

Activity 6 - Boys don't have to be one of those boys

Notes for educators

This educational activity is an opportunity for girls and boys to learn and challenge the dynamics of boy's socialization in relation to homophobia and homophobic teasing. Some boys in this age group will begin to routinely use sexist and homophobic remarks against both boys and girls. (For example, "He looks like a fag!" "That's so gay," "He throws like a girl.") This doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the issue of someone's actual sexual orientation. Rather, they are comments that say someone isn't a "real man," especially if he doesn't "fit in the box." For more information on the links between homophobic teasing of boys and violence please see the facilitator notes in part one.

You can play a very important role in challenging oppressive remarks that include homophobia, sexism, racism and ableism. Always remember that if, as teachers and community leaders, we are silent, youth will perceive this as tacit agreement. And because boys take their cues for behaviour from other boys and men, male teachers have a particularly important role to play. They can set the bar for how to live in a respectful and peaceful way with girls and women and towards their fellow men. Male teachers and community leaders certainly don't need to prove to their male youth that they're "one of the guys" if it includes sexist or homophobic comments.

Invite youth to visit www.whiteribbon.ca to post comments and see what other youth across Canada have to say about gender stereotyping, violence against women and healthy equal relationships.

Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum Linkages

Healthy Living: Grade 5

Overall Expectations

- *apply strategies to deal with threats to personal safety (e.g., in response to harassment) and to prevent injury (e.g., from physical assault);*

Growth and Development

- *identify strategies to deal positively with stress and pressures that result from relationships with family and friends;*
- *identify factors (e.g., trust, honesty, caring) that enhance healthy equal relationships with friends, family, and peers;*

Personal Safety and Injury Prevention

- *explain how people's actions (e.g., bullying, excluding others) can affect the feelings and reactions of others;*
- *apply strategies (e.g., anger management, assertiveness, conflict resolution) to deal with personal-safety and injury-prevention situations (e.g., swarming, threatening, harassment);*

Healthy Living: Grade 6

Growth and Development

- *apply a problem-solving/decision-making process to address issues related to friends, peers, and family relationships;*

Personal Safety and Injury Prevention

- *describe and respond appropriately to potentially violent situations relevant to themselves (e.g., threats, harassment, violence in the media);*

Healthy Living: Grade 7

Overall Expectations

- *explain how harassment relates to personal safety;*

Growth and Development

- use effective communication skills (e.g., refusal skills, active listening) to deal with various relationships and situations;

Personal Safety and Injury Prevention

- describe harassment and identify ways of dealing with it (e.g., by communicating feelings and reporting incidents of harassment);
- identify people and resources that can support someone experiencing harassment;

Healthy Living: Grade 8**Overall Expectations**

- analyse situations that are potentially dangerous to personal safety (e.g., gang violence) and determine how to seek assistance;
- apply living skills (e.g., decision-making, problem-solving, and refusal skills) to respond to matters related to sexuality, drug use, and healthy eating habits.

Growth and Development

- apply living skills (e.g., decision-making, assertiveness, and refusal skills) in making informed decisions, and analyse the consequences of engaging in sexual activities and using drugs;

Personal Safety and Injury Prevention

- analyse situations (e.g., hitchhiking, gang violence, violence in relationships) that are potentially dangerous to personal safety;
- identify support services (e.g., the school guidance department, shelters, Kids' Help Phone) that assist victims of violence, and explain how to access them;

You will need:

- One photocopy of Handout 6 - Rashid, Raymond and Francois, one for each youth

Activity (45 minutes)

1. Recall ground rules for all classroom discussions. Remind youth that you are counting on them to enable each student to respond as an individual and also as a responsible member of a community who is owed respect, is not measured against a stereotype and who will not participate in stereotyping. Ask the group if anyone has anything they would like to share from their journal entry last week.

Last week's journal question's were:

1. What would you do if your boyfriend/girlfriend became very jealous and angry at you?
2. What could you say to a boyfriend or girlfriend who didn't listen to what you had to say?
3. What words could you use if you had to end an unhealthy relationship?

2. Remind youth that we have been talking about healthy and unhealthy relationships. This week we are going to talk about more public and out in the open behaviour of boys that contributes to the problem of men's violence against women. This type of behaviour hurts both other boys and girls at the same time and it is caused by how we think we need to behave to live 'in the gender box'. For some boys this means they have to act in way that challenges other boys and puts down girls. This 'in the gender box' thinking.

3. We are also going to talk about what we can do when we see this type of 'in the gender box' behaviour and how we can get help for ourselves and our friends.

4. Distribute copies of Handout 6 – Rashid, Raymond and Francois. Below is the scenario, the discussion prompts and some possible explanations.

Rashid is a grade eight student at a middle school. For as long as everyone can remember, most of Rashid's good friends in the class were girls. This has never been a problem for Rashid or for the girls he hangs out with. Lately, Raymond and Francois, other boys in the class, have started to say quietly (and while pretending to cough) the words "fairy," "fag" or

“queer” each time Rashid speaks in class or when he passes by their desks. The same boys have also started to call the girls names like “fat”, “bitch”, and “dyke”, (also while pretending to cough). Some of the girls have heard these comments and have told Rashid that they think those boys are creeps. The teacher hasn’t yet noticed the comments so he hasn’t done anything to help Rashid. Rashid pretends not to hear them and ignores Raymond and Francois’s behaviour.

1. Is this okay? If so, why? If not, why not?

A possible explanation

Most boys and girls think this is not okay however there might be some that say that some of this is alright (likely to get attention or to re-enforce a stereotypical norm of being male). If this happens we suggest you give equal time to feuding factions in your class or group ensuring that all voices are heard and challenged.

2. What might be the ‘in the gender box’ thinking that Rashid or Francois are using to measure Raymond against?

A possible explanation

Boys are measuring Rashid’s masculinity. They are bullying and harassing him because he is not adhering to the strict rules of masculinity and manhood that they are facing. This type of strict conformity happens, quite often, to both girls and boys at the onset of puberty. While homophobic teasing is happening to Rashid, the boys are using degrading language towards the girls, again to adhere to the strict gender code and to exert power over others they perceive as less powerful.

3. Would you call this harassment? Why or why not?

4. What should Rashid do? Who could he talk to? Would it cause a problem for Rashid if he came forward with this issue?

5. What should the girls do? Who could they talk to? Would it cause a problem for the girls if they spoke out against this issue?

6. Do you think that Rashid is acting like this isn’t bothering him? Why do you think he might be acting like this doesn’t bother him?

7. What could the girls and other boys who are not name calling do to help Rashid?

A possible explanation

They could talk to the teacher or youth group leader. They could be a friend to Rashid and they might even tell him they think what Raymond and Francois are doing is wrong.

8. Only Raymond and Francois are making these comments to Rashid. Do you think all the other boys in the class also feel the same way? If the other boys are silent in their actions and words, what message does that send to Raymond and Francois?

A possible explanation

In fact, there are more boys that wouldn’t do what Raymond and Francois are saying but they are being very quiet. They don’t want to not fit in either and they definitely don’t want what is happening to Rashid to happen to them. If they say anything, they’ll likely be given trouble by Raymond and Francois. The trouble with them being silent is that Raymond and Francois think they other guys agree and there is no problem - the other guys are acting like they should, like guys and sticking up for them.

9. Why are Raymond and Francois doing this? What is going on in their heads to think that this is okay?

A possible explanation

Boys and girls, from a very young age are often taught what it means to be a boy or girl. Raymond and Francois are in a competition with each other to be more cool than the other in a special 'boys only' kind of way. They think that Rashid doesn't fit into the 'boy' gender box so they saying he is girly to tell him that he should change and be just like them. Unfortunately, this kind of behaviour is poison because it makes people feel bad about themselves and it can make other boys think this is okay and start doing it along with Raymond and Francois. What makes this even worse is that those words can't ever be taken back. No one can learn and be happy when there is this kind of poison around us.

Wrap Up (15 Minutes)

When thinking about living 'in the gender box', do you think it is getting better, getting worse or staying the same?

Name three places you would go to get Rashid help?

Hand Outs

If you have not done so already, please hand out a button to each youth who participated in the activity so they can visit www.whiteribbon.ca and see what other youth are saying about the problem of men's violence against women.

This Week's Journal Questions

1. Do you think your life is not as fun because you might be living 'in the gender box'?
2. Is there something you would like to try or do that you didn't think about before?
3. What would do if you were Rashid? Or the other silent boys in the class? Or the Girls in the class?

Handout 6 - Rashid, Raymond and Francois

Rashid is a grade eight student at a middle school. For as long as everyone can remember, most of Rashid's good friends in the class were girls. This has never been a problem for Rashid nor for the girls he hangs out with. Lately, Raymond and Francois, other boys in the class, have started to say quietly (and while pretending to cough) the words "fairy," "fag" or "queer" each time Rashid speaks in class or when he passes by their desks. The same boys have also started to call the girls names like "fat", "bitch", and "dyke", (also while pretending to cough). Some of the girls have heard these comments and have told Rashid that they think those boys are creeps. The teacher hasn't yet noticed the comments so he hasn't done anything to help Rashid. Rashid pretends not to hear them and ignores Raymond and Francois's behaviour.

1. Is this okay? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. What might be the 'in the gender box' thinking that Raymond or Francois are using to measure Rashid against?
3. Would you call this harassment? Why or why not?
4. What should Rashid do? Who could he talk to? Would it cause a problem for Rashid if he came forward with this issue?
5. What should the girls do? Who could they talk to? Would it cause a problem for the girls if they spoke out against the issue?
6. Do you think that Rashid is acting like this isn't bothering him? Why do you think he might be acting like this doesn't bother him?
7. What could the girls and other boys who are not name calling do to help Rashid?
8. Only Raymond and Francois are making these comments to Rashid. Do you think all the other boys in the class also feel the same way? If the other boys are silent in their actions and words, what message does that send to Raymond and Francois?