**[Lily Isobella](https://www.facebook.com/mslilyisobella/?__cft__%5b0%5d=AZU12oNUYr1fA0s6XVFoMWSyuGVjcvKttTFTIczQZMYbY-oPWMbLJeA0JeJLm5licVJUKtfW00CXN9Xs2j5P8ABOKX1sIqgFXLxe08tnB9j4_Ei9gc7EPNPiboLoZeYx3AaEl7fAPW42I5xvyKW0NWj6cpnv8ySbUryYP9Qj0pMdwg&__tn__=-UC%2CP-y-R)**

NOT MY SON

In seminars, I ask parents what their greatest fears are about sex and their kids. Without fail, parents of girls are worried about sexual assault and what they can do to stop their daughter from becoming a victim.

And without fail, what I do NOT hear is parents of boys worrying about what they can do to prevent their sons from becoming the perpetrators of that violence.

I can tell you right now, as a mother of sons - THAT is one of my greatest fears.

For every girl that is sexually assaulted by a male intimate partner, there is

a male intimate partner perpetrating that crime.

No one wants to think that their son could be that person, hence no one is talking about how we can help our boys not become that person.

But I want to.

So, here are some of the things I have done, as a mother of boys, to try and raise “good men”.. Or at least raise men who will not be a part of this horrific problem, and will hopefully be part of the solution. I am blessed to know many many amazing men who have been such an integral part of my sons journey, and I could write volumes about the importance of having strong male mentors for boys, but this is about what every parent, especially mums, can do... right now.

TOUCH THEM

We don’t touch boys enough. We roughhouse with them, we wrestle with them and somewhere along the line we stop touching in gentle ways. And this is pronounced when he becomes a teen. Don’t get me wrong, its not easy cuddling up to a prickly hormone-fuelled, eye-rolling, hairy ball of boy, but this is exactly the time when we need to. We need to teach them the joy, the beauty, the ease and release to be found in loving touch. We need to show them how it is done, so they can, in turn, share that with their partner in the future.

HAVE AN HONOUR CODE

All kids need to know the rules, but boys need to be returned to the idea that they are, at their core, good, decent, capable and worthy, and above all else, that they belong to something- FAMILY. But just like belonging to anything, there is a level of behaviour that they need to maintain. An honour code can be led by you, but is best when it comes from all of you, collaboratively.

Some of the things in the honour code of our family are:

\*\*Our home is a safe place for everyone

\*\*We never touch each other with violence

\*\*We fight fair, and with respect

\*\*We do not shame, and we honour mistakes

\*\*Take responsibility for what is yours - actions, words, body and belongings

CALL OUT THEIR MATES

Anyone who has ever set foot in our home is expected to honour that code as well - including all my sons’ mates. And if they can’t, or won’t, then it is up to me to help them do so. Do not be afraid to pull your son’s mates up on behaviour that is just not good enough. Your son will need to do this in future (god knows just how much shitty behaviour he will witness - and it all needs calling out and dismantling) and he needs to see it in action, so he can work out how to do it for himself. Strong bystander behaviour is needed so much right now to change the societal gendered norms.

TEACH HIM TO TAKE CARE OF HIS BODY

We show girls how to do their hair, their make up, their nails... we buy them bath bombs, perfumes and lotions... we encourage them to do “self care” in the form of beauty regimes. (SIDE NOTE: I hate this as a form of self care for girls - more on THAT another time) But we are sadly lacking some form of self care for boys.

Teach them the joy of caring for their body, for feeding it nourishing food, for letting it get the rest it needs, for treating it to massages and baths and yoga stretches. Why? Because a man that knows how good a body can feel is much more likely to make a considerate and thoughtful lover interested in mutual pleasure. And much less likely to go in search of bodily state changes like drugs and alcohol. �And he will smell pretty damn good too.

ALLOW ANGER

We all get angry and it is a damn scary emotion to have to deal with. But we need to be unafraid of our anger, and we need to start showing boys how to bring their anger out in safe ways. Ways that can result in integration, and learning, instead of the harm that comes when anger is subverted and made brittle. We need to create spaces and ways for them to express anger - to honour that it is a real and honest emotion, a worthy emotion. An emotion that has positive impact as well - healthy anger creates change, sparks resistance, makes us move. But we need to recognise it, move it through the body and then utilise it. Stop telling boys to calm down and start giving them spaces to bring their anger and work through it.

DECONSTRUCT MEDIA WITH HIM

Mainstream media has so much to answer for in regards to how our views about women are shaped. Dehumanisation and hyper-sexualisation of women is at the core of far too much advertising (still) as well as movie and sitcom plots. It is so hugely important for us to spend the (painful) time engaging in media with our sons and helping them to really see what is happening. Help them get curious, help them question the way sexuality, gender and relationships are portrayed. Help them get curious about the ethics of what they are engaging with and wether or not it fits their own belief system, and your family honour code. These media skills become the basis for how he interacts with pornography further down the track. We need to create critical thinkers.

SHOW HIM WHO YOU ARE

The worst advice I was ever given was to never show my sons my emotional self. Luckily, I ignored that advice.

They have seen me totally broken, they have seen me utterly in love, they have seen me ashamed of my actions, and they have seen me accept awards for other behaviour. They have seen me fight men twice my size in competition, and they have seen me freak out about picking up a squiggly earthworm. They have seen me work my ass off for what I believe in, they have seen me give without thought, they have seen my heart break with grief and they have seen my heart break open with joy.

And from all of that they have learned that a woman is an amazing thing.

A multifaceted, deeply wild, emotional, strong, capable, vulnerable, beautiful being. One that deserves respect, acknowledgement, care, love, attention and above all else, safety. And they know, without question, that they are man enough to give her those things.

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