



BIG BOYS CRY TOO

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I am a firm believer in all of us being responsible for our actions, behaviours and ourselves. However, I also believe that prevention is better than the cure and is much easier. This is a message to all of you that have power in our society to positively influence the generations to come.

In a situation where a man has been violent to his partner, or in a family violence situation,

it is a man's responsibility to acknowledge and alter his behaviour if he wants to truly engage in a safe and mutually beneficial relationship. But how does a man recognise that his behaviour is unsafe or dangerous for his partner? What are the values which inform men 'to do the right thing' or know when they are being violent, unsafe or controlling?

The rhetoric in current media, is about how

to solve the domestic violence epidemic and the general consensus is dismay and horror at the growing numbers of violent incidents. The most dangerous place for a woman to be, is at home with a violent partner. There has been an emphasis on behavioural change programs which work with men who use violence, once they have been identified. Behavioural change programs work with the behaviour as an afterthought.

What can be done in order to prevent these relationships and behaviours from taking place to begin with?

While changing our behaviour is tough, having different values on appropriate and safe behaviours in the first place may just be that little bit easier. What do men need in order to have safe relationships with their partners?

1. GENDER BELIEFS/ROLES

Our beliefs on gender and relationships start with our very first relationship, our relationship with and our understanding of our parents'

relationship. People who use violence or react violently, have built the idea that those behaviours are somehow acceptable, or even necessary in their relationships, so they feel that the behaviour is justified. These values or belief systems are the first elements that need change. Gender equality has forced its way into our social discourse over the generations and is becoming less of an issue, but maybe we need more men to own this issue as opposed to women. What better way for men to understand gender equality, than for it to be taught to them by their fathers? This includes modelling gender equality in your household by demonstrating joint decision making, shared roles in terms of daily tasks and open discussion about running the household.

What should parents be engendering in their children?

2. SAFETY IN A RELATIONSHIP

Kids learn how to problem solve by watching their parents do it repeatedly. If you want to teach your kids the safest, most beneficial

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way to hold safe relationships, teach them by doing it yourself. Demonstrate safety to your kids by showing them difficult problems can be resolved safely without the use of violence, shouting, extended silences etc.

It is OK to expose your kids to your (child appropriate) disagreements. This makes them aware that all couples disagree and that there are safe outcomes and resolutions when two mature adults work towards it.

3. CONSISTENT DISCIPLINE

There are many lessons to be learnt through our discipline styles, but more importantly, children learn safety and trust through discipline and will thrive within the boundaries which we implement. We also need to recognise the difference between situations which require us to discipline kids and situations which require us to emotionally support our kids so they are not left feeling unsupported.

Make sure your discipline styles are consistent, age appropriate and fair. Never apply discipline when you are upset or angry.

Using smacking, time out or shaming, has been demonstrated to be less effective and less useful for kids. The style of discipline you give your kids now, will become the model of conflict resolution that they replicate as adults. What message do you want to send your kids about resolving conflict?

4. BIG BOYS CRY TOO

As a society, we have forced the idea that boys should not feel as vulnerable, hurt or sad as girls can. Boys who reject their own sense of vulnerability, turn into men who feel threatened by it. When these men feel this threat, they naturally react in what they see as the only acceptable way...with violence.

Violence is not only about men hitting women. Violence is about safety in all relationships.

As a society, we can teach the generations to come, that violence is unnecessary and we can evolve past it. We are constantly telling boys they need to 'man up', not cry or feel weak. We are telling young boys that they are not allowed to feel vulnerable and that if they do they are not masculine.

We must allow boys to feel safe when they are feeling vulnerable. Teach boys about masculinity in terms of emotional strength as opposed to physical strength.

While this article is founded on the idea that society needs to raise boys to be open to all their emotions, including the vulnerable ones, there is another theme which desperately needs to be explored. Girls need to be able to accept themselves, recognising dangerous and unsafe relationships and be able to access support to extricate themselves safely. Girls need to be taught that they can be appreciated for more than their physical beauty and that they are valued no matter what.

Girls need to be able to accept themselves and recognise dangerous and unsafe relationships.

My hope is that we continue to see positive change and that the generations to come, can look back on our generation with dismay and wonder how it was possible that family violence had become such a widespread issue.

Ray Medhora is a child and family therapist. He loves to speak to people, he enjoys his work and has had much success over the years working with children, families and men of Australia. He is available for private sessions over Skype or in person in the North Shore of Sydney, Australia. More information is available on his [website](#).

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