy cooking for his family as much as he enjoys a soccer match. A man who is respectful of others and sure of himself doesn't have to be afraid of an intelligent woman. Instead he knows that smart women can be part of his support system. Above all, he can become a man who learns that treating others lovingly and respectfully is the best path to follow as he grows and explores life.

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