

How to raise feminist boys

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For those of us who identify as feminists (raising our hands over here), having boys can throw us for a loop. After all, raising boys to be sensitive and progressive in a culture that still expects men to be unemotional and, yes, kind of sexist is a pretty tall order. Sigh.

But never fear. This year, in honour of International Women's Day, we've put together some insights and tips from a group of seasoned feminist moms (and a couple of experts) that will help you navigate the murky waters of boy-rearing. May the feminist force be with you!

INFUSE FEMINISM INTO DAILY LIFE

Whether it's painting fingernails, shopping the girls' and boys' section for clothing and toys, sharing domestic chores or turning negative stereotypes into teachable moments, Lindsay Lorusso is a firm believer in infusing feminist principles into daily life. "Being mindful of feminism and gender equality in every aspect is super important," Lorusso says.

TEACH BOYS ABOUT PRIVILEGE

It's essential to teach our sons about privilege, says Lauren Moses-Brettler, mom to three boys. "I point out the ways certain bodies (male, white, non-disabled, etc.) are treated better than others, and how girls and women, racialized people, people with disabilities, etc. are disadvantaged by the same system. This helps the boys understand why it's their responsibility to stand up for others who don't get as many privileges as they do."

TALK POLITICS WITH YOUR TEENS

Got teens? Get talking. "We definitely talk politics at the dinner table," says Samantha Sacks, mom to two teenaged boys. "We watched the US presidential debates and each time a blow hit (like the now infamous "nasty woman" comment), there was a ton of discussion about the subtext. It's a great way for them to see and understand the practical implications of policy in action."

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

When Jessica Woolliams' five year old son began chatting about God being a man, Woolliams took the opportunity to push his thinking. "I asked him some probing questions about what that might mean in terms of equality," Woolliams says. "It's about helping him question the male focus of society's core institutions in a way that allows him to come to his own understanding of what's fair."

BOYS (AND GIRLS) CAN BE ANYTHING

For Sarah Liss and Lisa Rundle, raising their son feminist means emphasizing the arbitrariness of gender norms. "We tell him that despite what kids say at school, he can be the mommy when they play-act, because he can be anything he wants," says Rundle. "Undermining the rigid boy/girl man/woman thing will help create a man who sees himself and women as full human beings."

NORMALIZE "GIRL" STORIES

If your boys consume pop culture (and we're pretty sure they do), give them access to lots of girl-focused stories. "I always make sure they're reading books and consuming entertainment with strong female protagonists, and finding

commonalities aside from gender,” says Dori Skye Engel, mom to three boys. “And we always point out the movies, shows and books that don’t have good female representation.”

GET THEM SPEAKING OUT

It can be tough for boys to protest sexism and other forms of injustice, says Attiya Khan, mom to a ten year old. However, you can make it easier by letting your kid know you’ve got his back. “My son had a sexist teacher one year and he was afraid of being punished for contradicting her,” Khan recalls. “We told him that if he was respectful, even if he got in trouble, we were on his side and would advocate for him.”

START — AND SUSTAIN — A CONVERSATION ABOUT CONSENT

If you want your boys to engage in healthy, consensual sexual relationships as they mature, “talk to kids early about the concept of consent,” says sexual health educator [Marnie Goldenberg](#). The longer-term payoff? “Boys who hold firm ideas that all people deserve respect will seek to build trust and achieve joy not just for themselves, but for their sexual partners.”

ROLE MODEL FEMINISM – MEN, TOO

We know that raising kids is a job for both women *and* men – so what can men do to help raise feminist sons? “We can fundamentally reconsider what it means to be a man,” says violence prevention educator Tuval Dinner Nafshi. “We can give boys permission to feel the full range of human emotions. We can help them witness a different and more healthy, humane meaning of manhood.” Can we get an amen?