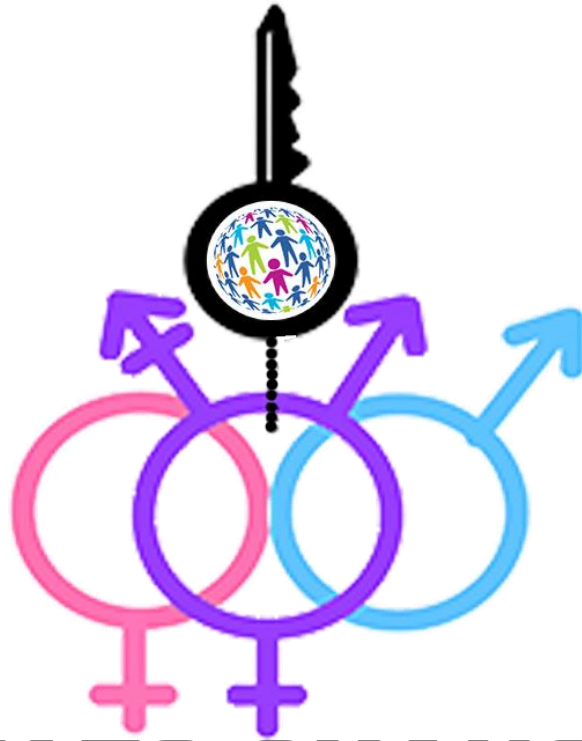




KEY TO CHANGE

Raise Responsible Boys

A Cactus Foundation India Initiative

Key to Change- Raise Responsible Boys

12 POINT AGENDA

Why Boys?

Our Society is plagued with a huge **GENDER GAP** and a vast majority of them use **GENDER DISCRIMINATION & GENDER BIASES** especially against women & LGBTQ. The pressure of “BE A MAN” is too much for young boys to handle and they easily fall prey to peer pressure, media influences, rigid gender stereotypes. These boys easily give in to **TOXIC MASCULINITY** and become spoilers for themselves and those around them. In the name of women empowerment, there are many initiatives and programs around the world. However, they will never be enough. Since we are failing to address an important stakeholder in the entire equation. On one hand if we need to empower women, we cannot and must not ignore the pressing need to sensitize, train and channelize young boys to become **EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY & RESPONSIBLE** men.

Let's not forget that even the most empowered women have been victims of these men with **TOXIC MASCULINITY**. Young boys fail to share their sufferings and abuse due to fear of breaking the gender stereotype that men cannot be vulnerable.

That's why, CACTUS FOUNDATION INDIA is choosing the challenge the attitude “**BOYS WILL BE BOYS**” and appeals to all the minds who think to put efforts to raise responsible boys committed to Gender Equality

WHO CAN USE CACTUS FOUNDATION's 12-Point AGENDA?

Anybody and anyone who understands that working on the roots of the problem is essential.

- Parents
- Teachers
- Educators
- Coaches
- Psychologists
- Caretakers
- Influencers
- Professionals
- community initiatives
- NGOs
- Young Teens, tweens
- Young & OLD Adults (MEN)
- LGBTQ Community advocates

WHERE TO USE THIS?

We encourage you to start implementing our 12-point agenda in your -

- Homes
- Schools & Colleges (theme this up in your school/college festivals)
- Workplace
- Community meet ups
- Social Connect Meetings
- Casual conversations with strangers, friends & Family
- On field with your community if you are working in non-profit sector
- Social Media to bring in the awareness

DISCLAIMER

- This 12-point agenda for raising boys is first step towards the larger goal of gender mainstreaming
- This 12-point agenda is not a one stop solution to the huge crisis of toxic masculinity
- This 12-point agenda addresses boys due to the nature, need and scope of our campaign. It nowhere implies that girls don't need guidance
- This 12-point agenda intends to help, assist and guide boys & men to understand their roles and responsibilities for a gender equal society. It nowhere implies that all boys or men are bullies or harassers
- This 12-point agenda needs to be understood and implemented to solve a larger social crisis of women & third gender abuse and exploitation due to biased, corrupt &

exploitative mindset of our society since centuries. It nowhere is aimed or sounds as male bashing or anti-men campaign.

- We totally acknowledge the abuse faced by men and young boys & the lack of support that male victims get. This 12-point agenda believes that gender inequality is the cause and it is important to work towards creating and initiating a dialogue, conversations and campaigns that will help in Gender mainstreaming.
- This 12-point agenda aims to young men and boys to break the “manbox” & creation rational & empathetic definitions of emotionally healthy men

THE 12-POINT AGENDA to Raising Responsible Boys

1. Recognize, Reflect & Work on your Gender Bias

Every person is a product of his environment. Our experiences and environment inject a lot of gender biases that we fail to recognize unless we become victims of it. Imagine the impact of acknowledging & isolating our gender bias & unlearning those irrational actions and transforming yourself through this powerful reflection

A gender bias free society is the ultimate goal. Start Now! Start Early!

2. Encourage & Build a positive home/school/work environment

The quality of home environment influences young boys in more ways than one. Positive role models are the need of the hour. A home infested with domestic violence, abuse, gender discrimination & rigid gender roles won't be able to raise emotionally healthy boys.

That's why it's important to **encourage & create a positive environment** free from gender biases to help boys become responsible and empathetic adults. Otherwise there's a high likelihood for boys to turn into aggressors & bullies.

3. Do not take women/or other genders for granted by categorizing & labelling them

Due to the biased gender stereotypes the society is quick to label women/men/LGBTQ into categories. This categorization and labelling also leads to taking them for granted. There are incidences of punishing them based on the choices they make with respect to the clothes they wear, education, the jobs & professions they choose or the life style they decide.

If we don't teach our boys that no matter what a person (men/women/LGBTQ) chooses, they are not entitled to mistreat, abuse or violate the boundaries of civility, dignity & respect

4. Teaching boys value of everyone's contribution in HOME MAKING

Due to huge gender gap & gender biases, the boys have remained away from home management responsibilities. In most cultures managing a home is supposed to be a women's domain. However, with modern day demands women are burdened with being bread winners as well as home managers

To have a world with gender equality it is inevitable for men to understand their roles and responsibilities in managing home. This participation will be a ground for empathy and will make boys & men responsible to run a home by equal sharing of responsibilities.

Gender role description is the key here!

5. Teaching boys about Emotions & Feelings

In a world, full of gender biases and rigid gender stereotypes it is common for people to associate emotions and feelings only with women. Boys and men due to the shallow stereotypical definitions of masculinity are groomed to be away & ignorant of emotions & feelings of self as well as others

Being a human, feeling emotions is natural. We have to teach our boys that **it is OK to feel, it is OK to experience emotions**. Only when one can feel, acknowledge, understand emotions only they will self-regulation take place. Its highly important to teach boys to understand their emotions & honor them in constructive ways

6. Brat proof your boys and create meaningful experiences

Gender inequality & bias tries to pamper boys while raising them paving way for spoilt & brattish men who oppress others due to feeling of being entitled on account of their gender.

It's important to teach boys that behaving in eccentric brattish way will not be accepted. It should be our priority to teach boys the significance & relevance of learning to **delay gratification**, increase level of frustration tolerance & disappointment tolerance. Challenging toxic, shallow, negative masculinity at a young age by brat proofing boys is an essential.

7. Power of teaching CONSENT to boys and men

To end violence, abuse, injustice, inequality & exploitation in our society [with respect to gender] we need to qualitatively initiate and strengthen **CONSENT CULTURE**. Our major cause of sexual violence against women, children, LGBTQ members is an absence of CONSENT Culture. Consent is not just about genders. Same rules apply regardless of genders.

However, most makes & young boys believe that silence is consent. No is consent. This attitude engages boys & men into crossing physical, emotional, sexual, financial boundaries of women, children & LGBTQ individuals.

Nobody wants to raise boys who will grow up to be rapists or men who hurt & destroy others. This is reason enough to teach boys & men about seeking consent in every sphere of life.

8. Help Boys to Prioritize & Focus on SELF WORTH for themselves & in others -

Boys who are raised with fractured egos, low sense of self-worth are more likely to make up for men who become over possessive & violate others boundaries. With growing external & media influences it's important to teach our boys to look within & focus on inner self worth. It is important to help them **focus on inner self & values**. Teaching them that outer worth of status, money, fame, social media popularity is temporary, superficial and shallow.

Boys need to look & Value inner worth of others too. Outward appearances shouldn't be the focus. Focusing on inner worth for self and others will help to create a kind, compassionate & empathetic society that respects & treats all genders equally

9. Teaching Boys about Commitment and Efforts needed in relationship

Any relationship needs efforts from both parties. However, the gender stereotyping, gender biased beliefs have made men believe that they are exempted from the efforts to make a relationship healthier and strong. Also, we have so many women abandoned while still staying in relationships. In most populations, women are single handedly managing the stress of relationships with very little or no effort from their male partners.

Most young boys & men restrict a relationship to marriage, kids or being bread winners. Our young boys need to learn that they too need to stay committed in face of challenges and put efforts to strengthen relationship. Being loyal is to try and understand the problem and work on it rather than giving up.

Only through this action point can we have less abandoned women within and outside relationships. Committed men in word and deed who don't run away when faced with challenges is need of the hour.

10. Pre-arming boys with INTIMACY

Young boys often have fractured notions about relationships. While growing up it is important to arm our boys with critical concepts of intimacy in relationships. Teaching boys the difference between intimacy and lust.

In a world where easy access to pornography corrupts young minds and tries to set up unrealistic expectations based on myths-intimacy education is a must. No wonder we come across inhuman cases of rape of women & young kids.

Sex education is incomplete without the concept of intimacy in relationships. We must help young boys to learn about different **types of intimacy viz. emotional, physical, intellectual, creative and spiritual.**

With an overdose of pornography young boys need to learn to express love in healthy functional ways. We need to talk to them about context & commitment. Isolating feelings and commitment from a relationship can lead to sexual violence, coercion and abuse. Teaching them emotional intimacy as a foundation for a healthy relationship is very important.

11. Support and encourage growth of your life partners

When these young boys become life partners it is important that they learn to support professional & personal development of their partners. They must be supportive, share responsibilities and help partners to achieve personal & professional well-being. Restricting professional growth or burdening the partner to work should be avoided.

Taking your partners growth seriously and value their work inside and outside homes should be normalized. But rigid gender roles and expectations influences boys and men to do the opposite. Whether your life partner is ahead of you professional or not should not make you feel inadequate. Teaching young boys to be secured in themselves. Gender biases shouldn't stop your life partner's growth and well-being. You don't have to compete with your life partner. You are one team. It is high time that our boys learn this invaluable truth.

12. Break & Get Rid of the Rigid MANBOX

The cycle of male violence against women, children, LGBTQ needs to end. This gender based violence tears the world of millions into pieces that cannot be gathered. The **'MANBOX'** is **pioneering work of Paul Kivel**, where he comes up with most common set of beliefs in society that put pressure in men to be and act in certain way

What is MANBOX? It is to believe that -

- women & girls are objects, property of men
- boys & men should not cry or openly express emotions
- boys & men should not show fear or weakness
- boys & men should not 'act like a girl'
- boys & men should be decisive & not ask for offer or accept help

- aggression equals dominance.

The beliefs include shallow & negative ideals of self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, heterosexuality & homophobia, aggression and control.

There is a constant pressure on men and boys to fit into this manbox and if they fail too they are called names & bullied. This is clearly evident with the rigid gender roles, gender gap & Gender discrimination

These beliefs need to change as they are root cause of all gender violence and exploitation. The consistent less progressive attitude of men and young boys needs a profound shift. Also, most men's personal gender norms are progressive but social gender norms don't align with it and they become mute spectators

As a parent, educator, professional & society we need to be vocal about this manbox and do the following -

- Highlight the harm & toxicity
- Disrupt gender stereotypes & roles through everyday action & weaken its cultural grip
- Address & highlight the gap between masculine social norms & men's own ideals
- Engage boys & men in critical conversations
- Work on gender multi-culturism
- Challenge the sources of manbox that propagate dominant ideals of manhood.

We need to equip our boys & men to -

- Embrace & express full range of emotions
- Validate feelings of other boys
- Ask for help
- Valuing lives of everyone around irrespective of gender
- Treating others with respect, dignity & humanity
- Don't use violence to control or passive aggression
- Use your language with compassion & mind your words

- Take interest in others not just for their sexuality. There is more to everyone than their sexuality & gender
- Modeling healthy positive Manhood for other boys to follow
- Not being a bystander but promote healthy manhood

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 12 ACTION POINTS TO RAISE RESPONSIBLE BOYS

Language:

- Use language that is kind, compassionate and respectful
- Use language mindfully free from Gender biases and gender stereotypes
- E.g.
 - Instead of poet/poetess, use Poet
 - Chairman -- chairperson/chair
 - Hero/heroine -- hero
 - Actor/actress -- actor
 - Salesman -- salesperson
- Refrain from providing irrelevant information about people's gender.

Communication:

- Learn to create a positive environment in your family, workplace and culture by stressing on communication
- When you communicate with anyone in any situation - ask yourself if your gender biases are influencing it. A little mindfulness will help you
- Focus on the content of the speaker. The gender of the source shouldn't affect your communication and perception of the message
- See to it that your gender stereotypes don't dominate the tone, content, body language and quality of your communication
- Don't have preconceived assumptions about speakers based on their gender

Defining Healthy Beliefs

- Create a safe space in families, workplaces, communities and educational setups to allow easy facilitation of challenging & disrupting rigid gender roles and stereotypes
- In a classroom, use role plays, media clips for discussions or stories to inspire kids & students to value gender diversity and at the same time help them understand the flexibility of gender roles. Swap the pre-defined gender roles in schools plays & concerts. Involve boys in all that is so called “girls activity”
- In school as well as families, let boys know about the physical challenges & pain of being a woman. Create an open forum, to discuss menstrual health, period pain, menopause, pregnancy and gender health
- Fathers to male teaches & males in society should be flexible enough to try to break stereotypes by cooking, managing & sharing responsibilities at home, baby sit etc.
- Gender categorization of tasks, activities, professions, playing & toys, clothes, roles, hobbies, personality traits shouldn't be done at all.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS & FAMILY SET Ups

- Keep swapping roles as father & mother or husband & wife while sharing day to day responsibilities
- Watch your communication with each other. It should be full of kindness, empathy & free from rigid gender roles
- Allow children to play whatever toys they want. Don't restrict & gender categorize play & toys. E.g. dolls should be given to play if boys want to and if your girl wants to join soccer don't stop her
- Don't label things, colors, places, activities, emotions, hobbies as “like a girl” or “like a boy” or “blue is for boys & pink is for girls”
- Practice everyday CONSENT with each other and let your friends & let extended family know about it too.

- Allow your friends & Family to know that you believe & practice being #genderbiasfree #genderequality
- Allow safe space for honest authentic, critical and open conversations in your family. Never say never to any such topic that your kids want to discuss e.g. pornographic, sexuality, emotions.
- Monitor your kids media, social media content. Discuss healthy manhood & toxic masculinity, gender equality & gender issues openly with kids to guide & give them clarity of thought
- Tweak popular cultural stereotypes, fairy tales, stories to make them more in alignment with gender parity and gender streamlining
- Monitor what your kids read. Try to discuss what they read so you can guide them towards recognizing gender biases & advocate gender sensitivity
- Be a positive role model

For parents - a quick note of caution & awareness.

- When you observe that your child is inclined to behave in an opposite way with respect to gender assigned to the child, don't panic and get furious.
- Try to observe, listen to your child and understand if it is just an external influence (most kids are gender fluid until 4 to 5 years of age) or it is an internal instinct
- If it is an internal instinct don't -
 - ABANDON
 - DISOWN
 - PRESSURISE
 - FORCE
 - YELL
 - PUNISH
 - Your child

- Meet professionals (who are gender sensitive) like pediatricians, doctors, psychologists, counsellors, community social workers to understand the child's inclination. Let them assess and listen to your child
- Once you get the confirmation that your child isn't accepting the biological gender assigned to him/her, then like a ROCK -
 - Acknowledge the fact
 - Accept the fact
 - Don't try to deny it
 - Be supportive
 - Be the child's shield against external bullying, harassment and abuse
 - Trust your child
 - Don't measure the worth of your child based on their gender
 - Remember! Every child needs, deserves parents who will accept them irrespective of their gender, color, intelligence & challenges. BE THAT PARENT
 - Seek professional help and get rid of people's & societal expectations. There are many NGOs, professionals who will be happy to help you in this journey
 - Stay committed and protect your child and strengthen them to face the world for who they are

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATIONAL SET Ups (teachers/educationists/coaches)

- Commit to a gender equality policy in word as well as in action. Let it reflect in your day to day interpersonal transactions with your students
- Educate/empower/engage equip all stakeholders involve (parents, staff, contractual staff, teachers, trustees, neighboring communities and most importantly your students on gender equality & work towards gender streamlining

- Influence the curriculum to be gender neutral, gender sensitive and one that promotes gender equality. As teachers, widen horizons of kids with your examples and tweak the examples if you cannot change the curriculum
- Involve themes of gender parity, gender streamlining and try to disrupt rigid gender roles and stereotypes through arts, crafts, science in your school/college functions and forums
- Just like anti-harassment, anti-bullying policies put forth a well-designed policy for gender equality, gender inclusivity and gender streamlining. Encourage CONSENT culture in your classroom from early years
- Keep a check on your students through a good rapport to understand & counsel their experiences with gender discriminations & gender bias in school and family environment
- Teach children about their bodies, consent, challenges of every gender, mental health, emotions, intimacy and relationships in age appropriate ways throughout their school/college journey
- Encourage a peer to peer support group and mentor future leaders for gender streamlining. Involve your alumni and let the impact get bigger and better
- Be a role model as institution and organization that is instrumental in raising responsible boys with ideals of healthy manhood & inclusive of all genders
- Speak about media influence to your students. Organize events to critically evaluate gender biases, gender stereotyping, gender discrimination in movies & popular culture. Organize films fests, mock critic reviews, competitions for same. Engage your students to choose to challenge gender biases, discrimination and stereotypes

ACTION THAT CAN HELP US!

- Implement these 12-action point in your capacity
- Create awareness through discussions in your set ups
- Dedicate one percent of your event calendar on a monthly basis towards this cause.

- Use social media to engage people for this cause & implementation of 12 action points

Don't Forget - Every big change begins as a tiny seed. This CACTUS FOUNDATION'S 12-Point Agenda is the seed for a healthy gender neutral future

For any clarifications/feedback/comments related to the content or for associating with our NGO, please CONTACT:

CACTUS FOUNDATION

Email: cactus.cpld@gmail.com

Call: +91 8888 441636

Country: INDIA



CACTUS FOUNDATION
"creating emotionally healthy society"