

The Three Questions Victoria's Attorney-General Asked Her Son

Recently, Victoria's Attorney-General, Sonya Kilkenney, was in Parliament House launching a campaign about coercive control when she put her notes down and spoke a little more personally - about her own family. Kilkenney's sixteen-year-old son had come home and told her what some of his mates were doing to their girlfriends. Location tracking. Checking their phones to see who they were speaking to. And constantly checking in. "Where are you?" "Who are you with?" "What are you doing?"

The Attorney-General said she asked her son three questions.

Do you know that is wrong?

Do you know that is a red flag?

What do the girls think about this?

Of all the commentary I've read these past few weeks, those three questions are likely the most useful thing in any of it. Our newsfeeds are full of hideous stories where girls have been hurt or have died because boys and men couldn't answer them - or more likely, didn't pause long enough to ask.

Because they're trying to be "the" man rather than "a" man, too many boys think this is how they're *supposed* to be. They act jealous and pass it off as caring. Their possessiveness is disguised as devotion. If they are controlling, it is because they are "so crazy about you". Some think it makes them a good boyfriend.

Why? Because the Internet, the social media feeds, the ugly parts of the manosphere, and their peers tell them that's the script. And we - the parents - aren't teaching them otherwise. In fact, only around [three per cent](#) of Australian parents of 16 and 17 year old boys believe their son has come across the really ugly material online. But the majority have seen it - online and IRL. Here's a taste of what's circulating:

White nationalist Nick Fuentes posted ["Your body, my choice. Forever."](#) He picked up more than 90 million times, and the line was being used in schools within days, chanted at girls in class.

Andrew Tate, who faces criminal charges he denies, [posted this](#): "Fact. Women are sex workers. Their primary job now is to find one customer, called a boyfriend, to pay for their entire lives in return for p****. If they fail at this they do Only Fans or porn; the same game with more than one customer. If they're ugly they work a job (badly) and are miserable."

Australian teachers [report](#) students quoting Tate to refuse instructions from female staff while obeying identical instructions from male colleagues - in children as young as six.

It's vile. I hate sharing this, but too many parents are oblivious to what their kids are seeing, and saying - and it starts *in primary school!* (I also need to say the other half: nearly every day I meet boys who are nothing like this. They're horrified by it. They despise the culture but feel helpless in the face of it.).

So what do we do?

Underpinning all of this - for boys and girls - is the need to understand what healthy masculinity is.

Healthy males help the people around them feel safer and stronger.

Ask the right questions

Based on this, ask them, “When did you see a boy/man help someone feel safer or stronger today?” Listen closely to their answer. Ask them how it felt to watch that happen.

Then, reverse it. “When did you see a boy/man leave someone feeling smaller or weaker today?” Listen closely to those answers. Ask them how it felt to watch that happen.

Finally, ask your boy: “What kind of man do you want to be? The first one, or the second one?” And ask your girl, “What kind of men do you want to spend time with? The first one, or the second one?”

Call out red flags

You could just start a chat by mentioning you read this. Ask your child, “Does this happen with your friends? What do you think about it? You know it’s wrong?” Say the red flags out loud so they can name them: tracking her phone, demanding to know who she’s with, needing a reply immediately, having opinions about what she wears, and the worst of them, “if you loved me, you would...” Your daughter needs that list every bit as much as your son does. And again, this stuff often starts in primary school..

Be open about the scourge of pornography

Talk about pornography, and be specific. Average pornography exposure in Australia somewhere around age 11. That means 50% of kids see it before Grade 5!

Your child needs to hear from *you* that it teaches things that hurt people. Strangulation during sex has killed young women here. There is no safe way to do it, and they may never hear that from anyone else. It’s a hard, horrible conversation, but if you won’t say it, who will? (Note. Save that one for high-schoolers!)

Tell them the words they’ll need

Finally, for parents of boys: give them something to say when they spot unsafe, unhealthy behaviour. Most kids who go quiet when a mate says something degrading or misogynistic aren’t agreeing with him. They just have nothing ready to respond with and no appetite for the social cost of saying it. Rehearse it. “Mate, that’s not cool.” Even a flat “nah” as he walks away will do the job.

Let’s wrap up with the story we began with. Notice the bit that’s easy to miss in the Attorney-General’s experience with her boy? Her son came home and told her about it all. He was disclosing. He wanted his mum to know.

That’s what everything else depends on. Kids who stay in conversation with us get our guidance. The rest get somebody else’s.



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