

MAN-ifest Destiny: Teaching Our Sons About Healthy Manhood

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In this technological age, it is easy to get lost in noise, clutter, and machines, and lose face-to-face connections. What's important may become trivial, and what's trivial can seem very important. There are still limiting messages out there about what it means to be a "real man." There is a lot of wisdom among people in the world. Ruiz' "Four Agreements" and Richo's "The Five Things We Cannot Change" are valuable tools for personal growth and development. It is crucial for elders to pass down this wisdom to younger men and younger women. I will focus on men and boys in this article. Many of the young men I mentor are raising their own sons now. I have known some of these dads for over fifteen years — watching them grow from 16 to 30 and beyond. There are some important life skills and life-affirming messages that I believe boys can benefit from hearing from their dads and from other respected men in their lives. Here are a few of them:

1. Be proud of being a man. Strong, healthy men are whole people, with strength and dignity. They can be vulnerable when it is safe and appropriate. Love yourself and appreciate the miracle of your journey.
2. Trust yourself and your intuition. Get to know yourself, and believe in yourself.
3. Treat others with respect and kindness. Many people are hurting, and need all the support they can get. Respect those who are different in age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, and social class.
4. Find your purpose. Figure out your skills and talents, and learn ways to use them in the world. Navigate challenges, and find practical ways to earn a living.
5. Create a strong support network. Find trustworthy people, and surround yourself with those who care about you.
6. Talk when appropriate, and listen when appropriate. We all can learn from others' wisdom. Share your own ideas when it makes sense.
7. Avoid emotional drama, highly needy people, and those who would try to control you. Use discernment to figure out which battles are worth fighting, and which battles are not that important to win.
8. Find ways to relieve stress. Make exercising, stretching and body work a priority. Find experiences that can work to create peace and calm in your life.
9. Practice gratitude for what you have been given. Realize that many others lack some of advantages you have had.
10. Allow yourself to feel all of your emotions in safe places. Be aware of your feelings, but don't always let your feelings dictate your actions.
11. Forgive others who have hurt you, and forgive yourself for past mistakes. You can forgive without confronting or reconciling with others. That is your choice. Forgiveness does not mean others' actions were justified. And you are free to leave people if you choose to do so.
12. Grieve your losses. Know that everything changes and ends. Allow yourself space and time to grieve.

13. Congratulate yourself on your successes and accomplishments. Appreciate the gifts you have been given. See that “failure” and “mistakes” are simply learning opportunities for your own growth and development.
14. Plan, but be open to new ideas. Flexible planning means relaxing into your destiny. Sometimes, there is something in store for you which is better than you ever thought possible.
15. Try not to take things personally. Some people project their own issues, needs and self-hatred onto others.
16. Find your passion, do your best, and be generous with your time and talents. Figure out what you can do something about what is not yours to do. Do what you can, where you can, when you can.
17. Live in the moment as much as possible. Be mindful of what you are doing and what is going on around you.
18. Blend physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of your life into a belief system that works for you. Stay positive as much as you can.
19. Be honest with yourself and others. Don’t try to impress anyone or “win them over.”
20. Watch out for addictive habits, and try to avoid substances and behaviors that are addicting.
21. Let go of the need to “be right” about everything. Our assumptions are frequently incorrect.
22. Don’t let others label or define you. You are too complex for any limited definitions.
23. Ask for help when you need it. Don’t be afraid to benefit from the guidance and wisdom of others. Follow their ideas if you believe it will work for you.
24. Know that you can bounce back from difficult situations, and start over. We are resilient, stronger than we think.
25. Take care of the earth, the air, the environment. Use them with care and respect. There are many more, so please add on to the list.

Dr. Michael Obsatz is Professor Emeritus from Macalester College where he taught education and sociology courses for 40 years. He is an author, film-maker, workshop leader, and was in the “Men’s Survival Resource Guide” written in Minneapolis in the 1970’s. His websites are www.angeresouces.com, www.mentorsmatter.us, and www.mirrormanfilms.org

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