HOW MEN & BOYS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We stand together in solidarity with everyone that has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis in Canada and around the world. So many of us are confronted with unprecedented life changes - dealing with our own precarious health, losing a job, in quarantine, or having loved ones who are impacted. For so many more, this crisis is compounded by poverty, present and historical discrimination, lack of access to basic human rights and health care, and other systemic inequities.

We can't overlook the disproportionate impact of this crisis on women and children, especially those that are experiencing gender-based violence at home, in the workplace, and in the community. For so many survivors, physical isolation at home is not safe and not an option.

We are in this together and more than ever, we need to strengthen our social solidarity bonds. We share the following tips on what men and boys can do to make a difference, to promote gender equality, to practice self-care, to build allyship, and to help end gender-based violence in these challenging times.

We call on all men and boys, in particular those in positions of leadership and power, to do their part to ensure a safe, equitable, and inclusive approach to ending this crisis. Here are some things all men and boys can do to make a difference at a personal and collective level.

1. IT'S OKAY TO BE VULNERABLE

These are stressful times. You will go through many emotions - feelings of anxiety, stress, insecurity, grief, hope, and so much more. This is normal. Rigid gender norms expect men to be stoic, in control and measured, but we need to challenge these norms together. Your mental health and emotional well-being is important.

2. OPEN UP

You are not alone, the current COVID19 health crisis is impacting communities globally. Speak honestly and openly with your loved ones, family members and friends, about your fears, concerns, and worries. Talk about family finances, the impact of a job loss, troubleshoot together, and brainstorm alternate plans. Reach out for help if you need to.

3. SEEK HELP

Stress, anxiety, frustration combined with the loss of employment, grief, etc, can have devastating impacts on our mental health and can lead us to engage in high-risk behaviours up to and including using violence in the home and community. If you are experiencing distress in your life, reach out for help. So many men are taught to toughen up, to get over their emotions, and keep going at all costs. You are not alone and your experiences are real. Reach out to your employee assistance program, local distress centre, faith leader, or talk to your friends about what you are going through.

4. ROLE MODEL

Help model emotional intelligence for young people around you and among your peers. Be brave and encourage your neighbours, friends, and family members to promote gender equality by encouraging men and boys to take action and dismantle gender stereotypes.

5. SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES

Check in with your partner about household duties and chores. Is it an equal workload? Show them you value their time, and share equally in household responsibilities, including cooking and cleaning, childcare, and at-home learning.

6. USE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE WITH CHILDREN

Children will likely experience stress and uncertainty as a result of these challenges and may act out as a result. In addition to reassuring and helping them feel safe, when necessary consider positive alternatives to discipline to gain a child's cooperation, such as logical consequences, acknowledging desirable behaviours and reinforcing forgiveness of wrongs.

7. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT CONSENT

With some extra time at home, and in addition to helping them understand life changes, talk with your kids about healthy and equitable relationships, and consent. Test your own knowledge by taking our consent quiz.

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8. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WORK LIFE BALANCE

Whether you're working from home or on the frontlines of this crisis, think critically about whether you need to dedicate more time to family life. Your loved ones need you too.

9. USE NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Check in with your partner; share with them what you see; tell them how you feel; let them know what you need; and ask them to support you. Reciprocate and ask them how they're feeling and how you can support them.

The COVID19 health crisis is impacting all communities around the world, it is important to make sure that stress and frustration don't show up in harmful or unhealthy ways. Take time and check in with your partner and children, listen to one another and allow each other to share feelings and needs, using non-violent communication.

10. PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Take time for yourself - listen to some music; read a book; meditate; take breaks from work; go for a walk and practice physical distancing; or try out a new recipe. If you practice good self-care, you're more likely to be able to care for others in these challenging times.

11. ENGAGE IN SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

Check in with family members, friends, neighbours, especially with survivors, and let them know you care about them and that you'd like to support them if needed. Listen to their experiences, empathize, show compassion, and support them as they wish. If possible, make a donation to a women's shelter, support organization, rape crisis centre, or crisis line. Support White Ribbon and our gender-based violence prevention programs.

12. SUPPORT VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

The current health crisis has a disproportionate impact on women, children, and vulnerable people. Newcomers might face increasing challenges compounded by language barriers, discrimination, and employment loss. It's important to be aware and sensitive of people's diverse needs. You can provide support virtually or by calling your neighbours, friends, and family members to find out how they are doing or to refer them to appropriate services.

13. DEMONSTRATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Whether you have mistreated someone or witnessed a family member or friend mistreat their partner, help make amends. Apologize, open up, ask what you can do to help. Let the person mistreating know that there are alternatives, and let the person affected know they don't deserve to be treated that way.

14. LEARN ABOUT MALE ALLYSHIP

Globally, more men and boys are supporting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence, together with women, girls, non-binary and trans people. Join us and check out White Ribbon's pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent on violence against women and girls. Use our resources, including our very own Toronto Maple Leafs sharing their commitment as #MenofQuality.

15. PRACTICE ALLYSHIP WITH THESE B.E.S.T. STEPS

- **Believe** that small changes can make a difference by creating a safe space where everyone can support each other both in your home and virtually.
- **Encourage** other men and boys around you to adopt healthy expressions of masculinity by encouraging them to share their emotions freely.
- **Support** by reaching out to your neighbours, friends, and family members.
- **Teach** men and boys in your life how to speak up and support others in distress.

16. ADVOCATE FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Our political leaders need to take strong measures to support our diverse communities while addressing systemic inequities, discrimination, and vulnerabilities. We must continue to advocate for equitable decision-making and equal representation, for feminist and human-rights based approaches to crisis management, and for a sustainable future where vulnerable communities are given the rights, resources, and means to heal from and thrive amidst this global crisis.

Thank you for your solidarity and for doing your part to help us end this global challenge. In the words the late Jack Layton, a White Ribbon founder, "My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world."