

# Healthy Masculinity

## Smart things to know

- Maleness in and of itself is not bad. Terms like “toxic masculinity” can bring negativity to our perceptions and beliefs.
- Healthy masculinity challenges, even defies, gender stereotypes: It’s kind, caring, respectful, and reflective of a person’s true self. The key is to recognize and celebrate the many aspects that make a person who they are, regardless of their gender.
- It’s important that kids see male-identifying adults in their lives model healthy masculinity.

## Smart things to do:

### Break down gender stereotypes

- Define gender stereotypes as assumptions or expectations (imposed on us by society) about how boys vs. girls should look, act, feel and “be”. It’s kind of like being shoved in a pink box of rules (for girls) or a blue box of rules (for boys) depending on the gender we are assigned at birth.
- Explain that gender stereotypes often don’t align with who we are or how we feel. They can make it difficult for us or even prevent us from living as our true selves.
- Point out real-life examples of gender stereotypes when it comes to our roles in the home and at work, our personality and our physical appearance (ie. Boys should be tough, shouldn’t express emotions and shouldn’t ask for help. Girls should be “nice”, should put others’ needs before their own and should do most of the work at home).
- Encourage your son to break out of the blue box to express themselves in a way that feels true to them. Or to do an activity they love regardless if it is consistent with masculine stereotypes.
- Take interest in your son’s interests, especially if they aren’t what society sees as traditionally masculine.

### Redefine “strong”

- Talk about what it means to be strong. Is this a physical or an emotional characteristic? What are boys taught about strength in our society (ie. it requires toughness, athleticism, power or dominance over others)?
- Identify what makes a person emotionally strong (ie. being resilient, confident, compassionate, emotionally expressive, self-regulating, balanced)



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## Smart things to do:

### Model how to identify, manage and express emotions in a healthy way

- Help kids understand your emotions by verbalizing how you feel and why.
- Don't be afraid to openly show emotion, like when crying.
- Stress that showing emotions isn't a sign of weakness in boys and men, it's a sign of having the courage to break through gender stereotypes. And it's good for our mental health.
- Show affection.
- Talk about self-regulation and the importance of managing anger without violence.

### Teach the importance of respect, equality and integrity

- Teach consent. It's never too early to teach the importance of respecting boundaries, asking for permission and listening to what others are telling us.
- Help your son what it means to act with integrity: To do the right thing even though no one's looking, to be honest (even when it's hard), to make sure our actions match our words.
- Talk about the importance of fairness. Hold your son accountable for behaviour or comments that are unjust or discriminatory. Teach him to look out for others.
- Talk about gender identity and sexual orientation. Teaching kids that these aspects of ourselves are diverse and complex fosters respect for others. It also reinforces the fact that our world isn't black and white...it's technicolour!
- Talk about and model qualities make a good human, *regardless of gender*.
- Talk about how we can redefine masculinity to be inclusive of all types of boys and men. How would that look in our relationships? In media? In the workplace?
- Talk about how we can redefine masculinity so that men and women are equal. With equality, could gender stereotypes exist?



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## *Smart things to say:*

- “I feel nervous because I’m presenting at a meeting tomorrow and people are relying on me.”
- “I’m trying to figure out why it upset me so much that my friends got together without me. I think it’s because we’ve grown apart and that makes me sad.”
- “I know it took courage to ask for help but I’m glad you did.”
- “I’m proud of you.”
- “Thanks for always looking out for your little brother.”
- “I believe in you.”
- “You are worthy of love simply because you were born.”
- “I know it’s not easy for you to talk about your feelings but I notice you doing it more often.”
- “The world wants to know the real you.”

