

ENGAGING YOUNG MEN AS ALLIES TOOLKIT

Curriculum Unit: Being a Man (developed by YWAT and Mariame Kaba)

OBJECTIVE

To explore the meaning(s) of masculinity among young men.

TIME

1.5 to 2 hours

MATERIALS

- Loose leaf paper
- Pens
- Markers
- Tape
- Large sheets of butcher paper or newsprint
- Enough copies of the “Male Codes” handout for each participant
- Enough copies of the “Strong Man” handout for each participant
- Photos of Male Popular Culture Icons

ICEBREAKER

Choose one of the activities included in the toolkit.

ACTIVITY #1—MALE CODES (1 HOUR)

Activity

Break participants into groups of 3 to 5.

Facilitator says:

“Here’s what I would like you to do in your small groups. First introduce yourselves to each other within the group. Share your name, school or neighborhood you live in. Then I want each of you

to take 5 minutes to write down 3 things that you learned at an early age about being a boy/man. For example: boys don't cry or be tough or don't back down... Write those three things on the paper that each of you have in hand."

After they complete this, the facilitator says:

"Now that you've completed this task. Please write down 2 things that you personally think defines being a man. Remember this is your own definition of manhood."

After they complete this, the facilitator says:

"Each group has a long sheet of paper. I want you to put a line down the middle (vertical line). Now as a group feel free to use the markers, pastels to draw, write, illustrate the **THREE** things you all learned at an early age about being a boy/man. The catch is that you all have to **AGREE** on which three things to write, draw, illustrate as a group."

"On the other side of the paper, write, draw, illustrate the **TWO** things that you all agree truly define manhood. You have 20 minutes to complete this activity. Please pick someone or two people who will be willing to present your work."

Debriefing

1. Ask for representatives of each group to share their work with the larger group.
2. If time permits, after each group shares their work. Pass out "Male Codes" handout. Ask for a volunteer who will read this out loud. Determine if many of the things that are on their list are mentioned on the handout.
3. Explain that the male code is the unwritten rule book of things boys and men can and cannot do according to society.

Facilitator should say: "This workshop will be about challenging the male code. It will be about unpacking the code to decide which rules are conducive to being a healthy, non-oppressive man and which encourage violence and oppression."

ACTIVITY #2: DEFINING MANHOOD THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE (30 TO 45 MINUTES)

Every culture has its own definition of manhood. Some are domineering, while others are moving into a more modern idiom of equality and respect.

Post Pictures of Several Men from Popular Culture

- Bruce Lee: Message: Manhood is Kung Fu.
- Arnold Schwarzeneger – Message: Manhood is brute force and physical power.
- Eminem – Message: Manhood is domination and brutality.

- Kanye West – Message: Manhood is 100 percent ego.
- 50 Cent – Message: Manhood is being a thug – and surviving it.
- Oscar De la Hoya – Message: Manhood is physical skill.

Ask the participants to walk around the room looking at the pictures while reflecting on the following questions:

1. How do these men define what it means to be a man? What is the message about manhood that they convey?
2. What do you think it means to be a strong man?

Debrief

Share the Strong Man handout with the participants. Compare the ideas from that handout with the participants' previous responses.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT – MALE CODES

The following are some basic assumptions and expectations that society has about boys growing up. Often these codes represent false criteria for manhood. The male code is usually a series of unwritten things that boys and young men learn directly or indirectly from older men.

1. Boys and men do not show emotions, except for anger
2. Real men never cry, even when in pain
3. Be independent, always stand on your own two feet
4. Fighting, bullying, and teasing other children is part of being a boy; “boys will be boys”
5. Separate from your mother and avoid anything that is feminine
6. Being involved in reckless, risky, and irresponsible behavior is part of being a growing boy
7. Never snitch or tell on anyone
8. Having sex at an early age is a rite of manhood; treat girls as conquests
9. Don’t ever show your fear of violence
10. Boys who have sex with multiple partners are considered players; if the girl gets pregnant, it’s her problem

What else would you add to these codes?

Source: *Dare to be King – What if the Prince Lives?* By David C. Miller

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A STRONG MAN?

A strong man is someone who...

- Respects others and doesn't try to control them
- Participates in discussions and does not feel threatened when his partner voices an opinion that is different from his own
- Compromises and realizes that he doesn't lose power or status if his way isn't followed
- Doesn't resort to threats, insults or violence to get his way
- Knows that "no" means no and doesn't force sexual contact
- Can confront feelings of anger and frustration without taking them out on someone else
- Recognizes that he may be physically stronger than others, but doesn't use that strength to hurt
- Accepts an equal share of the responsibility for the work needed to keep a relationship healthy
- Knows that any violence is UNACCEPTABLE.