

BREAKING FREE FROM BOYHOOD STEREOTYPES:

ACTION STEPS FOR CONTENT CREATORS

INTRODUCTION

Boys receive—and absorb—harmful stereotypical messages about what it takes to “be a man” from an early age. 72% of young men in the US say they’ve been told that a real man behaves a “certain way”—they are self-sufficient, tough, stoic, attractive without effort, a risk-taker, and straight. If boys embrace these ideas, it can have long-term impacts: they may be less likely to have close, emotionally connected relationships; and more likely to have poorer mental health and to use violence later in life.

We all have a role to play in creating a gender equal, nonviolent future. We need content creators to join us in challenging stereotypes by portraying vulnerability, connection, and respectful relationships, on screen.

TIPS FOR CONTENT CREATORS

1.

COMMIT TO INCLUSIVE STORYTELLING THAT REFLECTS THE BROADER POPULATION.

Review how identities represented on screen (gender identities, races, sexual orientations, ability status, ages, and body sizes) match up to the broader population. Make sure that characters are not tokenized, stereotyped, etc. based on their identities.

2.

AVOID STEREOTYPES ABOUT MEN AND PARENTING; AND ABOUT BOYS AND CHORES.

Allow male characters to be primary care providers who are competent and involved in the day-to-day lives of children: packing school lunches, driving kids to school, etc. Show male characters of all ages taking on chores, like cooking and cleaning.

3.

ALLOW MALE CHARACTERS TO EXPRESS A FULL RANGE OF EMOTIONS—INCLUDING LOVE.

Show male characters that model close friendships, family relationships, and healthy expressions of emotions. Also, show boys in a variety of healthy romantic relationships.

4.

SHOW BOYS AND YOUNG MEN ASKING FOR HELP, PARTICULARLY FROM PARENTS.

Avoid depicting boys and men as solitary or as having to “go at it alone.” Allow male characters to maintain social and familial relationships and to seek out support from others.

5.

AVOID GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE.

Avoid using vulnerable emotions—like sadness and fear—as a catalyst for destructive behavior. Allow male characters to resolve conflict in non-violent ways. This shift is particularly needed for male characters of color, who are less likely to be shown expressing an emotion other than anger, perpetuating a harmful racial stereotype.

6.

PORTRAY POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF MALE FRIENDSHIP.

Provide opportunities for male friendships to model sharing emotions and supporting each other, as well as calling out peers for bullying or violent behavior, rather than portraying men as bystanders.

7.

SHOW BOYS AND GIRLS PLAYING TOGETHER.

Boys who have positive, female friendships are building relationships based on respect from an early age. Show boys playing with typical female toys (e.g., dolls) and girls playing with typical male toys (e.g., trucks), preferably in the same narrative.

8.

SHOW MORE NUANCED BOY CHARACTERS AND NOT JUST STOCK TYPES.

The majority of male characters in kids’ TV are smart and active, funny losers (dumb jock or hapless dad), and geeks. Broaden the representation of male characters.

LEARN MORE AT: WWW.BOYHOODINITIATIVE.ORG

