

**COACHING BOYS INTO MEN:
A CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND
CHILDREN
BY THE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUND**

INTRODUCTION

Tremendous strides have been made in the past several years to change social norms on the issue of abuse. Now more than ever before, the majority of the American public recognizes domestic violence as a serious problem with deleterious health consequences for women and children. However, levels of reported activity on this issue are still consistently low compared to other social change campaigns that have been popularized over the years—among them efforts to reduce drunk driving, achieve racial equality, and save the environment. By and large, people are not taking the kinds of action steps that might recreate a sense of public indignation about domestic violence that translates into social and behavioral change.

Overall, women are much more engaged than men, despite the fact that awareness about the problem is high in both segments. Today, men are the least engaged on the issue of domestic violence prevention. Polling conducted over the past several years shows that: women are more likely than men to identify domestic violence as an “extremely important” issue, more likely to report they would do something to help reduce violence if they know how to help, and less likely to accept rationalizations for the violence. These results indicate that segmenting our messages to target men specifically makes good sense, as there is significant “room for change” on attitudinal and behavioral indicators reported by men nationwide.

Men’s active involvement in ending violence against women is critical to the success of any domestic violence prevention initiative. Men play a key role in setting social norms for other men—whether those men are basketball buddies, professional peers, or best friends from college. Within the field of domestic violence, experts agree that social norms play a significant role in permitting and perpetuating inappropriate male behavior—and, conversely, if properly harnessed, that they can play a powerful role in promoting more positive attitudes and behavior related to violence against women.

Young men, too, have a vital role to play in ending violence against women. Young men are not currently actively involved in preventing domestic violence in the powerful ways they could be. According to Peter D. Hart Research, Inc., young Americans are more willing to be involved in social issues than they have been in the past two decades. Yet, their involvement in the issue of relationship violence remains low.

The Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) refined its public education strategy, which previously targeted the general public to take action on domestic violence, and began concentrating on men as a critical part of the national movement to target and support male bystanders and youth. Bystanders are understood as men who are not violent, yet are family members, friends, teammates, classmates, and colleagues—men who are embedded in peer cultures with other men, some of whom are violent. In order

to be successful in reaching men to act on violence against women issues, we needed to accomplish these things: 1) invite men to be part of the solution while educating them about the problem, 2) motivate them to move beyond complacency to act, and 3) provide them with the tools and information necessary to break the cycle of family violence. The development and execution of the resulting campaign was built around a political campaign model.

RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM MEN

As part of the planning for the Coaching Boys into Men Campaign, we spoke to men directly, openly and honestly about how to engage them in preventing violence against women and children. We sponsored research, which included a national public opinion poll of adult men, dial sessions to explore men's reactions to various media and video segments, and a series of focus groups with men of different ages and races. Men responded extremely well to the notion that they are in a unique position as role models and can help steer boys and teens away from abusive behavior.

Overall, while these men were reluctant to intervene in violence against women and children situations, they were willing to take other action. But to this point, they had been given no information about what exactly they could do as individuals.

In order to reduce violence against women and the exposure of violence to children, it became clear that we needed to begin to encourage men to talk to the boys in their lives. But a barrier to discussing this notion with men is that they felt they had been vilified, that men were often seen as most of the problem, rather than an important part of the solution. They needed to be embraced as potential partners to women in the movement to end violence.

COACHING BOYS INTO MEN

Based on the research findings, "Invite, not indict" was the premise that drove the strategies, creation and execution for *Coaching Boys into Men*.

In conjunction with The Advertising Council and Berlin Cameron/Red Cell, a public service advertising campaign was designed to encourage men to talk to boys early on about appropriate ways to treat women. The public service announcements (PSAs) emphasize the fact that boys learn from watching men. The PSAs encourage men to communicate with boys about violence against women. Also, the spots model appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and pose questions about the right time to raise with boys the issue of violence against women and girls.

The campaign launched nationally in February 2002 to all major commercial television stations, broadcast networks, cable networks, local cable affiliates, commercial radio stations, and to the *New York Times*. Reports from the first year demonstrate the campaign has generated over \$26 million in donated media value since its launch.

The campaign directed viewers, readers and listeners to the FVPF's Web site (www.endabuse.org), as well as to a toll-free number (1-800-END-ABUSE) for easy tips

on how to talk to boys. A *Coaching Boys into Men* section of the FVPPF Web site provides information to help men learn appropriate ways to talk to boys about violence against women and girls.

To create a brochure that would give men easy tips on how to broach the subject of violence against women with boys, we surveyed respected educators and advocates for victims of domestic violence, child abuse and youth violence. The final result, *Coaching Boys Into Men*, included tips for talking to boys of different ages, sample talking points, examples of times to talk, starting points for conversations, and much more. The FVPPF printed 25,000 brochures that are sent to people who inquire about the campaign when they call the toll free number. The brochure is also hosted (and can be downloaded and reproduced) from the FVPPF's website.

The tips outlined in the brochure are:

“It’s never too soon to talk to a child about violence. Tell him that “hands are not for hitting.” Let him know how you think he should express his anger and frustration—and what is out of bounds. Talk with him about what it means to be fair, share and treat others with respect.

A kid will never approach you and ask for guidance on how to treat women. But that doesn’t mean he doesn’t need it. Try watching TV with him or listening to his music. If you see or hear things that depict violence against women, tell him what you think about it. And your job isn’t done once you get the first talk out of the way. Help him work through problems in relationships as they arise. Let him know he can come back and talk to you again anytime.

Hear what he has to say. Listen to how he and his friends talk about girls. Ask him if he’s ever seen abusive behavior in his friends. Is he worried about any of his friends who are being hurt in their relationships? Are any of his friends hurting anyone else?

Teach him ways to express his anger without using violence. When he gets mad, tell him he can walk it out, talk it out, or take a time out. Let him know he can always come to you if he feels like things are getting out of hand. Try to give him examples of what you might say or do in situations that could turn violent.

Fathers, coaches and any man who spends time with boys or teens will have the greatest impact when they “walk the walk.” Make sure you act in a non-violent way in your relationships, and that you always treat women and girls in a way that your son can admire and emulate. Let him know how you define a healthy relationship.

Use every opportunity to reinforce the message that violence has no place in a relationship.”

PARTNERS AND NEXT STEPS

From the onset, we were committed to engaging strategic national partners to maximize penetration of the messages. In an unprecedented effort, the National High School Athletic Coaches Association (NHSACA) partnered with us throughout the campaign. With over 60,000 high school coaches as active members, the NHSACA assembled National and Local Advisory Committees to advise on the development of coaching materials intended to give coaches the tools to talk to high school athletes about violence against women and girls. The NHSACA also will advise on the dissemination of these coaching materials within high schools across the nation. The NHSACA is extremely enthusiastic about the strategies and implementation of the campaign and they are eager to continue working with us as partners. Several schools in California will pilot test the materials and strategies in 2003.

Based on the success to date, it is clear that this campaign will lay the foundation for a new strategy in family violence prevention. *Coaching Boys Into Men* will help the FVPPF engage an important new constituency of men in America—essential to achieving our ultimate goal to stop family violence.

Our next step is to put *Coaching Boys Into Men* on the public agenda by continuing to create both public and private roles for men in the movement to end violence against women and children. Through our early work on *Coaching Boys Into Men*, we have learned that high profile individuals can heighten the issue and give these messages larger reach. Based on heavy involvement from influential individuals such as Ted Waitt, Chairman, CEO, Founder of Gateway Computers, Ray Dolby, Founder and Chairman, Dolby Laboratories, Larry Baer, Executive Manager of the San Francisco Giants, Russell Simmons, Founder, President, Def Jam, Phat Farm, Ken Novack, Vice Chairman, AOL Time Warner, Inc., we have been able to attract mainstream media and therefore, additional attention to the campaign and the importance of its messages.

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that the Coaching Boys into Men campaign will engage men in the issue of violence against women and children and help them recognize their role in helping to solve the problem. Through this work, we hope to spark a dialogue between men and high school aged boys, fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, coaches and athletes, teachers and students. We hope men will teach boys that violence against women and girls is wrong, act as non-violent role models, and give boys direction on how to treat women and girls.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-WT-BX-K019 awarded by the Office on Violence against Women, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Similarly, the ideas presented in this document do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the Family Violence Prevention Fund and its partners.