10 Tips for Engaging Boys and Young Men

by Jason | Mar 12, 2017 | Blog | 0 comments

We’re really proud to share some of our learnings and practices from
our experiences with the ‘Next Gen Men’ in our youth program, from our team debriefs and planning, and drawing on the knowledge and expertise of other programs and researchers. Presented at the Youth Forum and NGO CSW Forum at the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, these are our 10 Tips for Engaging Boys and Young Men in Gender Equity and Transformative Masculinities!

1 | What’s Your Hook?

Getting boys and young men to take the first step ‘in the door’ to start learning about gender inequities is often the first challenge. In Next Gen Men’s youth program, we emphasize the opportunity to build friendships outside of school, fun activities, and a field trip. We know of other programs that offer sports and recreation, or even take place during school hours and allow students to ‘skip class’ for their sessions.

2 | Get Out of the Classroom!

Instead of didactic, lecture-style teaching methods like lectures and presentations, using participatory, experiential activities and games to encourage discussion, sharing, and critical reflection can have a lasting impact on boys’ and young men’s understanding of, attitudes, towards, and actions around gender inequity. In our program, we start with a check-in circle, use physical movement and activity, watch short videos, and use role plays to explore issues from different points of view and practice new skills.

3 | Take Your Time

Having multiple sessions spaced apart by a week or a few days allows participants to reflect on what they are learning and how they can apply it to their everyday lives. In our sessions, we use our check-in time to review what we learned in the previous sessions and share if there were any opportunities to put it into practice.

4 | Safe, Inclusive Spaces

We establish group agreements on respect, confidentiality, and other ground rules suggested by our groups in the first session. Whether you have many sessions with a
group or just one, it is crucial to foster a safe space for everyone to be included.

5 | Challenge Gender Norms and Stereotypes

Using a gender transformative approach means challenging gender norms and stereotypes and addressing gender-based discrimination and violence in all its forms. There are opportunities to weave this focus into all different types of activities, games, and discussions.

6 | Gender Equality is Good for Everyone

We discuss how gender norms and stereotypes are harmful to people of all genders, including boys and young men. We want to promote the idea that gender equity is good for everyone and that boys and young men have an opportunity to be part of the solution!

7 | Role Model Healthier Masculinities

As facilitators, role models, and mentors, it is important to demonstrate and practice what we are hoping to inspire, such as vulnerability. If we are asking participants to share and talk about their experiences and feelings openly and honestly, we must be willing to do so ourselves. The first person to role model this behaviour, whether it is the facilitator or a participant, often gives permission to others to follow their lead.

8 | Break Through The Masks

People of all genders and ages seek acceptance and belonging and care about how they are perceived. Understanding this fear of rejection has helped us in working with boys and young men, who often adopt a ‘tough guy’ facade to fit in, belong, and/or protect themselves from bullying and other social and psychological harms. We ask everyone to let down the masks they wear and accept themselves and others for who they are.

9 | Meet Everyone Where They’re At

Every person’s willingness to learn about gender inequities and their readiness to take action is different! Understanding this means finding ways to offer different opportunities for different individuals and groups, including those who are very engaged
10 | Build Peer Support

It’s not always easy being the only person who is willing to stand up against bullying, discrimination, or violence. We work with groups from different classrooms, grades, and communities and encourage them support each other and stand up for what’s right outside of our program.

Why boys and young men?

Childhood, adolescence, and youth are critical ‘windows of opportunity’ during which the opinions, ideas, and beliefs that reinforce gender inequalities can be challenged. Boys and young men experience many advantages in our patriarchal societies, but just like everyone, they are also negatively affected by restrictive gender roles and stereotypes. Encouragingly, there is evidence that younger generations of boys and men are more accepting of gender equality! To accelerate change for the next generation, we need to continue to engage and involve boys and young men in gender equity.

What do we mean by ‘gender equity?’

Our vision for gender equity is for people of all genders to be valued and included and for everyone to grow up in a world in which they are not restricted or limited in any way by their gender identity and expression. We also like the idea of equity, because it’s important to recognize that not everyone starts at the same place or has the same needs.

What do we mean by ‘transformative masculinities?’

Basically, we think a lot about the question of ‘what does it mean to be a man!’ We grew up with some of the societal norms and stereotypes that told us that there was only one way to be masculine. These ideas have led to significant harm to boys and
men themselves, and people of other genders. The good news is that these norms and stereotypes are constructed by society and they can be changed by the people that make up our society! We can all embrace the idea that masculinity comes in many different expressions (hence, masculinities) and redefine ‘what it means to be a man’ for the next generation.

Interested in learning more about our work? Check out our youth program, follow our social media channels, and get in touch!
Essential Strategies for Teaching Boys Effectively

Excerpted from Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens

1. Teachers increase the use of graphics, pictures, and storyboards in literacy-related classes and assignments. When teachers use pictures and graphics more often (even well into high school), boys write with more detail, retain more information, and get better grades on written work across the curriculum.

2. Classroom methodology includes project-based education in which the teacher facilitates hands-on, kinesthetic learning. The more learning is project-driven and kinesthetic, the more boys' bodies will be engaged in learning—causing more information to be retained, remembered, and displayed on tests and assignments.

3. Teachers provide competitive learning opportunities, even while holding to cooperative learning frameworks. Competitive learning includes classroom debates, content-related games, and goal-oriented activities; these are often essential for boy-learning and highly useful for the life success of girls, too.

4. Classroom curricula include skills training in time, homework, and classroom management. In order to feel competent, engaged, and motivated, many boys need help learning how to do homework, follow directions, and succeed in school and life; classrooms are the primary place these boys come for that training.

5. Approximately 50 percent of reading and writing choices in a classroom are left up to the students themselves. Regularly including nontraditional materials, such as graphic novels, magazines, and comic books, increases boys' engagement in reading and improves both creative and expository writing.

6. Teachers move around their classrooms as they teach. Instructors' physical movement increases boys' engagement, and includes the teacher leading students in physical "brain breaks"—quick, one-minute brain-awakening activities—that keep boys' minds engaged.

7. Students are allowed to move around as needed in classrooms, and they are taught how to practice self-discipline in their movement. This strategy is especially useful when male students are reading or writing—when certain boys twitch, tap their feet, stand up, or pace, they are often learning better than if they sit still, but teachers are often not trained in innovating toward more movement in classrooms.
8. **Male mentoring systems permeate the school culture, including use of parent-mentors, male teachers, vertical mentoring (e.g., high school students mentoring elementary students), and male peer mentoring.** By 16, vocationally oriented boys (and girls) need schools and communities to provide access to jobs and mentors through which students can master a trade.

9. **Teachers and counselors provide skill building for sensitive boys (approximately 20 percent of males fall somewhere on the "sensitive boy" spectrum), and special education classes are taught by teachers trained in how to teach boys specifically.** This is crucial because approximately 70 percent of learning-disabled students nationwide are boys.
Select Books about Boys and Young Men
Note: Inclusion on this list does not necessarily imply endorsement.

Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys, by Dan Kindlon, Michael Thompson and Teresa Barker

Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood, by William S. Pollack

Real Boys' Voices, by William S. Pollack and Todd Shuster

Dude, You’re a F*g: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School, by C.J. Pascoe

The Masculine Self by Andrew Smiler

The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession by Harrison G. Pope Jr., Katharine A. Phillips, Roberto Olivardia

Invisible No More: Understanding the Disenfranchisement of Latino Men and Boys, by Pedro Noguera, Aída Hurtado, Edward Fergus (Editors)

Speaking of Boys, by Michael Thompson

Outside the XY: Black and Brown Queer Masculinity by Morgan Mann Willis

Teaching the Male Brain, by Abigail Norfleet James

Active Lessons for Active Brains: Teaching Boys and Other Experiential Learners, Grades 3-10, by Abigail Norfleet James

Race and the Black Male Subculture, by William T. Hoston


Challenging Casanova, by Andrew Smiler

And don’t miss this documentary:
The Mask You Live In: http://therepresentationproject.org/film/the-mask-you-live-in/
WHAT YOUNG MEN CAN DO
TO PREVENT BULLYING & SEXUAL HARASSMENT

You might think you can’t help prevent bullying and sexual harassment. Not true.

Read the list below to learn what you and your friends can do every day. It can be something small or large. Whatever you do, you're making a difference. Don't stand on the sidelines!

BE BOLD

Understand how you can help
Helping to prevent bullying and harassment is about small steps. You don't have to move a mountain. Decide what kinds of actions feel safe. Everyone taking small steps adds up to big steps.

Decide who you want to be
Consider whether messages like “stop acting like a little girl” lead young men to prove they aren’t acting like a girl by bullying and harassing. Choose what kind of young man you want to be. We need positive role models like you.

Talk it over
Don’t wait to deal with the problem after it’s occurred. If you’re troubled by bullying and harassment and want to do something about it, talk to a friend or a trusted adult. Two heads are better than one.

Get a different perspective
Ask young women how bullying and harassment affects their daily lives. Listen and learn from them about their experiences. Not only will they help you make better choices about your own behavior, they’ll help you be more convincing when you’re persuading your friends not to bullying and harass.

Show your strength
Don’t bully or harass anyone. Make a pledge to be a young man whose strength is used for respect.

BE STRONG

Ask guys
Ask other young men if they’re bothered by bullying and harassment. You might think you’re the only one, but it’s more likely that plenty of other young men feel the same way you do.

Be aware of pop culture
We are surrounded daily by TV shows, music, magazines, video games, and movies that communicate messages about bullying, and harassment. Don’t let images in popular culture decide your behavior.

TAKE ACTION!

Choose words carefully
When you use words to bully or harass someone, you support the belief that they are less than fully human. It is easier to ignore someone’s well-being when they are seen as inferior. Choose language that respects people.

Speak out
Start with friends. Maybe you say you don’t find it funny when a friend is making fun of someone. Maybe you say you don’t like some disrespectful language a friend used. Speaking out to people you know will be good practice for speaking out to others you don’t know as well.

Get involved!
Get involved in student government and become a spokesperson for anti-bullying and harassment at your school. Maybe there are already student groups that would care about preventing these behaviors. If not, start one.

Learn more about [YMOST] Young Men of Strength at www.MenCanStopRape.org
Most guys don’t commit rape, but every guy can play a vital role in ending sexual & dating violence

**BE BOLD**

**Define your own manhood**
Consider how common messages like “don’t take no for an answer” play a role in creating unhealthy and unsafe relationships. Choose what kind of man you want to be.

**Understand from a female’s perspective**
Ask a woman you know - how often and in what situations has she feared being sexually assaulted? How has this affected her daily life? Does she know someone who has been assaulted? How has it affected her? Listen and learn.

**Get a guy’s perspective**
Ask a friend - how would it feel to be viewed as a potential rapist? How would he react if a woman or girl in his life - his mother, a sister, a girlfriend, or a friend - was sexually assaulted?

**Take note of pop culture’s messages**
Daily, we’re surrounded by movies, TV shows, music, magazines, and video games that sometimes communicate harmful messages about masculinity and relationships. Ask how images in popular culture affect how you view yourself and women.

**Pledge to be a man of strength**
Don’t ever have sex with anyone against their will. Pledge to be a man whose strength is used for respect, and not for hurting others.

**Support survivors of rape**
Rape will not be taken seriously until everyone knows how common it is. By learning to sensitively support survivors in their lives, men can help both women and other men feel safer to speak out about being raped and let the world know how serious a problem rape is.

**BE STRONG**

**Talk it over first**
Create a space to speak honestly about sex: listen to your partner, state your desires openly, and ask questions if a situation seems unclear.

**If drunk or high, wait for consent**
If your partner is drunk or high and can’t give consent, back off and wait until you both are ready to enthusiastically say yes!

**TAKE ACTION!**

**Choose your words carefully**
When you put down women, you support the belief that they are less than human. It is easier to ignore a woman’s decisions or well-being if she is seen as inferior. Choose respectful language.

**Stand up**
You probably will never see a rape in progress, but you will hear attitudes and see behaviors that degrade women and promote a culture of violence. When your friend tells a rape joke, let him know it’s not funny.

**Get involved!**
Join or donate to an organization working to prevent violence against women. Rape crisis centers, domestic violence agencies, and men's anti-rape groups count on donations for their survival and always need volunteers to share the workload.