



DEFINING MASCULINITY SERIES

The Meaning of Manhood

Purpose: This is the first guided discussion in a series that will focus on the question “What does it mean to be a man?” These discussions are meant to be facilitated with teenage boys and young men, although anyone can use this guide to explore these topics together.

What you’ll need:

Pen and paper

Laptop/Internet access

RESILIENCE

ADVOCATES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE™

GUIDED DISCUSSION ON THE MEANING OF MANHOOD

Step 1: Check In

Ask participants how they are feeling. Ask them about things that get them to open up, rather than just diving headfirst into difficult topics.

What did you do last weekend?
What are you excited for this week?
What's better: Marvel or DC Comics?

Step 2: What does it mean to be a man?

Ask participants what they feel it means to be a man.
Allow them time to think and listen to what they have to say.

Step 3: The Man Box* activity

On a blank sheet of paper, ask participants to write "The Man Box" at the top. After discussing what it means to be a man, ask them to write words/phrases that describe a "real man".

What does he look like?
What activities does he participate in?
What is his job?
How does he function in the family?
How does he view relationships?
How does he express emotion?
How else would you describe him?

Step 4: Follow-up

Once you've listed out as many attributes as you can, ask them if the attributes they've written down are characteristics of a healthy person. Does our "real man" sound like he is mentally and emotionally healthy? Ask participants to consider if they want to give into what society says a "real man" is, or be different than those stereotypes.

*Does this describe you and how you want to be in the world?
Why or why not?*

Step 5: Consider positive alternatives

Look over the list with them and begin to talk about the more negative and unhealthy words they wrote. What would be the positive alternative?

Example: If they wrote, "chooses career over family", the positive and healthier alternative would be "puts family before job". If they wrote, "doesn't cry", the healthier alternative would be "expresses emotion".

Step 6: Understanding The Man Box

Encourage participants to draw a large box outlining all of the words or phrases on their paper. Explain that this is a visual representation of "The Man Box" - enforcing a narrowly defined set of traditional rules for being a man through shaming and bullying, as well as promises of rewards.

The "Man Box" forces boys and men to "prove" their manliness while burying their authentic selves.

Step 7: Consider watching "Be A Man"

Video (warning: contains strong language)

<https://youtu.be/KYvWhzSKoc4>

Ask participants if they agree or disagree with the video. Let them know that we don't have to live inside a "man box" and that manhood looks different for each person.

Look back at the list together. Ask them to circle the more positive words/phrases in the "Man Box". Which of these attributes do you want to embrace and which do you want to avoid? Which words/phrases are you living into now but don't really want to (e.g. puts family before job, disrespectful towards women, etc.)? You can keep track of the circled words and ask them weekly what they're doing to live into them.

Additional Resources:

Tony Porter's TED Talk about the "Man Box" (About 12 Minutes)

<https://youtu.be/td1PbsV6B80>

"Decoding the Man Box" (About 4 Minutes)

<https://youtu.be/HZLeNfeLQdg>

*Learn more about the Man Box from A CALL TO MEN:

<https://www.acalltomen.org/homepagefeatures-all/2017/7/21/what-is-the-man-box>

For more information on
healthy masculinity, e-mail us at
prevention@ResilienceMI.org

RESILIENCE
ADVOCATES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE™