

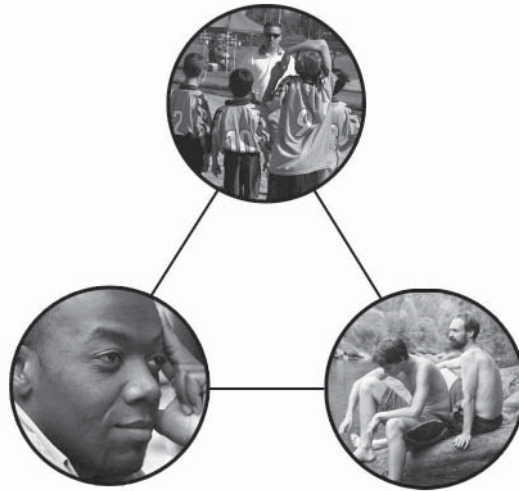
# THE MEN'S ROLL CALL

Newsletter of the Men's Network Against Domestic Violence, May 2005

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Welcome to the first edition of The Men's Roll Call. The Roll Call is written to inspire and support men in doing their part to end violence. Please let us know what you think of the newsletter at [info@menagainstdv.org](mailto:info@menagainstdv.org). If you are inspired, please forward this to others.

Visit our website at [www.menagainstdv.org](http://www.menagainstdv.org) to learn more.



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“The language we choose to use with boys is one of our strongest available tools. Every interaction provides opportunity to influence boys.”

Focus Article: Page 2, What Can Men Do? by Kevin Miller

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...when we talk about men taking a stand against domestic violence and the other injustices of society, we are in agreement with Joe's statement, “we must begin with fixing our understanding of masculinity and manhood”.

Book Review: Page 4, Season of Life, by Ward Urion

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## What Can Men Do?

A friend told me about a recent experience. While working a trade show, a group of people was discussing a recent piece of news about a domestic violence case. One of the men in the group spoke up and stated something to the effect that, "I'd like to take that guy out back and..." You can guess how the sentence ended. Many of us have probably expressed the same pent up desire. But of course, most men don't respond to violence with more violence. Not just because vigilantism went the way of the pony express, but also because the same values that prevent us from being violent in our own home prevents us from "knocking some sense" into our own violent brothers.

### **Why Focus on Men?**

For the many men who are not violent, we are often outraged at the violence of others, but don't know what actions we can take to prevent violence.

The dynamics creating and supporting violent men are not only detrimental to women and children, but shortchange boys and men as well.

Men are largely absent in violence response and prevention efforts. Working in partnership with women, men can effectively use their influence with boys and peers to ensure non-violent values and beliefs become the norm.

My friend appreciated this man's response. Not necessarily of the retaliation, but that he cared and was also outraged at this man's violence against women and children. What is this protective quality that makes us angry to see other men being violent in their homes? What stops most men at just being outraged? How do we marshal this anger and frustration into effective action against this seemingly complex issue? How should men respond?

Before we can effectively take action, it is important to understand that the controlling and abusive behaviors that define domestic violence are supported by a set of values and beliefs that are learned. Violent men are not born...they are created. While stress, substance abuse, and emotional disorders may complicate a situation, they do not cause violence. So we really need to ask where do violent boys and men develop a sense of entitlement to be controlling and use violence in relationships?

It is often thought that most violent men must have grown up in a violent home and that they are part of a continuing cycle of violence. This belief is partially correct. The data shows that just over half of the men who grow up in violent homes later commit violence in their families. So the good news is that about half escape without perpetuating violence. We are left with a challenging question. Where do the remaining violent men develop abusive and controlling attitudes if they do not come from a violent family situation?

To understand the impact men can have in influencing boys, it is important to understand the forces shaping boys. A simple exercise in listing the words that describe 'being a man' is revealing. The exercise becomes profoundly illuminating when we are asked to list the words that describe someone who is not being a man. The results often summarize and reinforce

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'being a man' as being independent, unemotional, in control, and being tough. This narrow definition has been called 'boxing in' or the 'gender straight jacket.'

Worse, the influence of the 'box' reduces experiences that teach the skills needed to have healthy and fulfilling relationships. Not just with women, but with other men and our children as well. Where are boys and girls being taught relationship skills? We find most of it left to "on-the-job training". Many of us find ways to adjust and learn as we go, but what has been lost when we don't start with a whole palette of relationship and emotional skills? How many unfulfilling and frustrating relationships will it take before we fix this?

Now thankfully, most of us endure the 'box' without becoming violent. But nearly every male has modified his behavior in various ways due to this powerful, yet very constricted, shaping of boys and men. As innocent and innocuous as they may seem, phrases like "don't throw like a girl" are subtle, yet powerful reinforcers. Besides insulting our daughters, many of the 'boxing phrases' shame our boys. The language we choose to use with boys is one of our strongest available tools. Every interaction provides opportunity to influence boys and to create a culture that honors boys for who they are as individuals.

This is where raising boys intersects with preventing domestic violence. Domestic violence is the extreme expression of a set of values heavily shaped from the 'boxing' of boys into a narrow definition of being a man. This very same shaping is part of the resistance that keeps many men from even talking to other men about what it means to be a man and relationships. "You're not becoming soft are you?"

It is time to speak up and discuss our role as men in addressing cultural norms that limit boys' emotions and relationships. We have the potential to create stronger, healthier, and more fulfilling relationships based on non-violence and equality; and in doing so we create the potential to eliminate the tragedy of violent homes.

The Men's Network is focused on men and the daily actions they can take within their own circles toward the development of boys who have healthy values, beliefs, and a toolbox full of relationship and emotional skills. We believe men have many existing opportunities to teach and discuss positive values and we need to take advantage of them. These moments happen at dinnertime, while watching movies, on the playing field, before a first date, discussing current events, and other daily interactions we have with our children.

There are other social justice factors men will also need to

**"How to Connect With Boys", from Real Boys Workbook, by William Pollack**

Connect through activity or play

Avoid teasing or shaming

Make brief statements and wait, don't lecture

Share your experiences as a boy

Genuinely listen

Convey how much you admire and care about him

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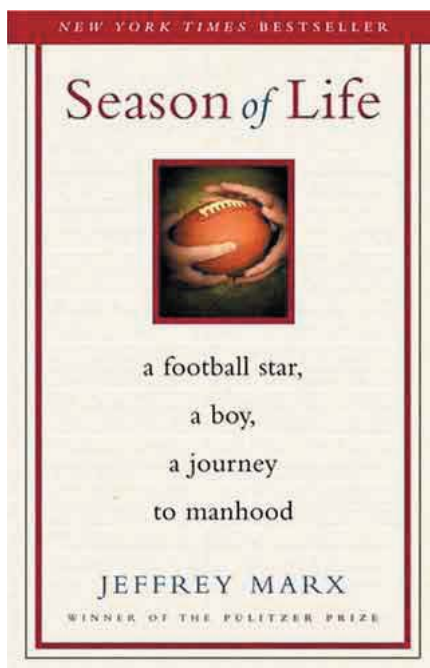
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address to finally eliminate violence from the home and society. We will present these in future newsletters along with practical examples and advice supporting the type of action we advocate. But a good place to start, with tremendous potential, is the boys in our immediate life. Boys in our life deserve and need our guidance, attention, and love.

We are bound to read about many more tragic domestic violence cases. The anger and frustration we may feel about these stories stem from healthy, protective qualities based on fairness and justice. Men can effectively use these qualities combined with our desire for our sons to grow up healthy and whole. This, in turn, has a wider benefit to our society as a whole. Please join the call to action. ■

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## Book Review



So often, when trying to convey what the Men's Network is asking of men, it is challenging to offer concrete examples. This, in part, is due to the many opportunities we feel exist everyday. The change we seek is more about awareness and intention shaping every interaction with a boy or peer. None-the-less, real examples are the best illustrators. That is why we are so pleased to have discovered and recommend the Season of Life: A Football Star, a Boy, a Journey to Manhood, by Jeffrey Marx.

Not only is this an enjoyable read, revisiting the drama of high school football, but it also offers a "manifesto" of the possibility of a richer and healthier masculinity. The story highlights Joe Ehrmann, a former player/captain of the Baltimore Colts and now a minister and high school football coach, and his philosophy and practice that he calls "Building Men for Others." This organized effort by the coaching staff of a high school prep football team emphasizes what it truly means to be a man in an age where positive paradigms for that are virtually invisible.

Jeffrey Marx shares his own search for meaning as a man and how he ultimately comes to peace with the most significant man in his life, his father, by examining Joe Ehrmann, his mentor and friend as a teenager. "Building Men for Others" is about using the context of developing a football team to connect with boys and teach them a clear and compelling definition of what it means to be a man. It also provides them a code of conduct for manhood and encourages them to figure out what their own unique, transcendent cause could be. Joe explains his philosophy to Jeff Marx in several one-on-one sessions and then, most importantly, goes out and lives it, actively demonstrating what it means to actually live this example of manhood.

Virtually nothing in this book directly addresses domestic violence other than to stress that part of

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the code of conduct that is enforced, with threat of permanent expulsion from the team, is if one of the "boys" mistreats a young woman. There is a danger of developing patriarchal attitudes without more definition about what it means to mistreat a woman and a focus on equality. Yet, Joe's ethic is still a powerful starting point given the current amount of silence and apathy toward teaching boys relationship skills and alternatives to narrow definitions of being a man. This is all the more impressive when done in the context of a sport that is ripe with hyper-masculinity.

There are bittersweet reactions to this book, especially for men who experienced a football coach like mine. He celebrated me most when I broke an opposing team member's legs in a tackle. As I read I kept wishing that I had the benefit of a coach like Joe. I can only imagine the impact of a coach like Joe who states:

*"(Masculinity) first and foremost, ought to be defined in terms of relationships. It ought to be taught in terms of the capacity to love and to be loved. If you look over your life at the end of it...life wouldn't be measured in terms of success based on what you've acquired or achieved or what you own. The only thing that's really going to matter is the relationships that you had. It's going to come down to this: What kind of a father were you? What kind of a husband were you? What kind of a coach or teammate were you? What kind of a son were you? What kind of a brother were you? What kind of a friend were you? Success comes in terms of relationships."*

*"And I think the second criterion - the only other criterion for masculinity - is that all of us ought to have some kind of cause, some kind of purpose in our lives that's bigger than our own individual hopes, dreams, wants, and desires. At the end of our life, we ought to be able to look back over it from our deathbed and know that somehow the world was a better place because we lived, we loved, we were other-centered, other-focused."*

With this ethos applied in our lives and as mentors to young men and boys, we can influence the world we live in.

If you want to know what we're talking about when we talk about men taking a stand against domestic violence and the other injustices of society, we are in agreement with Joe's statement, "we must begin with fixing our understanding of masculinity and manhood". This book gives us a great example of what it looks like to live the work, to feel what other people feel, to live with integrity, to seek justice, and to encourage the oppressed. If you, as a man, would like to do your part to end domestic violence and other injustices, read this book for the essence of what it's all about. ■

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