

MEN AT WORK Dialogue Theme: The 'Man Rules'

CORE ACTIVITY - using the 'MAN RULES' cards

Objective:

- Collectively explore the notion of 'MAN RULES' - whereby society teaches us about what men /boys 'should' or 'shouldn't' be /do (with implications for women/girls)
- Elicit & explore some of these 'Man Rules' and some of their impacts - on ourselves, other males and on women/girls
- Facilitate positive group discussion of issues arising, going into depth appropriate to your group

SUGGESTED DURATION: You know your group & context best, but a session of at least an hour is advised.

Step 1: Revisit the Group Agreement from Session 1

Step 2: 'Man Words'. Ask group members to write down (or say) words that they - or society - typically associate with what it means to 'be a man'. Ask volunteers to share their words with the group and try to explain why they are associated with manhood - by themselves and/or by society.

OPTIONAL: Collate all the words generated onto either 1) a picture of a box on a flipchart/whiteboard or 2) onto the sides of an actual box (in marker pen or with tape). This way you will have the sum of all the words of all the participants in plain view, while each has their own on their sheet. Reflect on the words together- considering sameness and difference of words offered.

Step 3: Lay out the 'Man Rules' cards on the table. Work through them, in order, 1-8, involving as many of the group as possible in reading out the cards and responding.

Card 1: What do people say that men SHOULD do or should be like? & Card 2: What do people say that men CAN'T or SHOULDN'T do or be like?

Cards 1 & 2 are an opportunity to establish some of the 'rules' associated with the words generated in the earlier 'Man Words' discussion. e.g. If 'strong' is a 'man word' typically associated with 'being a man', what is a 'man rule' that might be associated with that word? e.g. 'Don't ask for help', 'show that you are strong'.

Card 3: Where do we 'see' or 'hear' these 'MAN RULES'?

Card 4: WHO do we learn the rules from? Where did THEY learn the rules?

Cards 3 and 4 are about acknowledging the diverse influences on our development - both in terms of media: films, books, the web, music, games etc and in terms of other people: family and friends, neighbours and peers.

Sets of rules can offer a feeling of protection, familiarity and predictability, but inescapably they also impose limitations. Dominant cultural definitions of how men 'should be' can constrain men by limiting what we can and cannot do or feel.



We each experience our own unique blends of these various stimuli but we also share lots of common experiences in social messaging.

Card 5: What might men gain from following - or being seen to follow - the 'MAN RULES'? This question allows us to acknowledge what we can receive by 'toeing the line' - group belonging, inclusion, opportunities, peer-protection, status, a 'quiet life', anonymity, subservient others, feared / obeyed by others, material success, excuses made for us. **Prompt, if needed:** If there were no gains - why bother?

Card 6: What BAD things can HAPPEN to boys/men who break the 'MAN RULES'?

This card allows us to start addressing experiences of being policed / pressurised by peers for failing to observe the 'rules' of masculinity. It is highly unlikely that group members cannot think of any, but their willingness to describe them may vary. **Prompt, if needed:** What might these 'punishments' be - verbal and/or otherwise? Aim to elicit: name-calling (with authentic examples), bullying, isolation, marginalisation, assault. Allow the group to be authentically frank—the language used in these 'punishments' is vital to acknowledge as they commonly involve taunts relating to being 'like a girl' or 'feminine'. These messages help underpin sexism, as they create associations between femininity and inferiority.

This learning point is fundamental.

Card 7: If a man follows ALL of the 'MAN RULES'....

This is an exploration of potential harms, informed by reference to real harms ranging widely from missed experiences, rejected emotions, diminished relationships to rivalry, risk-taking, objectification, domination and aggression (including lethal violence). Be confident to follow the logic of where unquestioning obedience to the 'Man Rules' can lead. Elicit as many as the group can identify.

Card 8: What are the GOOD things about breaking the 'MAN RULES'?

Elicit what boys/young men could do freely if the rules didn't exist e.g. ask for help when needed, behave in more authentic ways, beyond arbitrary expectations. What challenges, such as emotions or expectations, stand in the way of breaking 'Man Rules'?

Card 9: Do we know people who make us follow the 'Man Rules'?*

Do some of our friends, family and/or peers police us and place limits and expectations on us? Reflect on responses.

Card 10: Who do we know who we feel free around?*

Do some of our friends, family and/or peers give us space and room to be ourselves, in ways contrary to some - or all - of the 'Man Rules'? Reflect on responses.

*Be sure to remind the boys/young men that you are not asking them to name individuals, but rather to acknowledge behaviours/influences.

Question to the group: 'Do you have any advice for other boys/ young men after having had these conversations?'

Dialogue Theme: The 'Man Rules' Core Activity



What do people say that men 'SHOULD' do or 'SHOULD' be like?

1

THE 'MAN RULES'



What do people say that men 'CAN'T' or 'SHOULDN'T' do or be like?

2

THE 'MAN RULES'



Where do we 'see' or 'hear' these 'MAN RULES'?

3

THE 'MAN RULES'



WHO do we learn the 'MAN RULES' from? Where did THEY learn the rules?

4

THE 'MAN RULES'



What might men gain from following - or being seen to follow - the 'MAN RULES'?

5

THE 'MAN RULES'

What **BAD** things can happen to boys/men who break the 'MAN RULES'?



6

THE 'MAN RULES'

If a man follows all the 'MAN RULES' without question, how might he cause harm to himself, other boys/men & women/girls?



7

THE 'MAN RULES'



What are the **GOOD** things about breaking the 'MAN RULES'?

8

THE 'MAN RULES'



Do we know people who make us follow the 'Man Rules'?

9

THE 'MAN RULES'



Who do we know who we feel free around?

10

THE 'MAN RULES'