

Men's Work

Men's Work Is . . .

Personal—to look in our own lives at any ways we are controlling, abusive or disrespectful toward women. Do we objectify women, tease women, tell demeaning jokes, use pornography or prostitutes, or sexually harass women? Do we expect our partners to put out for us, do what we want, and put our needs first? Do we force or manipulate women into having sex with us? Do we interrupt women, disparage or undervalue their contributions, disrespect their intelligence, dominate our conversations with them?

Interpersonal—to reach out to other men and challenge the culture of violence, which allows abuse and injustice to go unchallenged. Too many times we are silent when the comments are made, the jokes told, the pornography pulled out, the conquests recounted, or the abuse carried out. Too often we are silent in the face of sexual harassment, wage discrimination, and male objectification and abuse of women. Part of men's work is to challenge other men.

Parental—to model for and teach our sons and the other young men in our community different ways to relate to women, children, and other men—ways that are based on respect, mutuality, equality, and caring. Many boys and young men in your community are watching you as a model of how to be an ally to women. What are they learning from you?

Sociopolitical—to challenge the systematic mistreatment of women that makes them vulnerable to battery, sexual assault, incest, and date and marital rape. Job discrimination, routine sexual harassment, lack of police protection, and cultural objectification all make women less privileged than men, putting them at risk. We must understand that abuse and violence arise from a system of sexual inequality. To stop this requires us to challenge the socialization of young people into gender roles and to challenge the institutions and the unequal distribution of power upon which sexism and racism and homophobia and economic exploitation are based. Men's work is to become allies to women in the struggle to stop the violence, challenge the mistreatment, and work for justice for all women, children, and men in our society.

This is a big task, but it is one that each of us can start in small ways—in our homes, in our schools, in our communities. We can educate ourselves and offer our children new models of male behavior. We can support each other in finding a healing response to the pain and hurt we have suffered. We can challenge the schools to educate young people about empowering ways to counter sexism and racism. We can confront institutionalized oppression and violence in our communities. We can support movements and organizations that work for social justice. In sum, instead of colluding with injustice, by working together with others as allies we can build community responses to the system of inequality and the cycle of violence that are so damaging to our lives.

For more, see Paul Kivel, *Men's Work: How to Stop the Violence That Tears Our Lives Apart* (Hazelden, 1992).