

Dismantling the Patriarchy while Raising Pro-Feminist Sons

by kristopher kole

A friend of mine recently posted this to my wall. Most likely, she knew that it would set me off and inspire an analysis for UpRoots DTP category. Some folks have the right sentiment at heart when they create features like this meme that suggests there are 20 essential things that a mother should teach her son. Having the right sentiment at heart isn't always indicative of also having the appropriate message.

1. You will set the tone for the sexual relationship, so don't take something away from her that you can't give back.
2. Play a sport. It will teach you how to win honorably, lose gracefully, respect authority, work with others, manage your time and stay out of trouble. And maybe even throw or catch.
3. Use careful aim when you pee. Somebody's got to clean that up, you know.
4. Save money when you're young because you're going to need it some day.
5. Allow me to introduce you to the dishwasher, oven, washing machine, iron, vacuum, mop and broom. Now please go use them.
6. Pray and be a spiritual leader.]
7. Don't ever be a bully and don't ever start a fight, but if some idiot clocks you, please defend yourself.
8. Your knowledge and education is something that nobody can take away from you.
9. Treat women kindly. Forever is a long time to live alone and it's even longer to live with somebody who hates your guts.
10. Take pride in your appearance.
11. Be strong and tender at the same time.
12. A woman can do everything that you can do. This includes her having a successful career and you changing diapers at 3 A.M. Mutual respect is the key to a good relationship.
13. "Yes ma'am" and "yes sir" still go a long way.
14. The reason that they're called "private parts" is because they're "private". Please do not scratch them in public.
15. Peer pressure is a scary thing. Be a good leader and others will follow.
16. Bringing her flowers for no reason is always a good idea.
17. Be patriotic.
18. Potty humor isn't the only thing that's humorous.
19. Please choose your spouse wisely. My daughter-in-law will be the gatekeeper for me spending time with you and my grandchildren.
20. Remember to call your mother because I might be missing you.



This list implies a number of things about manliness and this meme as a whole makes some pretty grand assumptions. The three most obvious implications are that men are expected to grow up to be heterosexual; it mandates their dominance in relationships and encourages their entitlement and authority in society. Let's not even begin to get into the fact that some dudes don't have moms to give them these morsels of knowledge. This is a common narrative that's wrapped in cheesy romanticism and fluffy adornments with the allusions of being a *so-called good-guy*. This is merely a sugar coated representation of making complex little boys into entitled and egotistical men.

I'm not a parent and don't have the experience of raising a son and won't pretend to have all the answers. Uproot has written about this topic before with Cristy's incredible piece, [My Son](#). It was her words in this blog that stoked a fire that had been burning within me to get involved in working with boys and masculinities. I don't have sons but I do work with young men, I've spent time being a caretaker for two little boys and I do exist in this world as a guy. I believe that young men have an enormous stake in shaping our world to come and also possess cultural power and influence in dismantling the patriarchy. A prospect that often times confronts me with a peculiar discontent and overwhelming sense that we're up against something more immense than I could've ever imagined. Of course, we are. This is my open letter to any caretaker, role model, guardian, mother, father or mentor that is working together to raise healthy young men.

Dear Community,

I hope that when we see memes like the one above we are able to recognize the subtle messages. I hope that we will actually take the time to teach young men and boys that they don't set the tone for their sexual relationships. Let's teach them to make authentic efforts to value consent from their partners. To value and understand their partner's needs, desires and to put forth honest communication about their own needs. Openly, truthfully and with no shame. Let's teach him that sex isn't shameful and isn't scandalous. Let's explain to him that an individual's consent isn't something that's his for the taking, that's called rape. I hope that you are comfortable enough to explain to him that consent is based on free choice. Is active and not passive. Is a process. Is based on equal power. Isn't his entitlement or personal right. I really hope that we can help him learn the difference

in having a partner that is **wanting** of sexual intimacy and one that is merely *willing*. Help him learn the difference, understand the importance and know the consequences associated with using force and coercion.

Let's show him as a community that we support his interests and encourage him to seek out his personal curiosities with unabashed vigor and enthusiasm. Encourage him to play a sport if it interests him. To dance freely when he's inspired. Paint. Write. Sing. Create. Build. Teach him to never make fun of the interests that others pursue. Let's teach boys to understand that they will sometimes lead and they will often times be asked to follow. Let's demonstrate for them the distinction and exhibit personal accountability.

Tell him, "If you can't throw or catch well, it doesn't make you less of a man, it makes you human."

I hope we can teach them to learn that it's everyone's responsibility to share household tasks and support one another in creating a successful home. Demonstrate communication within shared homes and show how to distribute responsibility based on ethical interactions rather than rigid gender expectations. Teach him to take refuge in whatever direction his spiritual pursuits may lead. To be still. To embrace the moment. Tell him to make a commitment to respecting the spiritual beliefs of others and never attempt to force his own on another. Tell him, **"Don't bully anyone. Ever. Violence breeds more violence and inescapably escalates. Never attempt to coerce or force anyone to do something they don't want to do. Learn to respect the differences of others, attempt to understand them as best you can and embrace the rich diversity that we share as a planet."**

Teach him to know that if anyone ever violates his bodily autonomy, he has the right to self-defense, only as far as is necessary to escape the situation. Violence is always a last case scenario. **Tell him, "I want you to always ask yourself, is what I am doing right now an act of self-protection or retribution?"**

Impart the ability to respect his surroundings and understand that he's not the center of this world. Require him to clean up after himself and recognize that no one was put on this Earth to serve him. Show him that there are young women and men who are struggling to just get by and survive. Take the time to think through important decisions with him, show him value in what he has, to save for his future when possible and to assist other folks who may not have had the same opportunities and/or privileges that he has acquired. **Do community work with him.**

Strongly press him to understand that he doesn't have the right to invade, coerce or legislate the bodily autonomy of women. Ever.

Teach him to value knowledge and education. It will help him in understanding the world. Insist that it's a great privilege to be afforded. Tell him that this gift is not always accessible to everyone. Tell him to never use that knowledge to hurt others or render them inferior. I'd want my son to become acutely aware of the power knowledge affords us and then use it kindly and with respect. Tell him to resist the urge to follow the crowd and succumb to peer pressure. Then tell him stories about how you once did this yourself. Discuss options with him. Discuss safe ways to intervene in potentially violent situations. **This also includes resisting the urge to participate in patriotic events that glorify a brutal and violent history. Teach him America's accurate history and make a commitment with him to not repeating it.**

We've made our fair share of mistakes in this world, tell him that too. A ridiculous amount of them. Show him how to learn from them. To make amends. To earn trust. To move forward with the commitment to never repeating them. **Most importantly, show him through words and examples how to treat women kindly and with respect because it's the right flippin' thing to do.** Try not to base this off of what he might get out of the deal.

Women and girls possess inherent value and worth, exactly the same as him.

Thanks,

kristopher kole

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nobodysperfick December 25, 2012 at 8:26 am
I love this post so much! Well said, Kole.



[Reply](#)

HAVEN December 26, 2012 at 2:20 pm
Thanks! Let's keep the conversation going! 😊



Reply

Sacchi Patel December 29, 2012 at 5:08 pm
Reblogged this on [MasculinityU](#) and commented:
We love this. Thanks UpRoot!



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