

# Healthy Masculinity



We can reduce and prevent sexual violence by exploring and challenging the root causes of violence – oppressive social norms and behaviors that support sexually violent actions. Defying the harmful and violent behaviors that are traditionally tied to how men and boys are often socialized and represented in society, healthy masculinity means valuing and respecting women, girls, and the LGBTQIA+ community – and respecting and valuing oneself by striving to live authentically.<sup>1</sup>

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

### *Toxic Masculinity*

Masculinity can be defined in many ways. Toxic masculinity refers to how unhealthy attitudes and harmful behaviors can be tied to defining one’s “maleness.” Toxic masculinity contributes to a culture that permits men to commit acts of sexual violence. Traits associated with toxic masculinity, such as asserting dominance and power, and the normalization of aggressive behaviors are often factors in instances of sexual violence.

It’s critical to remember that toxic masculinity harms all of us – men included. When messages are reinforced that these traits are the only ways to “be a real man,” men and boys are limited in how they engage with the world. In addition to increased acts of sexual and domestic violence, toxic masculinity can result in mental health issues for men and boys that are often left unaddressed, among many other negative social impacts.

*Learn more, support each other.*

**Community-level prevention** requires everyone, including men, to work together to create safer communities free of sexual violence. By challenging harmful depictions of masculinity, men and boys can promote a culture of healthy, respectful masculinity and play a critical role in the creation of safer communities.



**Nearly 1 in 10 men experience depression or anxiety, but less than half of those men will receive treatment.<sup>2</sup>**

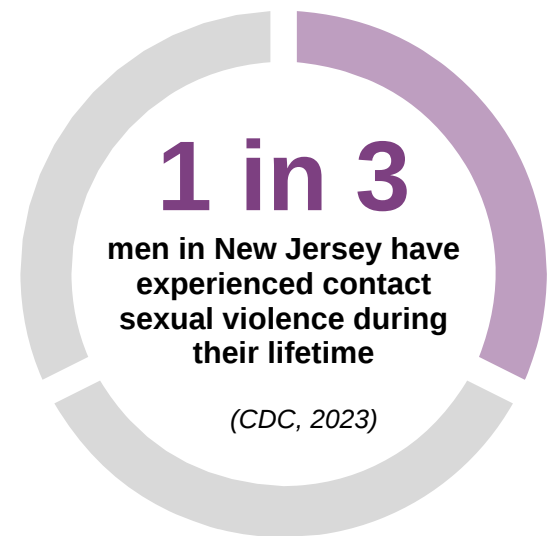
## HOW CAN WE PROMOTE HEALTHY MASCULINITY?

- **Speak up** against sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and other discriminatory comments and behaviors. Intervene when you hear or see harmful behaviors, and help others understand the value of allyship.
- **Support** men and boys who challenge toxic masculinity. Create supportive environments for men and boys to express a wide range of emotions and live authentically.
- **Celebrate** gender and sexuality diversity. Embrace and honor all genders, gender expressions, and sexual identities.
- **Practice and model** empathetic behavior toward yourself and others by demonstrating empathy, compassion, and consent.
- **Promote representation** of healthy masculinity in community-based settings. Incorporate healthy practices and activities with your team, colleagues, peers, and more, and uplift media with diverse and positive examples of what masculinity could look like.
- **Listen to each other.** If you've never experienced being the target of sexual violence, discrimination, or unwanted sexual attention, take the time to listen to the experiences of those who have experienced them. If someone addresses your own behavior that they find problematic, respond with compassion and humility. We all have room to learn and grow.
- **Keep learning.** Continue to expand your knowledge and understanding of the ways that toxic masculinity impacts our communities and strategies for changing the culture.

## SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Although research has shown that men commit most instances of sexual violence, most men are not perpetrators of violence. Only a small fraction of men commit acts of sexual violence, and it's critical to remember that men and boys are also harmed. In fact, approximately 1 in 3 men in New Jersey have experienced contact sexual violence during their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

By promoting a culture of healthy masculinity and believing and supporting men and boys who share their experiences of sexual violence, we can help break the silence and address barriers and stigmas.



## RESOURCES

### Learn more

- **A Call to Men:** [acalltomen.org](http://acalltomen.org)
- **Engaging Men – Futures Without Violence:** [engagingmen.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://engagingmen.futureswithoutviolence.org)
- **Men Can Stop Rape:** [mcsr.org](http://mcsr.org)

**njcoalition**  
against sexual assault

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> A Call to Men. (n.d.). Healthy manhood. A Call to Men. <https://www.acalltomen.org/healthy-manhood/>
- <sup>2</sup> Anxiety and Depression Association of America. (n.d.). Men's mental health. Anxiety and Depression Association of America. <https://adaa.org/find-help/by-demographics/mens-mental-health>
- <sup>3</sup> Smith, S. G., Khatiwada, S., Richardson, L., Basile, K. C., Friar, N. W., Chen, J., Zhang Kudon, H., & Leemis, R. W. (2023). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 state report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVS-2016-2017-State-Report-508.pdf>

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