

In contemporary discussions about gender violence prevention, one of the first questions parents, teachers and others tend to ask is very practical: how do we reach the boys? How do we get beyond men's defensiveness around these issues? How can I get my son or male students to hear the kind of things you're talking about? How can we educate them without blaming them for thousands of years of sexism and gender oppression? How can we get boys and men in greater numbers to join the struggle against gender violence?

Underlying many of these people's questions is their concern that while feminist educators have made much progress over the past generation in educating girls and women about a wide range of gender issues, they have not had nearly as much success in educating boys and men. This is especially true in the area of gender violence, where crisis levels of boys' and men's violence against girls and women persist despite decades of feminist activism and educational initiatives around rape, battering, and sexual harassment.

This paper outlines six key strategies for bringing boys and young men into discussions about gender violence in a way that maximizes their chances for becoming active anti-sexist allies to girls and women. Working with a racially diverse group of male and female colleagues, I have been developing and testing these ideas for several years in work with men's athletic teams, in all-male classes and workshops in high schools, colleges, and the United States Marine Corps, and in mixed-gender settings in all of those institutions.

Many of these strategies were first developed in single-sex educational settings, but the approach utilized has also proven to be effective in reaching boys and men in

mixed-gender settings. These strategies can be utilized by both male and female educators, separately or in co-facilitated sessions. Furthermore, the strategies discussed in this paper can be applied, with slight variations, to boys and men of varying socioeconomic status and from different racial and ethnic groups. They can be employed in numerous formal and informal settings, including the educational system at all levels, as well as athletic teams, fraternities, community groups, the military, or various workplaces.

### **Strategies for inspiring boys and young men to be anti-sexist allies:**

#### **1.) Introduce violence against women as a men's issue.**

Many boys and men have been conditioned to think about sexism in general and gender violence in specific as "women's issues," something they need only concern themselves with when forced to do so by a female teacher, or some other woman or girl in their school, workplace, family or friendship circle. As a result, one of the first steps in motivating boys and men for antisexist efforts anywhere should be getting them to reconceptualize issues like rape, sexual assault, dating violence, and sexual harassment as *their* issues. Without this reconceptualization, and to the immense frustration of many feminist educators, many boys and men will simply not give these issues serious time and attention.

One of the ways I make the point that gender violence is a men's issue is through introducing the first "remedial empathy" exercise (see #3). I ask the young men in the room to raise their hand if they have a sister, girlfriend, mother, aunt, grandmother, or female friend. This usually prompts laughter, and some grumbling, but eventually they all put up their hand. The message is clear: every issue that affects the women and girls that we care about affects us by definition. We live in the world together. Sometimes we sleep in the same beds. We share the same bathrooms. Our lives are inextricably