



Start the Conversation: Engaging Men and Boys



Office for the
Prevention of
Domestic Violence

Active participation of men and boys is crucial in the effort to eliminate gender-based violence. Historically, men and boys have not always been prominent in this effort, but by engaging with them around this topic, men and boys can fulfill a crucial role in ending gender-based violence. This toolkit provides definitions, conversation starters, and resources to “Start the Conversation” with the men and boys in your life.

How to Use This Toolkit

Do your research. The resources in this toolkit will help you learn about sexual violence and consent, so you're prepared to answer common questions.

Be clear about definitions. Gender-based violence is about power and control; it's not an accident or a miscommunication. Definitions are at the end of this toolkit.

Be ready. Once you've learned about the topic, think about who you want to talk to and the best way to talk with them (alone, with friends, in a group setting, etc.). Many different people can benefit from talking about gender-based violence (i.e. what it is, how it impacts us, etc.) and you may need a different approach for each one. Check out the different ways to “Start the Conversation” in this toolkit.

Start the conversation! There are so many ways to get involved to end gender-based violence. By bringing this difficult subject into the light, you're showing survivors that they aren't alone.

Every conversation will be different. Sometimes these conversations can be difficult. Don't forget to take care of yourself throughout the process.

Make sure you're heard. These conversations are important but can be hard for many people to talk about. Some people aren't ready or may have difficulty hearing what you have to say. Remember to meet people where they are and know that you are making a difference just by bringing this topic into the light.

Create a safe and comfortable space. Acknowledge the possible discomfort and reassure the people you're speaking with that their feelings are valid and their contributions to the discussion are valuable. Set a standard with the expectation of creating open dialogue by establishing group agreements.

Promote reflection and participatory learning. Be present for the conversation by listening and understanding what individuals are feeling. Look for opportunities for agreement and connection. Be mindful of the language you use.

Encourage openness and honesty. Remain open to positions that are different from yours and be open to receiving questions about your own assumptions. Different lived experiences shape our perspectives, and the goal of these conversations is to help one another learn and open our minds to other possibilities.



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New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline

Text: 844.997.2121

Call: 800.942.6906

Chat: opdv.ny.gov

Free. Confidential. 24/7.

Available in most languages

Ways to Start the Conversation

Please note that some audiences may find this material difficult. To learn more about the topic, or to talk to an advocate, see the resources at the end of this toolkit.

Host a Documentary Viewing Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Man Enough</i>, 2017• <i>The Mask You Live In</i>, 2015• TED Talk: Why I'm done trying to be "man enough"• <i>Minding the Gap</i>, 2018• "Is there a better way to raise boys to avoid toxic masculinity"
Listen to a Podcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Code Switch: What's in a Dad?• Remaking Manhood: The Healthy Masculinity Podcast• Man Enough• Scenes from a Black Trans Life
Start a Reading Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture</i> (Roxane Gay, 2018)• <i>Breaking Out of Manhood: The Next Generation of Manhood</i> (Tony Porter, 2018)• <i>The Macho Paradox</i> (Jackson Katz, 2019)• <i>You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame, Resilience, and the Black Experience</i> (Tarana Burke and Brené Brown, 2021)• <i>You Throw Like a Girl: The Blind Spot of Masculinity</i> (Don McPherson, 2019)
Talk About a PSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a Word
Post on Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media can be a great place to "Start the Conversation"• Make sure to tag @NYSOPDV• Post a graphic, ask a question, or share an article or video to get the conversation going
Call it Out	<p>The best time to "Start the Conversation" is when people are engaging in harmful behavior that contributes to rape culture and blames victims for abuse. When you hear rape jokes or victim blaming, say something. Sometimes people don't even realize that their words can have consequences on how we view sexual violence and victims. If you're not sure what to say, try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "What did you mean by that?"• "How do you think they feel?"• "How would you feel if that happened to you or someone you love?"



Conversation Starters

Masculinity

- What types of problematic messages do boys get about what it means to “be a man?”
 - “Boys don’t cry”
 - “Take it like a man”
 - “Stop acting like a girl”
 - “Be strong”
- How are these messages reinforced as boys grow up?
- How do these messages shape how men behave?
- What are some ways that men try to “turn off” their feelings?
- Can two people have different opinions of masculinity or manhood?
- What does healthy masculinity look like?
- Where do these messages come from?
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Society
 - Media
 - Community

Masculinity and Gender-Based Violence

- How do the messages boys get about masculinity impact their relationships and how they treat girls and women?
- How does it impact their ability to express their gender identity and sexual orientation?
- What messages about sexuality can be harmful? How?

Bystander Intervention

- Why don’t more men say something when they see harassment or abuse? What stops them from stepping up?
- What is needed to help men become more active bystanders?
- What can men do to keep each other accountable?

Men as Victims and Survivors

- Why would it be hard for men to talk about being victims of violence?
- Why do you think some people stay in unhealthy relationships? Are these reasons different for women than for men? Why?
- What are some things we can do to support men experiencing abuse?

Resources

- NYS Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline is free, confidential, and available in most languages 24/7: call 800-942-6906, text 844-997-2121 and chat at opdv.ny.gov
- [Bystander Intervention Training](#)
- [A Call to Men](#)
- [White Ribbon Campaign](#)
- [Coaching Boys into Men](#)
- [The Barbershop Toolbox](#)
- [Outside the Box](#)
- [Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Transformation: Group Education Manual](#)
- [Vera House: Engaging Men](#)



Definitions

Gender-Based Violence: Violence or threats that happen because of someone's sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or other related characteristics.

Consent: Fully formed, freely given, and enthusiastic permission for what someone is okay with in relation to their body. A person cannot give consent if they are being physically forced, guilted, manipulated, threatened or coerced.

Consent can be taken back at any time and is not based on relationship status or consent given in the past.

Consent cannot be given if the person is underaged, incapacitated, sleeping, physically helpless, or has certain disabilities.

Sexual Violence: Sexual violence includes sexual acts or activities that happen without consent. This may include rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse. Sexual violence includes different types of unwanted physical contact including rape, molestation, groping, sexual abuse by an intimate partner and child sexual abuse, that may or may not be criminal.

Sexual Assault: Unwanted sexual contact through physical force, threats, guilt, manipulation, or coercion, with the goal of establishing power and control. Some victims are assaulted by a stranger, but most know their attacker. It may be a current or former intimate partner, a friend, an acquaintance, or a family member.

Rape: A type of sexual assault with actual or attempted penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth without the consent of the victim.

Sexual Harassment: Unwanted verbal or physical sexual advances, sexually explicit statements, or discriminatory remarks because of the victim's sex. Examples include requests for sexual favors, sexual comments or questions, offensive remarks about a person's sex or gender identity and expression, and unwanted messages or images that are sexual in nature.

Sexual Abuse: An ongoing pattern of unwanted sexual contact with the goal of establishing power and control. Sexual abuse usually occurs when the victim has less power than the abuser, such as a caretaker of a person with disabilities or an adult and a child.

Rape Culture: An environment with cultural norms, stereotypes and institutions that contributes to sexual violence, while ignoring the realities of sexual violence. The impact of rape culture is different for everyone but occurs across sex and gender.



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New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

The Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) is the country's only executive level state agency dedicated to the issue of gender-based violence.

For more information, contact us:

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<https://opdv.ny.gov/>