



### #EngagingMenAndBoys

*Men won't sit back and be silent in the movement to end gender-based violence, domestic violence and abuse. Maitri is engaging men and boys through this social media campaign so that together we can raise awareness and work toward prevention.*

*Thank you, Sandeep Bajaj, for joining this Maitri campaign. Here is a message from Sandeep:*

Domestic violence is one of the most underreported and misunderstood crimes in our society. Most people think that domestic violence is about physical abuse that happens only in households with low socio-economic status. But that's a myth. Domestic violence has many forms beyond physical including emotional, sexual, stalking, neglect and economic. All these forms are very prevalent across our society and know no cultural, socioeconomic, education, religious, geographic or sexual orientation boundaries. While physical domestic violence is quite prevalent, other forms of domestic violence and abuse are much more difficult to detect and therefore, often go untreated.

As the saying goes, 'Prevention is better than cure', therefore, it is important that we create awareness about domestic violence in our children and inculcate good values so that they can grow up as responsible individuals and stand up firmly against domestic violence, gender violence and gender discrimination. They can provide non-judgmental help to victims, and hold perpetrators accountable.

I found the following tips to be particularly useful while parenting my boys:

1. Help children deal with behavioral issues such as excessive anger, anxiety, jealousy and low self-esteem. If we let these issues grow uncontrolled, statistics show that there is a greater likelihood that those kids can turn out to be perpetrators of domestic violence and gender-based violence. As parents, we need to provide kids with ample 1:1 quality time and emotional support. I also find teaching them about guided meditation and breathing exercises is helpful, as these self-help techniques provide benefits around controlling their anger and anxiety.
2. In patriarchal culture, there are harmful beliefs that men have the right to control women and women are expected to have a much higher degree of tolerance in order to make their marriages work. We need to make sure that we are not bringing up our kids with these harmful expectations. Men and women are equal, so both partners are equally responsible to create a happy partner relationship. The best way in which adults can teach these things to their kids is to practice these principles at their own homes.
3. Alcohol and substance abuse can aggravate violent behavior, so I think it's best if we can teach our children to stay away from alcohol and drug abuse. When an individual is under the influence, they are much less likely to control violent impulses, which can lead to abusive behavior in partner relationship. Parents need to make their kids emotionally strong so they don't cave into peer-pressure regarding alcohol and drug use.

4. Create awareness in our children (especially teens), so that they can detect signs of potential abuse in their peer-groups. Are any of their friends having marked changes in terms of difficulty interacting or being overly depressed or a sudden onset of academic issues? There can be many reasons causing these symptoms but if we teach our kids to be supportive of their friends who are going through these hard times, then perhaps their friends can open up and reveal if there are underlying issues w.r.t domestic abuse or not.
  
5. We need to educate our teens about responsible, healthy and respectful sexual behavior. It's important that teens understand the importance of "consent" in a dating relationship. We need to teach them to refrain from any kind of dominance, aggression, and coercion whether it is physical or emotional.

Most important, we have to be good role models for our future generations. I hope that by sharing some of my parenting experiences, I can help create awareness and prevent domestic violence and relationship abuse.

About the participant: Sandeep is an IT professional and a San Francisco Bay Area resident for over 20+ years. He volunteers and coaches youth at local schools and is a parent leader at Boys Scouts of America.