

Saving our Sons

A 10-step plan to keep them nonviolent

By Ted Zeff, Ph.D.

Increased violence by young males is spinning out of control. Since the 1999 Columbine shooting, there have been 31 school shootings in the U.S.

Violence and violent images permeate our society. Boys are constantly bombarded with the false information that real boys must always be strong, aggressive, tough, in control, and repress their feelings. Boys are continually saturated with this distorted version of manhood from television and movies, video games, the Internet, peers, coaches, and other adults.

In the last 15 years the violent video games and movies children have been exposed to have become more graphic than ever. And now the ubiquitous Internet allows our boys to be brainwashed constantly with horrific, savage images of what a man is supposed to be like. One study showed that children in America between the ages of 5 and 18 have watched 20,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television. And violent media does spur real-life aggression. Research has consistently shown that after watching violent movies, children interact in an aggressive manner, while after watching movies about kindness, children treat one another with gentleness and compassion.

With these 10 steps, you can help combat the culture of violence and raise a nonviolent son:

1. Don't tolerate someone shaming your son. Never tolerate anyone shaming your son when he expresses gentle, compassionate behavior. Help your son understand the causes for society's negativity toward gentleness in males and talk with your son about all of the positive aspects of being a compassionate boy.

2. Encourage nonviolent games and safety. Monitor your son's exposure to violence as much as possible and provide nonviolent games and activities. Encourage your son to hang out with friends who enjoy less-violent games. Frequently discuss the harmful effects that exposure to violence can have on him. Create safety for your son when he engages in

potentially dangerous activities, i.e. establish rules for fair fighting when play wrestling and sword fighting with friends.

3. Give him a pet. Taking care of a pet not only teaches a boy responsibility, but through cuddling a kitten, for example, he will learn about the sanctity of all life. Caring for a pet will make him less likely to mistreat an animal.

4. Have him meet new people. Have your son interact with people of different faiths, nationalities, and races, to learn the commonality of humanity.

5. Embrace beauty. Expose your son to the arts and increase your son's respect for Mother Nature by visiting an orchard, or nursery, spending time at a lake, river, or the ocean, or gardening.

6. Talk about what “being a man” means. For dads, talk often with your boy about what it really means to be a man. Reassure him that he doesn't need the approval of aggressive boys, star athletes, or the alpha male to feel good about himself. Let your son know that it's okay for him to express fear and sadness and ask for help. Discuss with your son the detrimental consequences of violent males being so frequently extolled in the media. Read books or watch movies with your son about the lives of great spiritual men, i.e. Jesus, St. Francis, Moses, the Buddha, and discuss how they have created peace on Earth through righteous behavior.

7. Defend him. Make sure you always defend your boy if others shame him when he expresses his feelings. Teach your son how to respond to aggressive children by role-playing with him. Model setting limits with others so that your son will learn how to set boundaries with violent peers. Let your son know that it's okay to set personal boundaries with others rather than going along with peer pressure.

8. Increase his compassionate nature. To increase your son's compassionate nature, it would be good sometimes to do activities with your son that help people, animals, and the environment, such as planting trees or cleaning up trash in your community. Volunteer to help out in a hospital, nursing home, or animal shelter. If you have carpentry skills, you and your

son could help a neighbor, friend, or relative fix up their house or your own house.

9. Try to make his school more boy-friendly. Since boys learn differently from girls, encourage your son's teacher to incorporate more movement during instruction and take physical breaks between subjects, incorporating active learning games and more outdoor learning. Creating goals and using games will create motivation. Assemble a team of at least three parents of boys to meet with your son's teacher and/or principal (or your PTA) to discuss how to make your son's class more boy-friendly.

10. Create a class constitution. Encourage your son's teacher to create a class constitution with the help of the students, detailing how they should treat one another, and ask the teacher and students to sign it. Suggest that your son's teacher give rewards to students for kindness and good sportsmanship. Ask your son's teachers to read and discuss exciting tales that promote noble and brave qualities of heroes who help others. You and your son's teacher should let him know that everyone has different abilities and interests and that those differences need to be respected.

It's tough raising an emotionally healthy, respectful and compassionate boy in a cruel culture that glorifies violence. But by listening to your son, showing him unconditional love and support, and giving him permission to express all his feelings, you can help him transcend the distorted and damaging view of manhood. And by doing so, he will grow into a happy, confident and thoughtful man.

Ted Zeff, Ph.D. is the author of ***Raise an Emotionally Healthy Boy: Save Your Son from the Violent Boy Culture.***

For more information please visit www.drzedzeff.com

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