



Peace Corps

# Engaging Men and Boys around Positive Masculinities

A Guide for Peace Corps Volunteers



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# Engaging Men and Boys

As Volunteers, you will have a wide range of opportunities to engage with host families, counterparts, colleagues, and other community members around the role and impact of gender norms and expectations in their lives. One unique and important opportunity is engaging men and boys in discussions around positive masculine norms. These conversations can focus on how supporting girls and women in their lives and facilitating healthy, gender-equitable relationships benefits everyone. Men and boys, families, and entire communities see improved health, education, economic, and overall development outcomes, and also report significantly greater happiness when relationships are more equitable.

This brief is meant to support you in facilitating conversations with men and boys about gender-equitable norms and expectations. It includes:

- Tips and considerations to keep in mind when facilitating the discussions;
- A list of curated, evidence-based activities to use during conversations;
- A facilitation checklist outlining a 10-step approach for effective facilitation; and
- The Peace Corps Engaging Men and Boys checklist that highlights best-practice approaches from the global evidence around this work.

## Creating Safe Spaces

One of the most critical considerations for engaging men and boys around positive masculinities is the need to create a safe space for these discussions. Many topics can be very sensitive, and it is important to take the time to build trust and a supportive environment before engaging in dialogue. We recommend spending at least a few weeks getting to know the group and engaging them through sports, mentoring, or other activities before delving into serious topics related to gender norms. We also recommend beginning each activity with a more light-hearted exercise to help participants relax and feel comfortable, and encourage asking participants to come up with their own fun icebreaker activities and games.

Make sure to review the [Creating Safe Spaces for Sensitive Conversations](#) brief for additional guidance and considerations for ensuring that participants feel safe and able to comfortably participate in the conversation.

# Tips and Considerations

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As a Volunteer, you might find opportunities to engage men and boys in informal discussions – whether playing sports, sitting around a table, teaching new agricultural techniques on a farm, or mentoring boys with their homework – as well as in more formal venues such as camps or clubs, in schools, and in workplaces. Regardless of the venue, it is important to keep these considerations in mind when thinking about facilitating the kinds of activities and discussions outlined in this packet.<sup>1</sup>

## Know Your Role

As an outsider, you should not be the one leading the activity but should work with a trusted member of the community to co-facilitate it. Your role is to support your co-facilitator in creating an open and respectful environment in which participants feel comfortable sharing and learning from their own experiences. You should not insert your own perspective, judgment, or criticism about participants' attitudes, language, or behavior, but rather support a process of reflection and participatory learning. Your job is to get to know the community, and build trust and relationships.

## Identify Appropriate Timing

Remember that transforming norms does not happen overnight. In fact, it can take years for changes in attitudes and behaviors to take hold in a community. As outlined above, your role is to build trust before undertaking activities focusing on sensitive topics such as masculine norms. Ideally, you would use the first 6 – 10 months at site developing relationships and getting to understand the community. Use PACA and other participatory tools to get a better sense of norms and expectations, and work with a counterpart to conduct a needs assessment that can help identify priorities, needs, goals, and challenges. Complete this groundwork before attempting to design and co-facilitate sessions with your partner.

## Prepare Yourself

Before you try to facilitate or co-facilitate an activity to engage men and boys, you should first try to experience, or at least envision experiencing, the activity as a participant. This first-hand experience helps you to understand the strengths and weaknesses of an activity, to think and learn more about the issues addressed, and to reflect on your own comfort level and ability to handle those issues. It is important for you to have undergone some degree of self-reflection. If you feel uncomfortable talking openly or have strong opinions about certain topics, it may make it hard to facilitate an open discussion. You may also be reminded of painful experiences from your own past in which you suffered or caused others to suffer, which may make it hard to talk about certain topics. Take the time you need to understand your own feelings, perspectives, and any potential “triggers.”

## Ensure a Safe and Welcoming Space

If you don't know what the room for the workshop is like, it is a good idea to look at it in advance and to ensure a positive and welcoming environment for participants. You may need to move chairs and tables or improve the lighting. Avoid classroom-style arrangements. Ensure that the space feels safe for everyone – an environment in which participants are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues, without fear of

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the tips and considerations were adapted from [Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Transformation: The Group Education Manual](#) © 2008 The ACQUIRE Project/EngenderHealth and Promundo, under a cooperative agreement with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Adapted with permission from Promundo.

attack, ridicule, or denial of experience.<sup>2</sup> Consider spaces where men already congregate and feel comfortable. The space should be private so that participants feel at ease discussing sensitive topics and personal opinions. See the brief on [Creating Safe Spaces for Sensitive Conversations](#) for more guidance and specific considerations for creating a safe environment for these dialogues.

## Know Your Co-Facilitator

As outlined above, you should identify a co-facilitator who can bring a level of cultural understanding and perspective to the discussions. This helps ensure community ownership and sustainability. Many of the themes are sensitive and facilitators should ideally receive training to facilitate dialogues around the topics addressed. If it is not possible to provide training, make sure to spend time going over some of the issues that might come up. There may be groups of participants who open up and express their feelings during the process, while others may not want to talk. A critical role for you could be to assist when the dialogue seems stuck. Discuss the activity with your co-facilitator to ensure you are comfortable with how it will be run.

## Know Your Audience

Ask yourself: Who will be participating in this activity? Is it a group of men who all know each other, or will the group just be getting to know each other? Do you know them, or will you be meeting them for the first time? What do you know about the group, their perspectives and attitudes, their goals and priorities, how they relate to each other, and what roles they play in the community? What cultural considerations need to be taken into account – including for example, religion, ethnicity, and linguistic identity? How can you find out more about the group?

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<sup>2</sup> Holley and Steiner (2005) and the staff at Arizona State University Intergroup Relations Center (n.d.) as found in "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces," Arao and Clemens (2013).



# Curated List of Activities

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The following is a list of activities for engaging men and boys that might be helpful for facilitating discussion around the role and impact of gender norms, and in particular masculine norms in the lives of community members.<sup>3</sup> They are divided into six groups:

- Gender, identity, and power
- Communication and relationships
- Men's health
- Fatherhood and caregiving
- Substance abuse – alcohol and drugs
- Violence prevention

The activities can be done in the order they are outlined as a comprehensive curricula for a club focusing on engaging men and boys in positive masculinities. They can also be integrated as distinct activities in the context of a range of different club activities – i.e. a sports or homework club – choosing the activities that make sense.

## Gender, Identity, and Power

These five activities engage participants in dialogue around their everyday experiences as girls and boys, women and men. Expectations about how they are supposed to behave and the roles and responsibilities they take on are shaped from the time they are born, and are reinforced with messages from the family, community, and broader society. These norms have short- and long-term consequences for women and men's health, education, and overall development.

All five activities can be done with mixed or single-sex groups, and can be easily integrated into a camp or club. We would recommend picking at least two of them to use as foundational discussions about the role and impact of these norms and what they look like in the particular community.

1. Looking at our attitudes (Group Education Manual, Page 61)
2. Act like a man, act like a woman (Group Education Manual, Page 69; Program HMD, Page 23)
3. Persons and things (Group Education Manual, Page 73; Program HMD, Page 27)
4. Gender fishbowl (Group Education Manual, Page 79)
5. How women and men express themselves (Program HMD, Page 26)

## Communication and Relationships

These activities focus on effective and healthy communication in relationships – including both intimate relationships and those with family or friends. They can be done with mixed or single sex groups, and should build on the foundational discussions about gender and power outlined above. These activities can be integrated into a

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<sup>3</sup> Activities can be found in [Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Transformation: The Group Education Manual](#) (2008 The ACQUIRE Project/EngenderHealth and Promundo, under a cooperative agreement with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID): Washington, D.C.), and [Program HMD: A Toolkit for Action/ Engaging Youth to Achieve Gender Equity](#) (2013 Promundo, Instituto PAPI, Salud y Género and ECOS: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Washington, DC, USA) Used with permission from Promundo.

camp or club, but require more thought around the facilitator’s comfort level with the kinds of issues that might come up for participants. We recommend selecting one focusing on relationships and one activity focusing on emotions and anger.

6. Effective communication (Group Education Manual, Page 81)
7. Healthy and unhealthy relationships (Group Education Manual, Page 191)
8. Expressing my emotions (Group Education Manual, Page 195)
9. What to do when I am angry (Group Education Manual, Page 315 ; Program HMD, Page 52)

## Men’s Health

These three activities focus on engaging men and boys in supporting their health. Masculine norms can have a negative impact on men’s health outcomes by promoting unhealthy behavior and by discouraging them from seeking health services. These activities can be done in the context of a camp or club, as part of clinic outreach to the community, or through peer education and mentoring efforts. They do not need to be preceded by foundational activities, although some discussion around gender norms is helpful.

10. Caring for oneself: men, gender, and health (Group Education Manual, Page 125)
11. Men’s and women’s bodies (Group Education Manual, Page 129)
12. Men’s health (Group Education Manual, Page 141)

### Additional suggested resources on gender and men’s health

- The *Peace Corps HIV and Life Skills Manual* is an excellent resource for information and activities that can be adapted for a camp or club context, as well as for clinic based educational awareness raising activities. It can be found at: <https://pclive.peacecorps.gov/pclive/index.php/library/general-subjects/health-wellness/item/510-life-skills-manual-moo63-moo65-moo72>
- *Brothers for Life* is a community mobilization and education approach for engaging men and boys around factors that underlie HIV risk – including multiple concurrent relationships, gender-based violence, and substance abuse. It can be found here: <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/community-education-mobilisation/brothers-for-life/>

## Fatherhood and Caregiving

These activities encourage reflection related to relationships with fathers and mothers, messaging around fatherhood and caregiving, and on the benefits of being engaged caregivers and fathers in children’s lives. These activities can be done in the context of a camp or club, or peer education and mentoring efforts. They do not need to be preceded by foundational activities, although some discussion around gender norms is helpful. If the Volunteer is not a parent, it is best to have a “champion” father from the community lead the activity.

13. Letter to my father (Program HMD, Page 42)
14. Fatherhood (Group Education Manual, Page 285)
15. Men, women and division of caregiving (Group Education Manual, Page 279; Program HMD, Page 46)

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<sup>4</sup> Peace Corps does not specifically endorse the work of any external organizations. A select list of evidence-based resources are provided as examples of tools that might be helpful for Volunteers when considering activities to engage men and boys.



## Additional suggested fatherhood and caregiving resource

- *MenCare Program P* toolkit at: <http://men-care.org/what-we-do/programming/program-p/><sup>5</sup>

## Substance Abuse – Alcohol and Drugs

The following four activities foster dialogue around the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs. They can be facilitated in a camp or club context as well as part of community or clinic-based outreach and awareness-raising, or as part of peer education or mentoring efforts. We recommend doing all four activities as a series. Note that the facilitator or mentor should a) feel comfortable and have some background in substance abuse dialogue or b) enlist a counterpart with this experience and c) have a list of referrals for resources in the community.

16. What are drugs? (Group Education Manual, Page 145)
17. Drugs in our lives and communities (Group Education Manual, Page 151)
18. Pleasures and risks (Group Education Manual, Page 163)
19. Decision making and substance use (Group Education Manual, Page 167)

## Violence Prevention

These activities focus on addressing the norms that underlie the perpetuation of violence – amongst intimate partners, friends, and family members and in the community. They emphasize how expectations about what it means to be a man are at the heart of violence, and encourage creating safe spaces for positive dialogue around transforming those norms. These activities can be done in the context of camps or clubs, but we strongly recommend that only well-trained facilitators take on this subject. They should be done only after significant trust has been built, and should follow the foundational activities around gender norms, as well as activities around communication and relationships. See the *GBV Prevention Handout* for further guidance and important considerations related to GBV prevention-related activities.

20. What is violence? (Group Education Manual, Page 301)
21. Violence clothesline (Program HMD, Page 50)
22. The violence around me (Program HMD, Page 170)
23. From violence to respect in intimate relationships (Program HMD, Page 54)
24. New kinds of courage (Group Education Manual, Page 325)

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<sup>5</sup> See previous footnote.

# Facilitator's Checklist

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This checklist outlines a “10-step” approach for successful facilitation of activities.<sup>6</sup>

- ❑ **Create a safe and comfortable space.** Participants should feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics and personal opinions. Use a circle or half-circle rather than a classroom-like setting to encourage exchange during discussions. Participants may sit in chairs or on the floor.
- ❑ **Encourage participants to come up with ground rules.** These ground rules should be based on the principle of “do no harm,” attempt to mitigate conflict, and encourage ethical behavior. They should include active listening, respect for others, confidentiality, and participation.
- ❑ **Present information neutrally, and create a safe learning environment.** Be aware of your position of power. Avoid judgmental attitudes and never impose your feelings or opinions on the group. Do not aim to instill fear, because young men and women can often “switch off” their emotions, interest, or engagement, or become paralyzed and unable to participate.
- ❑ **Review your own views, assumptions, and prejudices, and avoid bringing them to the group.** Be aware if young men or women from particular social, cultural, or religious backgrounds trigger certain emotions in you, positive or negative, which may affect your engagement.
- ❑ **Include a lot of physical movement** so that participants remain active, alert, and interested.
- ❑ **Be friendly and create rapport** with your participants.
- ❑ **Dress appropriately.** You should look approachable, but professional and respectful.
- ❑ **Encourage participants to be honest and open,** rather than say what they think you want to hear. Manage the dynamic among participants to ensure that the environment is supportive. They should not be afraid to discuss sensitive issues, including questioning firm opinions about masculinity and gender, for fear of ridicule from their peers. Remember that, although young men or women may speak and behave as if they are knowledgeable about sex, they often have concerns and questions on a wide range of topics, including relationships, sexual health, puberty, penis or breast size, and the best ways in which to communicate with others.
- ❑ **Promote reflection, and participatory and inclusive learning.** For example:
  - a. *Manage the discussion:* Ensure that everyone feels heard and has the opportunity to speak, and that no one dominates the conversation. Recognize that some participants may speak more than others; respect participants' decisions to remain silent at times.
  - b. *Ask open-ended questions:* Avoid using leading questions or giving advice. Encourage participants to respond and debate issues from their own experiences, clarifying misinformation when necessary.
  - c. *Involve youth in choosing the themes and activities* so that they are meaningful to them. Always ask: *How does what we have learned apply to our own lives?*
- ❑ **Use participatory-style activities** that are entertaining and educational such as role-playing exercises and debates. Check in regularly to learn what participants like and do not like.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted with permission from Promundo, Instituto PAPAÍ, Salud y Género and ECOS (2013). [Program HMD: A Toolkit for Action/Engaging Youth to Achieve Gender Equity](#). Promundo: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Washington, DC, USA.

# Checklist: Programmatic Approaches for Engaging Men and Boys Around Positive Masculinities

Men and boys are critical to any effort to promote gender equality and foster women's and girls' agency. Volunteers, with their counterparts, have many opportunities to engage men and boys, including structured discussions around the role and impact of masculine norms in their lives, opportunities for dialogue that emerge in the context of other activities (sports, clubs etc.), and challenging conversations that arise in everyday situations. This checklist outlines best practices for ensuring discussions facilitate meaningful reflection and long-term support for positive, gender-equitable norms, and can be used by Volunteers, counterparts, and any community members engaging in conversations with men and boys. The approach emphasizes relationship and trust building and providing safe and supportive spaces for dialogue. They highlight the benefits of gender-equitable relationships for men and women, building space for learning from women and girls, beginning with "where they are," and striving to understand the deeply rooted fears and limiting roles that men and boys may have internalized and adopted.<sup>7</sup>

*Italics indicate that the action is also included as a quality standard that Volunteers report on under the GenEq CSPP in the VRF.*

## Identify Appropriate, Supportive Places and Timing

- Work with community members to lead or co-facilitate discussions with men and boys around positive gender norms and to ensure that those discussions are "owned" by the community.*
- Map community using PACA or other community assessment tools to learn where men and boys already congregate.
- Identify opportunities to engage boys and young men in already-planned or ongoing activities (i.e. camps or clubs).
- Consider creating single-sex spaces which could help boys and young men feel comfortable and not judged sharing their fears, concerns, and hopes.*
- Identify mentors, allies, and/or peer groups for support in the face of potential peer pressure and stigmatization from other community members.

## Emphasize Benefits of Gender Equality

- Identify examples of the economic and educational benefits of gender-equitable relationships for men, their families, and their communities.
- Provide examples of positive behaviors for men and boys that support an enabling environment for girls and young women.*
- Frame discussions with men and boys around the role and impact of power dynamics in their lives.

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<sup>7</sup> Edström, J.; Hassink, A.; Shahrokhi, T.; and Stern, E. (eds) (2015) "Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality," EMERGE Evidence Review, Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies

- Use an asset-based approach to ask: “What do you like about being a boy or a young man?” “What is your role in supporting girls and young women?” “What is the role of women in supporting men?”
- Provide examples of the benefits of positive health-seeking behavior and healthy relationships for themselves, their partners, and their families, and what this looks like in specific contexts.
- Identify the restrictions and limitations that traditional gender roles place on men and boys.
- Provide examples of positive male gender roles that allow men to express their emotions.
- Provide examples of positive male gender roles that allow men to express support for girls and women.
- Practice and develop non-violent conflict resolution skills with men and boys, including for example, self-awareness, empathy, compassion, and effective communication.

## Implementing Activities

- Use activities that are appropriate for the specific age group and developmental stage. Target separate activities and discussions for different age groups and developmental stages.
- Find trusted male peers, allies, and role models in the community to serve as facilitators and champions and who can help lead discussions.
- Shape activities that reflect the range of boys’ and young men’s experiences including with societal and cultural norms.
- Ensure that discussions recognize and are sensitive to the particular experiences and challenges faced by marginalized boys and men.
- Begin with discussions and small steps that are appropriate for where men and boys are, rather than focusing on immediate transformation of attitudes and behaviors.

## Encourage Listening to and Learning from Girls and Women

- *Find opportunities such as clubs, sports, or other events that allow men and boys to hear from and learn about the challenges and priorities that women and girls identify for themselves.*
- Use supportive, age-appropriate activities for men and women, boys and girls to hear and learn from each other about their experiences, challenges, fears, hopes, and aspirations.