

Coaching Boys into Men

by Nancy Durborow, PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The boys in your life need your time and energy to grow into healthy young men. Boys are swamped with influences – from friends, the neighborhood, TV, the Internet, music and movies. They hear all kinds of messages about what it means to “be a man” – that they have to be tough and in control. These messages are harmful.

Boys need your advice on how to behave toward girls. Boys are watching you and how you relate to other men and women. So teach boys, and teach them often, that there is no place for violence in a relationship.

Teach Early. It’s never too soon to talk to a child about violence. Talk with him about what it means to be fair, share, and treat others with respect.

Be There. If it comes down to one thing you can do, this is it. Just being with boys is crucial. Boys will probably not say this directly, but they want male presence around them, even if few words are exchanged.

Listen. Hear what he has to say. Listen to how he and his friends talk about girls. Is he worried that any of his friends are hurting someone else?

Tell Him How. Teach him ways to express his anger without violence. When he gets mad, he can walk it out, talk it out, or take a time out. Let him know that he can always come to you if things are getting out of hand. Try to give him examples of what you might say or do in situations that could turn out violent.

Bring it up. A kid will never ask you for guidance on how to treat women. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t need it. Try watching TV with him or listening to his music and when you see or hear things that depict violence against women, tell him what you think about it. Be sure he knows that treating girls with respect is important.

Be a Role Model. Fathers, coaches and any man who spends time with boys or teens will have the greatest impact when they “walk the walk”. They will learn what respect means by observing how you treat other people. So make respect a permanent way of dealing with people – when you’re driving in traffic, in restaurants with waiters, and with your family around the dinner table. He’s watching what you say and taking his cues from you, good and bad.

Teach Often. Your job isn’t done once you get the first talk out of the way. Help him work through problems in relationships as they arise. Use every opportunity to reinforce the message that violence has no place in a relationship.

For more information and help on coaching boys into men, go to www.endabuse.org. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE). 1-800-787-3224 (TTY for the Deaf). visit the website at www.ndvh.org.

Help is available in English and Spanish and many other languages. All contact with the hotline is free and confidential.