parenting ideas

INSIGHTS

Respectfully breaking the masculinity strait jacket

There's nothing so mindless as a mob, which was abundantly clear last year when a group of boys from a Melbourne school were filmed making a misogynist chant on a crowded tram.

While it's easy to blame the mob for such behaviour it shows that out dated ideas about masculinity persist. There's still a lot of work to be done to teach boys to respect women and treat them as equals.

Calling out the bro' code

The tendency for boys to bond tightly is dual-edged sword. On the one hand, a tight set of mates provides a boy with a sense of safety, security and belonging. On the other hand, the bonds between young males can propel a boy to act in ways that are reckless, amoral and just plain stupid.

It takes a brave boy to go against the crowd and call out this bro' code. Doubly so when he has to stand up and call out the sexist behaviour of his friends. Calling out your mates' sexist comments, like calling out violent acts, is the quickest road to ostracism and being branded a loser, loner or loathsome by the mob.

Respectful attitudes take courage

It takes courage and real leadership to swim on your own against the tide, particularly when the mob is swimming the other way. Courage, leadership and respectful behaviour are part of the ongoing conversations about respectful behaviours that adults need to have with boys from the early primary school years.

Respectful attitudes requires eldership

Men have major role to play in helping boys develop healthy values and attitudes that they can take into their adult lives. Men's lifestyles and beliefs become touchstones for adolescent boys who are searching for legitimate pathways to adulthood.

Boys need to see genuine reactions of outrage and disgust by the men in their lives to sleazy, inappropriate behaviours toward women displayed by some current high profile celebrities so they see that misogyny and disrespect plays no part in decent masculinity. Similarly, they need to see men calling out inappropriate remarks made toward women in the workplace, in the community and at home.

Respectful attitudes are forged through rites of passage

One of the great opportunities we have as a culture is the reintroduction of healthy rites of passage from boyhood (and girlhood) into manhood (and womanhood). It is through adult-initiated rites of passage that boys leave behind the vestiges of boyhood, taking on the mantle of manhood and the responsibilities that go with being a man.

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Respectful behaviours between boys and girls are now part of school curricula in all schools. They also need to be reinforced, and indeed lived, by parents and other community members for lasting change to occur.

Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation,* and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.