

Raising boys in #MeToo era

Teaching respect starts with parents

My husband Sudeep and I have two boys, Atiksh, 8, and Akshaj, 14, and we want to raise them to be good human beings who are happy, kind and respectful of everyone.

There was a time, when I thought good parenting is about teaching kids to be courteous and empathetic and to make their beds, be hygienic and help around the house. Instead, I find myself talking to them about gun control, mental health, inclusivity, sexism, all-gender bathrooms, etc.

Just the mere thought of either of my children being harassed or harassing another child is enough to keep me awake all night. I am sure any parent has the same worry.

Raising boys in the #MeToo era has many significant questions. One is: How can we successfully raise sons to understand the need for mutual respect, inclusivity across genders and empathy for all? We all agree that girls can do anything, including playing with cars and being good at maths and science.

But what can boys do?

Boys are still at risk of being mocked when they cry, play with dollhouses or kitchen sets or wear pink. Pre-teens and teen boys are under great pressure to “act like a man,” which often means fitting into a stereotype that makes them shut down their feelings, which results in anxiety and depression.

We need to let our sons express their weak moments and emotions, and make a constant effort to listen to them and understand them. If they feel empowered, they will listen, react and embrace everyone, including their parents. We told both our boys that it is OK to nurture and be nurtured. This will in turn make them better human beings.



Sumiti Mehta, a Sacramento mother of two boys, serves on the city's Parks and Community Enrichment Commission and several Natomas Unified School District committees.

Until a few years ago, it was a struggle for me to break these stereotypes in my own house. I grew up in the 1980s and '90s in India, where boys and girls are traditionally divided.

So as we raise our family in the United States, my husband and I are mindful of what we model at our house. We are consciously breaking gender stereotypes in our daily lives. My sons Akshaj and Atiksh do not see traditional gender roles in our

house; Sudeep and I swap our chores and work as a team. Sudeep is in consulting, so he

travels, but whenever he is home, the boys have seen him preparing breakfast and dinner and helping with cleaning and laundry.

This has made our boys understand there are no gender-specific chores. The boys help every day with dishes, cooking and dusting.

I am hoping this will make

them grow up to caring and understanding boyfriends, husbands and fathers. Akshaj has a nurturing quality that is setting a good example for his younger brother. He even cooks and helps with Atiksh's homework when I am out at meetings.

Sudeep and I do feel fortunate that we are able to talk openly to boys to make them understand the terms “sexism” and “gender inclusivity,” but as parents we are still learning every day. Believe me, parenting has no short cuts and it does not come with hacks.

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