



Tenderness as a Horizon

**A Toolbox to
Promote**

**HEALTHY AND DIVERSE
MASCULINITIES**

**with Boys and Young
Men in Mesoamerica**







Tenderness as Horizon: A Toolbox for the Promotion of Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Boys and Youth in Mesoamerica

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***"Men aren't built in silence,
but in words, in work, in
action, in reflection."***

Paulo Freire



● Introduction.

Tenderness as a Horizon, A Toolbox for the Promotion of Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Children and the Youth in Mesoamerica, is an invitation for educational and creative ways for boys and young men to be capable of overcoming gender mandates imposed by the patriarchal order, building new ways of being men that embrace justice, share responsibility, love, and collective healing. As its name suggests, tenderness is the horizon we seek to move toward in a diverse and reflective manner.

In this practical and theoretical Toolbox, you will be able to find information and key concepts, methodological proposals, activities, and exercises to develop with your organization, collective, friends, neighbors, family, and/or community. So, from diverse geographies, you can build healthy masculinities on the path of promoting tenderness and gender justice in all the spaces and territories you inhabit. So that together we can build community.

This document emerges from the collaborative work with partner organizations of Global Fund for Children (GFC) as part of the initiative to promote healthy masculinities for gender justice, *“One goal, many voices”*, also known as the *HEEL Initiative*. The Mayan word heel means transformation and change, values that GFC and their partners strive to put into practice day by day to build different worlds where gender justice, collective care, and active listening are fostered.

We hope you enjoy it and, above all, that you can put into practice the lessons, methodologies, and shared reflections by committed grassroots organizations who, through art, music, the right to joy, and collective creativity, work tirelessly for the well-being and holistic development of their families and community.

To all of them, thank you for being a light of hope. We love and admire you deeply.



● Our Journey: HEEL Initiative for the promotion of healthy masculinities.

For over 25 years, Global Fund for Children (GFC) has been committed to supporting grassroots and community-based organizations that work with children and youth around the world. Our work addresses a wide range of critical issues, including educational support, gender justice, youth leadership, the creation of safe and nurturing environments, climate resilience, and solidarity in times of crisis.

Our support model is grounded in three core pillars:

1. **Flexible, multi-year, trust-based funding** — we support long-term community transformation processes, not one-off projects.
2. **Organizational capacity strengthening** — using participatory tools and methods tailored to the needs and context of each partner.
3. **Promotion of collaborative networks** — to foster exchange, mutual learning, and the creation of communities of change and social development.

The organizations we fund are often youth-led and known for their bold, innovative approaches to creating sustainable social transformation. Their work focuses on the defense and promotion of rights, leadership, agency, diversity, and the dignity of children and youth. From the beginning, GFC has prioritized strengthening community leadership and building local and regional support networks. These networks facilitate knowledge-sharing, collective advocacy, and movement-building aimed at transforming society for the well-being of future generations.



In 2015, GFC launched a strategic partnership with The Summit Foundation to support educational and community-based initiatives in Mexico and Central America. This collaboration focuses on encouraging boys and young men to question and change patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, while promoting the empowerment of girls and young women and fostering more equitable and healthy gender relations.

As part of these efforts—and with the generous support of The Summit Foundation and The Kendeda Fund—we launched the HEEL Initiative in 2021. This initiative supports youth organizations across the Mesoamerican region and is guided by four core objectives:

1. **Empower youth groups to promote healthy masculinities**, advance gender justice, and build the advocacy skills of children and young people, positioning them as community leaders in promoting positive masculinities.
2. **Create safe spaces** where children and youth can critically examine stereotypes, stigmas, social norms, and legal structures that reinforce gender inequality.
3. **Promote storytelling** as a powerful tool to spark dialogue, challenge dominant narratives around masculinity, and amplify the voices and contributions of children and youth in transforming narratives for gender justice.
4. **Strengthen networks for advocacy** and learning among organizations and youth movements dedicated to fostering healthy masculinities throughout Mesoamerica.

The **HEEL Initiative** is made up of the following organizations:

Academia de Liderazgo Social: A youth-led organization in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, that empowers children and young people to take on leadership roles in their communities and engage in political and social issues.



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Asociación SERniña: A youth-led organization in Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, that promotes gender equality and empowers children and young people to reach their full potential.



KNOW MORE



Red de Jóvenes Artistas por la Justicia Social (JAXJS):

A civic participation space for young people from different regions of Guatemala, using art as a tool for advocacy, empowerment, and holistic development.



KNOW MORE

Warriors Zulu Nation: A youth-led organization in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, that uses urban arts to engage and empower young people in neighborhoods with significant gang presence, encouraging them to practice various forms of art.



KNOW MORE

Red de Masculinidades por la Igualdad de Género (REDMAS):

A platform for professionals and diverse collectives to share experiences and knowledge on promoting the work of positive and healthy masculinities.



KNOW MORE

FormArte: A man and women youth-led organization working to prevent domestic and gender-based violence through artistic activities and popular education processes in various communities.

Zankistas Fuego y Son: An artist-led organization using social art in community processes, with an emphasis on promoting children's rights and gender justice.



KNOW MORE

OYE: Based in El Progreso, Honduras, this organization promotes workshops and training sessions in communities and educational centers on topics such as Comprehensive Sexual Education, gender, and masculinities.



KNOW MORE

Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción con Pueblos Migrantes:

Located in Chiapas, Mexico, this organization supports individuals and communities linked to migration through inclusive participatory community projects that ethnic, cultural, political, religious, and sexual diversity.



KNOW MORE

Over the past three years, the partner organizations of the HEEL Initiative have carried out numerous activities in support of gender justice, including: peacebuilding and gender justice camps for young community leaders, such as the "Revedecer" camp by **Academia de Liderazgo Social** in Honduras; community art festivals like "Sin Fronteras," hosted by **Warriors Zulu Nation**; artistic practices like dance



and theater productions aimed at promoting gender equity, led by **Zankistas Fuego y Son**; mobile libraries promoting reading, coordinated by the **FormArte** collective; community workshops for children and youth; media campaigns challenging gender stereotypes, such as the “Yo me rifo” initiative led by **REDMAS**; story-writing projects; songs advocating for gender justice and collective care; local, national, and regional gatherings, such as the National Youth Meeting in Guatemala, organized by **JAXJS**, which brought together over 60 young people; manuals; podcasts; magazines; transformative programs like the “Laboratorio de Masculinidades” by **Asociación SerNiña**; safe spaces for young men, such as the “Círculos del Buen Trato” by **OYE** in Honduras; and training schools, such as the School of Masculinities by **Voces Mesoamericanas**, among many others.

These collective efforts have impacted over 50,000 children and young people, helping them to challenge traditional gender roles, recognize normalized privileges and unequal power dynamics between men, women, and other identities, and develop a deeper understanding of caregiving work and its importance. The initiatives have also contributed to the prevention of teenage pregnancies, encouraged men to express emotions more openly, and fostered the development of positive relationships among men. Moreover, these interventions have strengthened the commitment of children and youth to community work aimed at addressing injustices related to gender, racism, colonialism, and patriarchal violence.

The outcomes of GFC’s initiatives highlight the importance of engaging boys and young men in challenging traditional gender roles, which helps prevent sexist attitudes and reduce various forms of violence. Undoubtedly, starting these reflections at an early age on gender inequalities and the construction of healthy and diverse masculinities fosters sustainable change, promoting empowerment, dignity, and access to rights for children and youth so they can fully develop their potential.

The efforts of GFC’s partner organizations in the *HEEL* Initiative go far beyond what we can list here, they involve the lives, work, and emotions of thousands of young people committed to social change, gender justice, and the construction of new possible worlds. Through art, activism, creativity, psycho-emotional support, and the promotion of safe spaces, these organizations and young leaders remind us that change is already underway. That gender justice is possible and urgent.

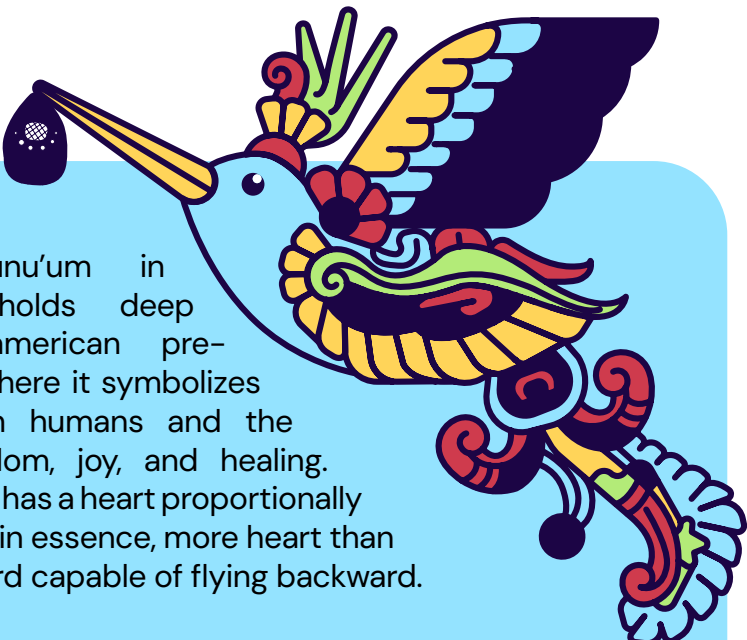
We invite you to visit GFC’s website to learn more about their activities and, whenever possible, to replicate them in your community.



➔ <https://globalfundforchildren.org/>



● We present Yutsil, the hummingbird, whose name means kindness in Tsotsil..



The hummingbird—ts'unu'um in the Maya language—holds deep significance in Mesoamerican pre-Hispanic cosmogonies, where it symbolizes communication between humans and the gods. It embodies wisdom, joy, and healing. Notably, the hummingbird has a heart proportionally larger than its body—it is, in essence, more heart than body. It is also the only bird capable of flying backward.

For us, leading with the heart means embracing new ways of being in the world, fostering masculinities rooted in tenderness rather than violence. Like the hummingbird flying backward, we believe in the importance of self-reflection—returning to our personal stories and the collective histories of our communities and territories. This backward flight represents a journey of recognition and understanding, helping us uncover the roots of our behaviors, our pain, and our joy—so that we may heal and break the cycles of violence.

As you may notice, Yutsil carries a drop of water falling from its beak. Here we share a Guarani tale, shared by the Guatemalan organization SERNiña, to understand why:



The Hummingbird and the Fire – A Guaraní Tale.

One day in the jungle, there was a huge fire. All the animals fled in terror to save their lives. Suddenly, a jaguar saw a hummingbird flyby in the opposite direction, heading towards the fire with drops of water in its beak. The jaguar watched the hummingbird fly back and forth multiple times, puzzled by his actions, and decided to ask him:

– What are you doing, hummingbird?

– I'm going to the lake – responded the small bird – I'm taking water with my beak to carry to the fire and put it out.

The jaguar smiled and said:

– Are you crazy? Do you really think you can put it out by yourself, being so small?

To which the hummingbird replied:

– I know I can't put it out by myself, but this jungle is my home; it feeds me, shelters me, my family, and my friends. I am grateful to the jungle, and that's why I help it grow by pollinating its flowers. I am a part of it, and it is a part of me. I know I can't stop the fire alone, but I must do my part.

After speaking, the hummingbird left towards the lake for more water.

The jaguar and the other animals who had overheard the conversation were deeply moved. They decided to do their part, taking water in their snouts to try and put the fire out.

The spirits of the jungle also heard the hummingbird's words. Moved by what they heard, they asked the gods to send a pouring rain. The gods answered their call, extinguishing every last flame of the fire.



Yutsil knows the hummingbird from the tale, and seeks to inspire everyone who engages with this Toolbox to become aware and help extinguish the fire of violence and patriarchal masculinities. Yutsil knows well that everyday efforts, no matter how small they may seem, contribute to building new possible worlds and fostering community. **He will guide you along the way of this document with his drop of water, A drop that is part of tenderness as our horizon.**



● How did we build this Toolbox?

Tenderness as a Horizon: A Toolbox for Promoting Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Children and Youth in Mesoamerica was developed not only through theoretical research, but more importantly through collaborative, participatory research with Mesoamerican organizations that have spent years working with children and young people. This work is the result of a co-creative process rooted in learning and shaped by a diversity of ideas and perspectives.

The GFC partner organizations within the HEEL Initiative share with us their multiple perspectives on gender, masculinities, human rights, education, arts, health, sexuality, and politics, allowing to intertwine an intersectional set of tools to address healthy and diverse masculinities with children and young people across different geographies, contexts and communities. After conducting an in-depth theoretical review of healthy masculinities, we went on the task to visit GFC's partner organizations in their communities. To observe and participate in various activities that pose new approaches to gender discussions with children and young people.

We began by systematizing each organization's journey, understanding their objectives and values, to highlight their activist, artistic, political, and social work in the communities where they work. Witnessing their efforts firsthand enabled members of these organizations to appreciate their journey and contributions. Furthermore, this approach provided a deeper understanding of their short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals in promoting healthy masculinities.

We asked questions like 'What does healthy masculinity mean to you?' to gain an initial understanding of the topic, which later allowed us to explore the various ways it is addressed within the communities they serve. Once we had a clearer understanding of each organization's broader work, we facilitated a series of group activities aimed at listening to participants' feelings and perspectives, always fostering an atmosphere of playfulness, active listening, and respect.



For most organizations, GFC conducted two-day workshop sessions where each member had the opportunity to express themselves through drawing, play, writing, and laughter. This collaborative process helped us develop both theoretical and practical approaches for creating the tools outlined below.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed their ideas, effort, and passion to the development of this Toolbox. This collective endeavor transcends geographical boundaries, sharing knowledge to create new possibilities grounded in radical tenderness, honesty, critical thinking, play, and art.



● Methodological recommendations..

In this Toolbox, you will find both theoretical and practical approaches to help build healthy masculinities within your organization, family, and social circles, but most importantly, with the children and youth in your community. Addressing these topics from an early age helps build a culture that respects diversity and honors emotions as tools for overcoming violence.

We share a variety of reflections and activities that can be done in a group and some that can also be done individually. However, **we strongly recommend that these practices take place collectively**, as this enriches discussions and encourages the creation of alternatives for a better world.

While most activities can be facilitated by anyone with basic group management skills, some exercises may provoke discomfort or trigger difficult emotions in participants. Certain discussions may bring up intense emotions or create moments of tension. Therefore, we recommend having support from organizations and individuals experienced in gender issues, psycho-emotional support, and conflict resolution.



If you choose to be the facilitator of the various activities presented in this Toolbox, here are some recommendations to make the work process smoother and more effective:

- Strive to create a space of respect, openness, tenderness, trust, and honesty.
- The physical space for the activities should be calm, free from external distractions, and ideally open and spacious to accommodate movement-based activities comfortably
- We recommend offering some food and non-alcoholic refreshments for each session, as this helps create a healthy social atmosphere.
- Have all the necessary materials ready for each exercise. The activities in this Toolbox do not require many supplies, and in many cases recycled materials can be used.



- At the beginning of each session, collectively establish group agreements. Here are some that may be useful: respect for the group, active listening, punctuality, freedom of thought, voluntary participation, empathy, commitment to confidentiality, and attendance.
- When you begin working with a group, it will be important to explain the duration of each session and its objectives. This Toolbox includes many moments related to the three Rs: Recognize, Relate, and Revolutionize, which makes it suitable as a long-term training program carried out in multiple weekly sessions in the form of workshops (we recommend that each session should not exceed three hours per day). However, you can also focus on specific activities and work on them in fewer sessions; feel free to take what you find necessary from this Toolbox, adapt it, and reshape it for your context.
- Read the entire document to get a first understanding of the themes of masculinity, gender, patriarchy, violence, etc. We encourage you to research each topic further to have a solid foundation in case the group you work with has more questions.
- Reflect on each point, linking it to your experiences of masculinity, sexuality, fatherhood, gender, and violence; when we facilitate a space, we too are changed and are always in a process of continuous transformation. In this space, you will also learn collectively.
- Sensitivity and receptivity will be essential to perceive if any participant requires specific attention and referral to a professional guidance service. We encourage you to always listen actively to all participants and maintain calm and openness in difficult moments.
- Some organizations from the *HEEL Initiative* recommend that the facilitator for some topics on masculinities preferably be a man (in some activities, we point this out specifically). However, we believe that masculinities should be a topic anyone can address, regardless of gender and identity. In fact, we are confident that healthy masculinities are developed through collective and intersectional efforts.

We hope this Toolbox proves to be valuable to you and that you feel inspired to share it with others. Remember, these tools are the product of collective work and are continually evolving. We encourage you to adapt and revise them as needed to better suit the children and youth in your community and context.



● What do we understand by healthy and diverse masculinities?

We talk about masculinities in the plural because we recognize that all men, boys, young people, and adults are different and diverse. There is no single way of being a man in the world; territory, social class, skin color, sexual orientation and identity, age, culture, and personal history imply different ways of being and inhabiting the world.

Healthy and diverse masculinities are, by nature, works in progress. They represent ways of being men that reject domination and patriarchal violence, challenge inequality, racism, and classism, and oppose all forms of exclusion and discrimination. These masculinities acknowledge the privileges that come with being a man in society, while also recognizing the social expectations surrounding sex, gender, sexual orientation, and sexual identity—expectations that are often imposed and can cause discomfort.

Healthy and diverse masculinities go through the reflection and construction of identities based on freedom, love, equity, and tenderness, to build healthy relationships, deconstruct gender roles, embrace collective care work, practice responsible and active fatherhood, heal, and break the cycles of violence.





● How can we build healthy and diverse masculinities in our communities with children and youth? The 3 R's model.

Over more than 10 years of continuous work promoting healthy masculinities for gender justice in the Mesoamerican region, GFC has developed the 3 R's model. This approach goes beyond the belief that promoting healthy masculinities is solely about workshops or activities focused on violence prevention or sexual and reproductive rights. Instead, it is viewed as a profound and complex process of transformation that fosters both individual and community well-being.

Through the 3 R's model, we aim to promote the development of healthy and diverse masculinities from an early age. Children and youth are not only our future—they are our present. We start by recognizing them as individuals with memories, desires, pain, and hopes, then create spaces for relationship and interaction that open pathways for transformation. The goal is to politicize participants' personal experiences, turning them into catalysts for social change and community well-being. In this sense, addressing these topics from the start of our lives is crucial for building societies that are just and free from patriarchal violence.

The 3 R's model broadly encompasses three stages: Recognizing ourselves, Relating to others, and Revolutionizing ourselves and our communities. Below, we outline our understanding of each of these stages:



(Re)cognizing ourselves: Reclaiming our personal histories and experiences means recognizing the violences we have endured and their impacts, as well as the violences we have perpetrated. It also involves distancing ourselves from the cultural constructs that shape our understanding of masculinity and reclaiming our ability to express and process emotions. All emotions are valid, and we can express them in healthy ways without fear of judgment: we can cry, dance, embrace one another, make eye contact with other men, and experience fear and doubt. When we allow ourselves to do this in the presence of other men, finding their support and understanding, our world begins to change.



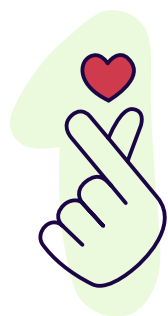
(Re)lating to one another: Once we recognize ourselves, we critically engage with our social, economic, historical, and political environments to uncover the power structures and systems of domination that sustain the patriarchal order. This involves analyzing cultural products to identify the norms, values, gender roles, and stereotypes that exclude, discriminate, and perpetuate inequality and suffering. It means understanding our community within its specific context and territory. Ultimately, it is about collectively challenging patriarchal masculinities and exposing their absurdity and violence.



(Re)volutionizing ourselves and our communities: By combining self-recognition with the relationships we build in our contexts, we collectively create spaces for imagination to construct less violent and more equitable realities. This involves transforming our communities and society through political action, understood as promoting gender justice through art, social organization, and fostering new ways of relating within our communities. It requires engaging families, friends, authorities, and governments. It is the moment to ask, 'What can we do?'—and to organize ourselves to change our reality, promoting respect, justice, equity, and radical tenderness in all the spaces we occupy.

Based on this model, we built the Toolbox for the Promotion of Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Children and Youth in Mesoamerica, Tenderness as a Horizon, below, you will find various reflections, concepts, and activities designed to work through each stage of the 3 R's model, so that you can bring these practices and teachings into your life and environment.

Let's begin!



(Re)cognizing Ourselves.

The First Step in Building Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Children and Youth in Mesoamerica.

To foster healthy masculinities, the first step is to strengthen the involvement of boys and young men in these discussions. This can be achieved by ensuring that they feel personally addressed and invited into the conversation so that they perceive these reflections and activities as enriching for their lives and relationships. Recovering their life stories and personal experiences to identify the impacts of violence, both experienced and perpetrated, can encourage critical thinking and reflections that help them distance themselves from the social and cultural constructs in which they were raised. This process is known as “biographical ruptures” (Parrini, 2020).

To facilitate this initial engagement, it is essential to clearly define what we mean by patriarchal masculinities and how they affect us, as well as the gender roles and stereotypes imposed in our societies that contribute to different forms of violence.



What is Patriarchal Masculinity and How Does It Affect Us?

Patriarchal masculinity is the hegemonic or dominant model of what it means to be a man in our society. It involves practices, imaginaries, and ideas that, when followed, allow men to access certain privileges and establish hierarchies. In general, patriarchal masculinity is a concept that associates “being a man” with control, power, isolation, and violence.

This type of masculinity is constructed within multiple systems of oppression: patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and adult-centrism. Each of these systems enforces specific forms of violence and hierarchy; for example, **patriarchy** implies a hierarchy where young and heterosexual men hold dominance over all other people in society. This often leads to machismo, sexual exploitation, gendered division of labor, misogyny, and LGBTQIA+ discrimination; **capitalism** creates a hierarchy where owners of the means of production hold power over the working-class, resulting in labor exploitation, classism, and economic discrimination; **colonialism** establishes a hierarchy in which people from the Global North are positioned above those from the Global South. This leads to various forms of racial discrimination based on ethnicity and skin color, as well as the exploitation of labor, dispossession of land, and extraction of resources; **adult-centrism** upholds a system where adults hold more rights and decision-making power over children and youth, often minimizing their voices and experiences.

These hierarchies do not exist in isolation, they **intersect and reinforce each other**, creating further **exclusions, inequalities, and violence**.

A practical and simple understanding of patriarchal masculinity in three different ways:

1. Patriarchal masculinity is an intersubjective expression and experience. It acts as **“a pair of lenses”** placed on us from birth, shaping how we relate to others, our history, and ourselves. It includes the ideas, norms, practices, values, and behaviors that define our identity as men, influencing our patterns of interaction and our roles within families and communities.
2. Patriarchal masculinity is also a gendered system of domination. It acts as **“a prison”** where conforming to dominant, pre-established notions of manhood grants privileges, while failing to adhere to these ‘norms’ results in sanctions and social exclusion. This masculinity is a



cage built from beliefs passed down by parents, families, the media, peers, women, and other members of society. These influences pressure men to be self-sufficient, heterosexual providers, to 'control' their emotions, to reject anything deemed 'feminine,' and to resolve conflicts through aggression and competition (Heilman, et al., 2017).

1. Additionally, patriarchal masculinity is **"a mask"**, as its negative impacts extend beyond women and girls. The 'trap' of patriarchal masculinity lies in promoting an unattainable ideal of the 'perfect man,' one that is impossible to achieve.



Who among us has never felt the urge to cry? Who has never had doubts? Who has never needed the help of others?

By failing to meet the demands of patriarchal masculinity, we choose to hide and imprison ourselves. We pretend to conform to norms that dehumanize us and disconnect us from our emotional selves.

Thus, a patriarchal model of masculinity, rooted in violence and domination, perpetuates and exacerbates issues such as alcoholism, depression, risky sexual behaviors, bullying, unwanted pregnancies, sexual harassment and abuse, and aggressive or disrespectful relationships, among others. All of this negatively affects society as a whole, including boys and young men.



Gender roles and stereotypes in childhood.

Gender roles and stereotypes are deeply ingrained cultural patterns passed down from generation to generation. From birth, children are socialized within the family, school, community, media, cultural products, and language, constantly reinforcing societal expectations of what men and women should be and do to gain social recognition and value. These norms distinguish between 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviors (INMUJERES, 2017).

Although gender roles have evolved over time, prejudices and stereotypes based on gender still persist. A gender stereotype becomes harmful when it limits individuals' ability to develop, access their rights, or make decisions about their lives.

For example, boys are often assigned a "masculine role," which carries expectations such as refraining from crying, being passionate about sports and cars, exhibiting physical strength, and engaging in fights (Connell, 2020). In contrast, girls are assigned a "feminine role," which includes being delicate, romantic, and nurturing. Today, social media is saturated with concepts and discourses like "high-value men and women," which serve only to reinforce these traditional gender roles and stereotypes in a more modern and widely disseminated manner, often targeting children and young people.

A major issue with these roles and stereotypes is that, beyond creating artificial distinctions between genders and setting unrealistic ideals, they also reflect an adult-centric perspective. Adults often impose decisions from a top-down approach, disregarding the perspectives of girls, boys, non-binary children, and young people. These actions rarely involve listening to their opinions or fostering their critical thinking skills.



Do you remember any role that was imposed on you during your childhood? How could we overcome this division and these stereotypes from an increasingly early age?



Basic concepts: sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity
Why is it important to identify and differentiate them from an early age to build healthy masculinities?

Gender roles and stereotypes often include specific beliefs and biases about sexuality that are imposed from a young age. These misconceptions can lead to misinformation, which in turn may fuel discrimination and various forms of violence. Understanding and distinguishing between these concepts is crucial for the development of healthy identities, fostering respect for others, and allowing individuals to love themselves and express affection freely.

The terms “sex” and “gender” are not interchangeable, just as “orientation” is distinct from “identity.” Below, we outline some general categories to clarify these differences.

Sexuality.

It is a central aspect of all human beings that is present throughout their lives. It encompasses everything from reproduction, identity, gender roles, eroticism, pleasure, feelings, social and sexual relationships, sexual orientation, and gender expression. It can be experienced both physically and psychologically through behaviors, practices, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and values. It is influenced by physical and biological factors, but also by political, social, cultural, religious, and spiritual aspects. Each society establishes specific norms about sexuality, and these norms are learned from childhood (WHO, 2006; Voces Mesoamericanas, 2024; JAXJS, 2024; REDMAS, n/d).

Sex.

Sex refers to the biological and physical characteristics that define an individual as male, female, or intersex. These characteristics are shaped by several dimensions, including chromosomal, genetic, gonadal, hormonal, internal pelvic sexual organs, and external genitalia. Intersex individuals are those born with chromosomal or genital traits that do not align with typical definitions of male or female bodies.



Gender.

It is a social, political, and cultural construct that involves the assignment of specific roles, customs, and life expectations, which are reproduced in all spheres of life; for example, male or female gender roles. These roles encompass behaviors, activities, and attributes associated with women and men, and they change over time and in different political, social, and cultural contexts. Gender is a social construct that is shaped by both biological factors (sex) and social and psychological influences. Each individual internalizes a unique combination of these elements to form their own gender identity. Today, common gender identities include male, female, and non-binary. Transgender people have a gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. In contrast, individuals whose gender identity matches their biological sex are referred to as cisgender.

Gender Identity.

Gender identity is an individual's personal sense of their gender, shaped by cultural, political, and social influences. It may or may not align with the gender and sexual roles assigned at birth.

Children typically begin to identify with a specific gender around the ages of two to three, and this identity continues to evolve alongside their physical, intellectual, and social development, influenced by their cultural and societal context. Gender identity can change over time, influenced by various social, psychological, and cultural factors, at any age. As a result, there is a wide diversity of gender identities.



***What is your
gender identity
at this moment?***

Sexual Orientation.

Sexual orientation refers to an individual's emotional, romantic, and/or erotic attraction to others. For example, heterosexuality is the attraction to people of the opposite sex, homosexuality is the attraction to people of the same sex, bisexuality involves attraction to both sexes, and pansexuality is attraction to people regardless of their sex or gender. It's important to note that sexual orientation may not always align with sexual behavior—an individual may feel a particular attraction without necessarily acting on it.



Gender Expression.

It refers to the way we present ourselves to the world, including how we express cultural and symbolic aspects through our appearance, such as the way we dress, style our hair, speak, and behave. Based on our gender expression, others may perceive us as women, men, androgynous, or in other ways.

Identities and the Queer Movement.

Queer is both a theoretical framework and a political movement that challenges traditional definitions of sexuality and opposes cisheteropatriarchy—the patriarchal system that upholds the perceived superiority of cisgender and heterosexual people. The movement advocates for the right of all individuals to embrace a diverse gender identity, free from societal expectations and traditional norms.

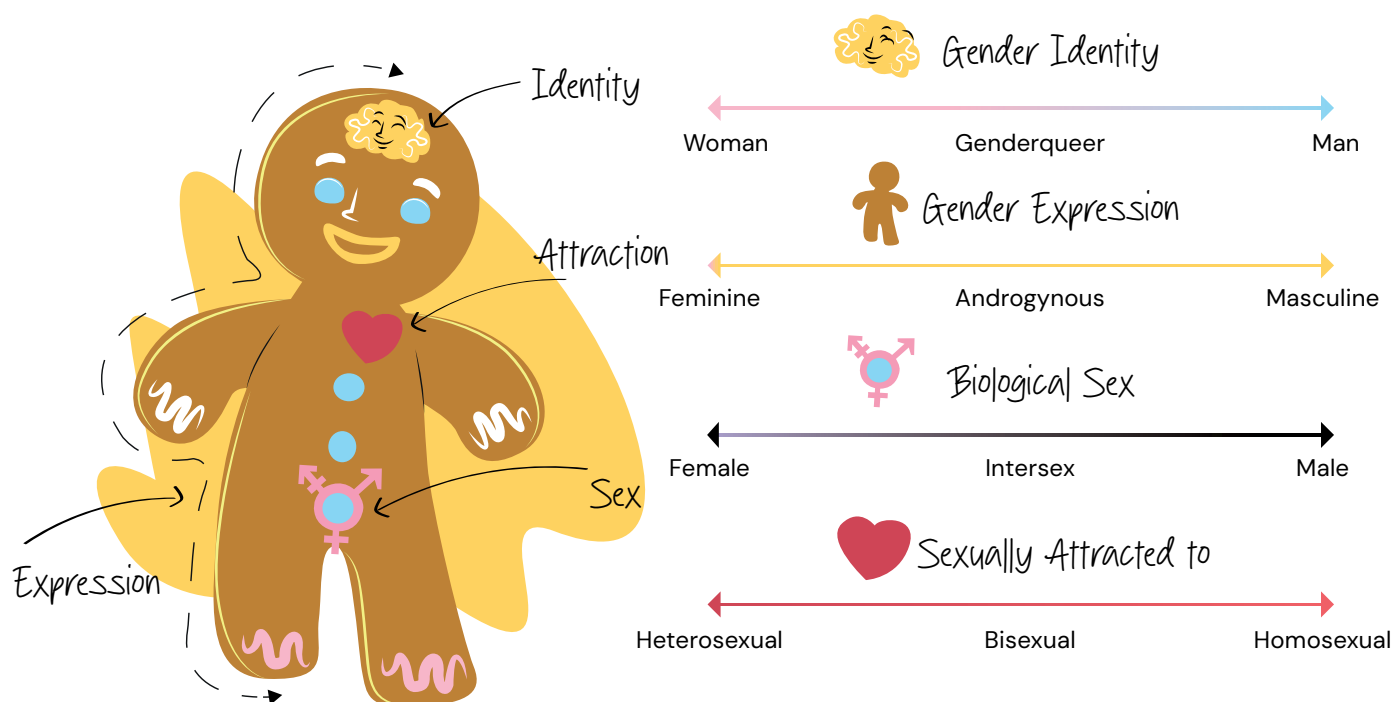
Queer individuals may have a gender identity and/or gender expression that differs from the dominant social norms associated with their assigned sex at birth and may identify as beyond traditional gender categories.



Gingerbread Cookie and Gender (Genderbread Person).

We share with you this educational tool created by Sam Killermann (2011), which makes it easier and friendly to understand aspects of human sexuality.

The gingerbread person



➔ [KNOW MORE](#)



Ideas and activity to work with children and youth in this first moment: towards **Recognizing ourselves.**

Questions like Who taught you how to be a man? are extremely powerful in reminding us that masculinity is not an “essence” or something we are born with, but a social, political, and cultural construct that changes over time. By understanding that masculinity is learned, participants remember that it is possible to unlearn it, and that they themselves have already made changes or adjustments in relation to the masculinity exercised by their fathers or grandfathers. They have already begun to create cracks in patriarchal masculinity.

At the same time, by identifying the “milestones” or significant moments that shaped their male identity, participants realize that many teachings were marked by violence and emotional distance. Learning to be a man is a painful process that does not allow them to be free and authentic, and that many times, they have unconsciously reproduced these teachings. In this first moment, it is crucial to work on expanding and complicating the emotional range of the participants. Helping them understand that there are no “good” or “bad” emotions, but that how we express or process them is what can cause positive or negative impacts in our lives.

(Re) learning that men can feel fear, uncertainty, and pain without being judged also contributes to the creation of intimate and safe spaces. Thus, the first step is to get to know ourselves better and expand our range of interactions and emotions, allowing ourselves to try other ways of acting, being, and feeling without the fear of having our masculinity or our “worth” as men questioned.



And for you... Who taught you what it means to be a man?








ACTIVIDAD 1:

M.A.T.E.A.¹

The goal of this exercise is to help us become more aware of the wide range of emotions we can experience in a short period, reinforcing that it's completely natural for our moods to shift in response to different circumstances. In many patriarchal models of masculinity, men are often conditioned to suppress certain emotions—particularly tenderness, fear, and sadness—thereby restricting their emotional expression. This activity invites all participants to tune into their emotions, reflect on how they feel throughout the day, and affirm that all emotions are valid, regardless of gender.

Instructions:

- 1 The facilitator will provide each participant with a blank sheet of paper and a pen.
- 2 Each participant will divide the sheet into five columns. At the top of each column, they will write the following emotions:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
				
Fear	Joy	Sadness	Anger	Love

- 3 In each column, participants will answer the following questions:



***When was the last time I felt this emotion?
What situation triggered this emotion?***

- 4 Beneath the chart, participants will write which of the five listed emotions is most present in their hearts at the moment of completing the activity.
- 5 At the end of the activity, participants may choose to share their responses voluntarily.
- 6 The facilitator will emphasize that all emotions are valid and that they naturally shift over time. Recognizing and naming our emotions is an important first step toward healing and creating new pathways for a life free from violence.

¹Named as an acronym in Spanish for fear (miedo), joy (alegría), sadness (tristeza), anger (enojo), and love (amor)



ACTIVITY 2:

Traditional Games to Challenge Patriarchy.

In collaboration with the organization FormArte, we present a playful activity designed to question and reflect on gender stereotypes. FormArte values the use of games as a way to establish genuine connections with the children and youth in their community. They emphasize the importance of play in building healthy masculinities among children and youth in Mesoamerica through the transformation of popular games: the same games many of us played at some point in our lives, such as hopscotch, marbles, spinning tops, treasure hunts, cat and mouse, blind man's bluff, etc. However, this time, these games are connected to themes of human rights, gender perspectives, tenderness, and empathy.

We invite you to reflect: What was your favorite childhood game? Once you have it in mind, try transforming the game as a way to explore the theme of healthy masculinities. How could a game change the perspective on what it means to "be a man"? Here are some tips shared by FormArte: "We firmly believe that playing is also learning." Playful activities turn learning into a rewarding and emotional experience because they develop skills and competencies through active and emotional participation. Through play, people can learn about the world around them with sensory and motor experiences, helping to construct and deconstruct concepts (Colectivo Juvenil Somos Diferentes, 2018).

To carry out these activities, a dedicated physical space is needed—such as community playrooms—where children can enjoy their right to recreation and holistic development. We encourage you to begin by organizing within your community to create safe, welcoming spaces where children and young people can play freely and access materials for regular and unrestricted use. This could be a local park, a quiet street, or even a newly designated area. You can also advocate to your local government for the creation and support of safe public spaces designed specifically for children and youth.



How Can We Introduce the Construction of Healthy Masculinities into Holistic Growth Through Play?

Our games should be guided by a social and political intention to challenge and transform the gender order, which is a sociocultural construct and therefore open to change. This transformation involves questioning and breaking down traditional male and female roles, as well as unlearning sexist and violent behaviors.

To achieve this, it is essential to involve children in our activities from the outset in an inclusive and equitable way. With this approach in mind, we offer an example of a traditional game that has been adapted to spark reflection and discussion around these important themes.

Masculinities Hopscotch.

- 1 Using chalk, draw 10 numbered squares on the ground, either in the shape of an airplane or a traditional hopscotch pattern. Use different colors for each square to make it more vibrant and engaging.
- 2 Assign a stereotype or prejudice related to patriarchal masculinity to each numbered square. Here are examples of themes that can be addressed with different age groups:

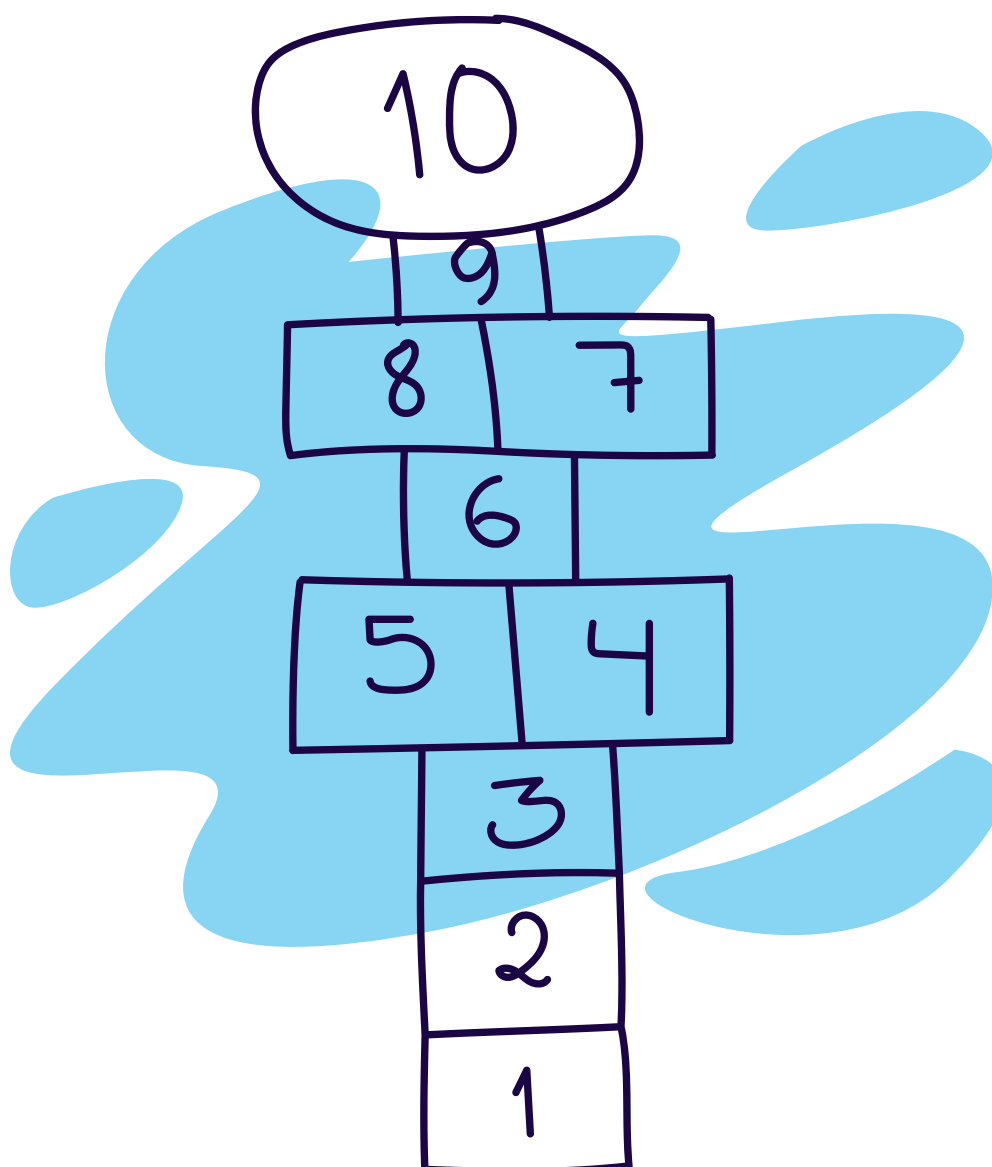
Stereotypes to address with teenagers and young adults:

- Men don't cry.
- Men are always brave.
- Being a man means being physically and emotionally strong.
- Being a man means being heterosexual.
- Men always want to have sex, at any time and in any situation.
- A man must be the provider for the household and family.
- Having masculine energy means being a leader, rational, independent, and competitive.
- Having feminine energy means being intuitive, nurturing, and delicate.
- A "manly" man must be tall, muscular, and have facial hair.
- Men don't know how to take care of a baby.



Stereotypes to address with children aged 7 to 12:

- Boys don't cry.
- Being strong means never showing weakness.
- Boys don't play with dolls.
- Blue is for boys, and pink is for girls.
- Household chores are for women.
- Boys must be tough and aggressive.
- Sports like soccer are for boys, and dancing is for girls.
- Men must work, and women must stay home.
- Being a man means never showing fear.
- Men can't be affectionate.





- 3 All participants should line up behind the first number, ready to play.
- 4 Each participant will throw a flat object (like a stone, bottle cap, or cork) onto the squares in numerical order. The square where the object lands is considered “home” and should not be stepped on during the game.
- 5 The player must hop through the squares, using one foot for single squares and both feet for double squares. The goal is to move through the squares, navigate the circuit, and return to the starting position.
- 6 If a player loses their balance, steps on a line between squares, or if the object lands outside a square, they forfeit their turn. The player must then answer a question related to the number where the object landed:



“Why is this phrase a stereotype or prejudice tied to patriarchal masculinity, and how can we challenge or overcome it?”

- 7 The objective is for as many participants as possible to reflect on and analyze one or more of the stereotypes related to patriarchal masculinity, encouraging critical thinking and discussion.
- 8 After the game, the group will engage in a discussion where participants can reflect on their answers, share insights, and discuss how these stereotypes influence societal perceptions of masculinity.



Is your country or community currently experiencing a political crisis? What types of violence arise in this crisis? How are the masculinities in your community affected by it? What play-based methodologies could you implement in your community to reflect on violence and masculinities?



ACTIVITY 3:

The Story of Your Voice

In collaboration with Academia de Liderazgo Social, an organization based in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we present an activity designed to help strengthen the self-esteem of children and young people. By reflecting on our life stories and childhood experiences, we can explore our identities, examine the masculinities we have known, and envision the masculinity we wish to build. Recognizing and understanding our own voice is an important step in this process.

Our voice is produced when air is inhaled into the lungs and then exhaled through the diaphragm. As the air passes through the trachea and larynx, the vocal cords vibrate to create sound. The tension of these cords determines the pitch of our voice—tightening them results in a higher pitch, while relaxing them produces a deeper

tone. The shape of the sound is further refined by the movement of our tongue, palate, lips, and cheeks, making each voice uniquely our own. Just like fingerprints, no two voices are exactly the same!



Have you ever thought about how your voice sounds? How do you perceive it, and how do others perceive it?

Together with Academia de Liderazgo Social, we invite you to engage in an exercise to help you project and recognize your voice.

MOMENT 1

Find Your Breath

First, become aware of your breathing. To do this, we invite you to use two balloons. Inflate them while paying close attention to how much air you inhale and exhale, using the strength of your diaphragm. Follow these steps:

1. Set a metronome to 80 bpm (you can download a free metronome app on your phone).
2. Inhale deeply on every two beats of the metronome. On the third and fourth beats, exhale while inflating the balloon in your right hand.
3. Repeat the same exercise with the balloon in your left hand, keeping the metronome going.
4. Alternate between balloons and try different beat counts for at least 5 minutes. If you feel dizzy, pause and do a couple of squats to regulate your airflow.



MOMENT 2

Find Your Voice.

Now that you are aware of your breathing and diaphragm strength, we can use this same breath to produce sounds and project our voice:

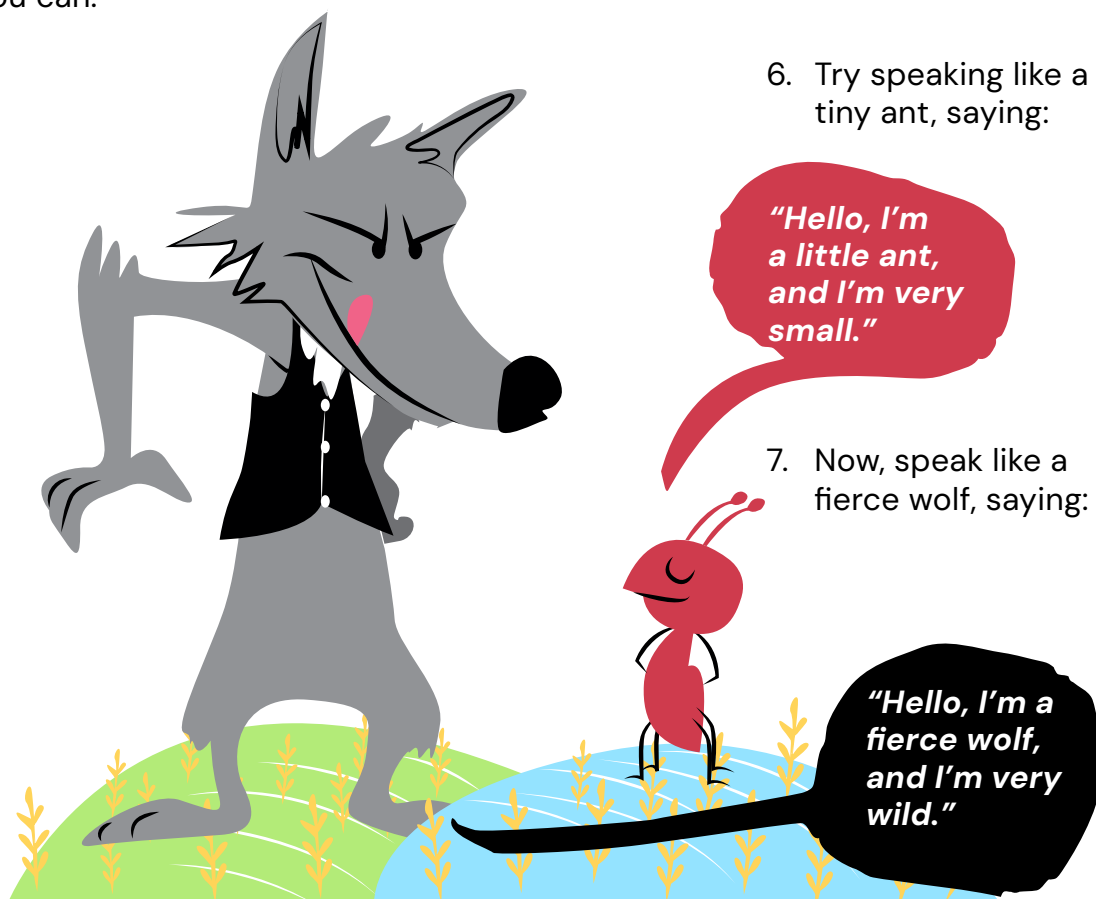
1. Inhale deeply and, as you exhale, say “ha” as loudly as you can.
2. Inhale again and, as you exhale, say “ha-ha-ha” as loudly as you can.
3. Repeat both exercises, but this time make the sound much softer and quieter, like a whisper.
4. Inhale and, as you exhale, say “ha-ha-ha” in the lowest pitch you can.
5. Inhale and, as you exhale, say “ha-ha-ha” in the highest pitch you can.

6. Try speaking like a tiny ant, saying:

“Hello, I’m a little ant, and I’m very small.”

7. Now, speak like a fierce wolf, saying:

“Hello, I’m a fierce wolf, and I’m very wild.”





MOMENT 3

What Does My Voice Represent?

After completing the exercises and exploring different ways of modulating your voice, ask yourself the following questions:



- *Which parts of your body vibrate the most depending on the sound you make?*
- *Did you hear your voice clearly? How did it feel to make loud sounds versus softer ones?*
- *What did you feel when you produced a lower sound? A higher sound?*
- *What can you say about your voice? Do you like it? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think your voice can represent your masculinity? How or why?*

Did you know that children's voices are often referred to as "white voices"?

This term comes from the fact that before puberty, the larynx has not fully developed, resulting in a bright, high-pitched voice. At this stage, there is no significant distinction between male and female voices. As puberty begins, the body undergoes rapid changes, and the larynx grows, deepening the voice by a few tones. During this time, many teenagers experience vocal instability, with sudden shifts between high and low pitches—what is commonly called “voice cracks.” These fluctuations tend to occur more frequently in individuals assigned male at birth, and while this may feel uncomfortable at times, it is a natural part of growing up.

Understanding your voice involves embracing all its tones, both high and low, without feeling the pressure to conform to societal expectations about how you “should” sound. We encourage you to accept and embrace your voice, regardless of how it changes.

CONCLUSIONS

Society often links a deep voice with strength and virility, associating a high-pitched, soft voice with weakness and femininity. However, as we explored through these exercises, it takes diaphragm strength to produce any sound—whether high or low, loud or soft. The way we use our vocal cords, the air we push out, and the volume we produce all affect the sound of our voice.

Voice has nothing to do with our strength as individuals, and it can vary greatly even among people of the same gender. These exercises not only help us break certain stereotypes but also encourage us to get to know an essential part of ourselves: our voice. Our voice is a powerful tool for communication and self-expression. Truly understanding and embracing our voice strengthens our self-esteem and helps us define who we are and who we want to be—beyond societal expectations.



And you? How do you use your voice?

ACTIVITY 4:

The Empty Chair Game

Jóvenes Artistas por la Justicia Social (JAXJS) is an organization from Guatemala composed of young people from diverse regions across the country. In collaboration with them, we present an activity designed to prompt deep reflections on how we experience and understand masculinity, and how it has been shaped by various experiences from childhood. This exercise seeks to help participants express and identify their emotions, recognize harmful forms of violence embedded in masculinity, and promote greater self-awareness.



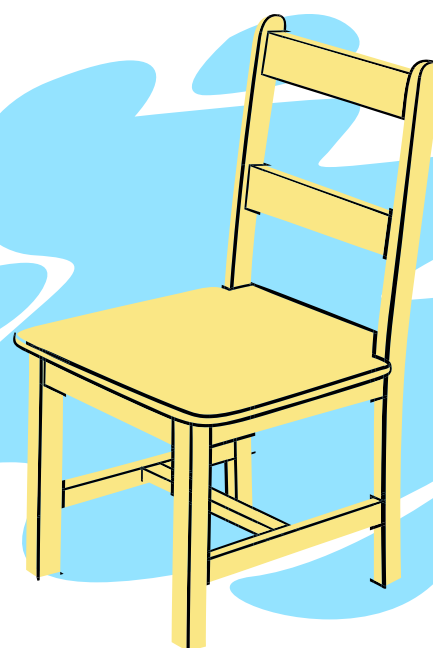
WARNING: This activity may have a strong emotional impact. It is recommended that the facilitator be experienced in group support or psychology to ensure a safe and supportive environment.

1. Setting Up:

- All participants sit in a circle around an empty chair. Whoever occupies this chair holds the “power of voice” and is encouraged to share their thoughts openly.
- The facilitator sits in the empty chair first, explains the activity’s purpose and structure, and guides participants to cover their eyes with blindfolds.

2. Introduction:

- The facilitator introduces the theme: “Your childhood and finding pathways out of violence.” This theme can be explored further using various sections of this Toolbox.





3. Taking Turns:

- Each participant can choose to take the empty chair by raising their hand. The facilitator will guide them to the chair, and once seated, they will answer the following questions. The questions are structured from lighthearted to more profound topics:
 - a. Share a happy memory from your childhood.
 - b. Recall a positive memory with your father or father figure.
 - c. Describe an experience of violence you witnessed or experienced as a child. How did you feel in that moment?
 - d. How did you respond to that feeling? What actions did you take to express it?
 - e. Have you ever done something that made someone else feel bad? What happened, and how might you make amends for it?

4. Important Notes:

- Questions c, d, and e may touch on sensitive topics. The facilitator must ensure a respectful and supportive environment, offering careful mediation throughout the discussion.

5. Reflection:

- After all participants have answered, everyone removes their blindfolds. Participants then have an opportunity to reflect on the activity by either writing or drawing their thoughts and emotions, which they will place on the empty chair.
- The chair is no longer empty; it is now filled with the personal reflections and experiences of the group, symbolizing the collective journey toward building healthier masculinities.

6. Closing the Circle:

- To conclude the activity, the facilitator approaches each participant and ties a piece of yarn, ribbon, or string around their wrist as a bracelet. This bracelet symbolizes the importance of reflection and marks the beginning of each participant's ongoing journey toward building a healthier masculinity through personal insight and meaningful interactions with others.



This activity encourages deep emotional exploration and fosters the development of healthy masculinity through shared vulnerability and support.



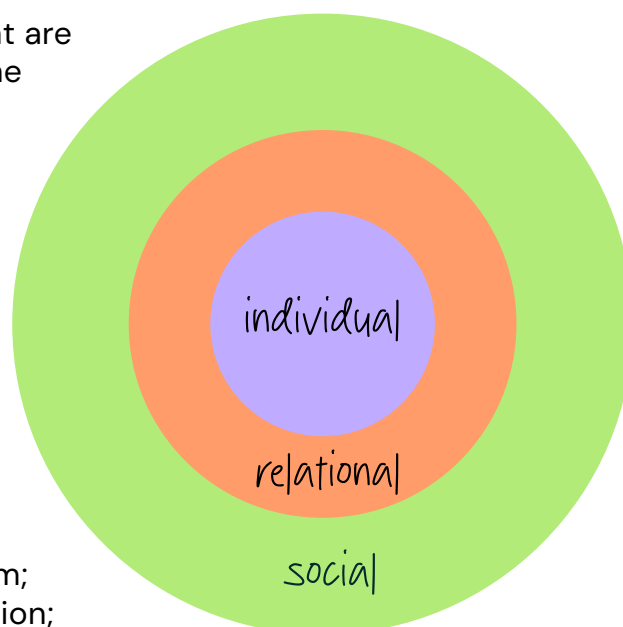
ACTIVITY 5:

Circles of Good Treatment

In collaboration with OYE (Organization for Youth Empowerment), based in El Progreso, a city in northern Honduras, we present the methodology of The Circles of Good Treatment. This approach has been implemented by OYE for over five years and is grounded in Fina Sanz's (2016) Good Treatment coexistence model. The model serves as an alternative to the prevalent violence-based framework in society. These circles aim to highlight the concept of Good Treatment as a direct counter to mistreatment, fostering peaceful relationships and promoting education for well-being (Sanz, 2016).

OYE's Circles of Good Treatment are organized into three spheres: the social sphere, the relational sphere, and the individual sphere. This framework helps participants explore and understand their relationships with themselves, others, and their community.

Within these circles, young men engage in discussions on a range of topics, including physical, sexual, and psycho-emotional health; healthy masculinities and sexism; gender-based violence prevention; responsible fatherhood; and the prevention of early pregnancies.



How to Develop a *Circle of Good Treatment* Among Young Men

OYE recommends the following steps to carry out this activity:

- 1. Gather Participants:** Build trust within your community to form a group of young men. You can invite participants through campaigns and announcements, both in public spaces and on social media.



2. **Initial Diagnosis:** “We begin by understanding how young men experience their lives and their perspectives, discussing their lived experiences in terms of the costs and privileges of being men, as well as the roles assigned to us” (Ángel Rodríguez, young member of OYE Honduras). During this phase, it’s crucial to ask participants about the topics that interest them most and raise the most significant questions for them.
3. **Select a Quiet Location:** Choose a space that encourages open discussion. It’s also recommended to provide refreshments and non-alcoholic beverages to create a more comfortable and welcoming environment.
4. **Facilitator Recommendation:** OYE suggests that the facilitator be a young man, as this can help foster trust, safety, and honesty. The facilitator should be well-trained and knowledgeable in psychological support to guide the discussions effectively.
5. **Introduce the Topic:** Once the topic for the Circle of Good Treatment is chosen, audiovisual materials such as short films can be used to spark discussion. OYE has utilized the following films addressing issues such as sexism, the patriarchal system, sexual diversity, and abusive relationships.

➤ Majorité

➤ El orden de las Cosas

➤ Un mundo al revés

6. To begin the conversation around the chosen topic, start by watching the selected audiovisual material carefully. Afterward, introduce guiding questions to stimulate discussion, such as:



“What did you understand from the video?” and “What are your thoughts and feelings about it?”

Using audiovisual resources helps participants reflect on what they see and hear, making it easier to discuss topics that may resonate with their own experiences and realities.



How to Address the Topic of Violence in the *Circles of Good Treatment?*

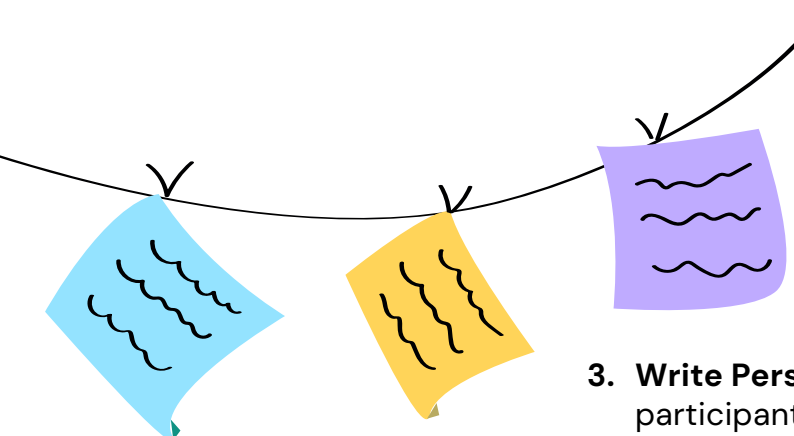
Patriarchal masculinity is rooted in various forms of violence, with abuse often linked to gender-based violence. This violence can manifest across social, relational, and personal spheres. Below, we share the Violentometer from the Instituto Politécnico Nacional of Mexico, a tool designed to help identify different types of violence, particularly those occurring in intimate relationships, within the relational sphere.²

ENJOY Your relationship is healthy when he...	1	Respects your decisions and tastes
	2	Accepts your friends and family
	3	Trusts you
	4	Is happy when you feel fulfilled
	5	Gets your approval when making plans together
WARNING, SAY STOP! There is violence when he...	6	Ignores you on the days when he is angry
	7	Blackmails you if you refuse to do something
	8	Belittles your opinions and projects
	9	Makes fun of you in public
	10	Manipulates you
	11	Is constantly jealous
	12	Controls your outings, clothes, makeup
	13	Goes through your texts, emails, apps
	14	Insists that you send him intimate photos
	15	Isolates you from your family and friends
PROTECT YOURSELF, GET HELP You are in danger when he...	16	Calls you crazy when you reproach him
	17	"Blows a fuse" when he is unhappy about something
	18	Pushes, pulls, slaps, shakes or hits you
	19	Threatens suicide because of you
	20	Touches you intimately without your consent
	21	Threatens to circulate intimate photos of you
	22	Forces you to watch porn
	23	Forces you to have sex with him
	24	

² You can also download more resources at this link: <https://www.ipn.mx/genero/materiales/violentometro.html>.



Building on the previous information, we invite you to conduct an exercise shared by OYE called The Violence Clothesline. The goal of this activity is to help participants recognize moments in their lives when they have experienced violence and times when they have inflicted violence on others. Here's how the activity works:



- 1. Set up the Clothesline:** Use a cord tied at both ends and plastic clips to create the clothesline.
- 2. Distribute Materials:** The facilitator will give each participant two paper cards and a pen.
- 3. Write Personal Stories:** On the first card, each participant will write about a personal experience where they were subjected to violence. On the second card, they will write about an instance where they acted violently toward someone else.
- 4. Hang the Cards:** One by one, participants will go to the clothesline and hang their two cards using the plastic clips.
- 5. Reflect on the Stories:** Once all the cards are hung, participants will read the stories on the clothesline and reflect on the following questions:

*How do I feel when I am subjected to violence?
How do I feel after learning about the violent experiences my peers in the Circle have gone through?
How do I feel knowing that I have inflicted violence on someone?
How do I feel reading about the violent actions my peers in the Circle have committed?*



- 6. Facilitated Discussion:** Based on the reflections that emerge, the facilitator will guide a discussion about violence, using participants' emotions as a starting point to explore and promote Good Treatment within the Circle.



How to Address Health and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Good Treatment Circles Among Men?

OYE has conducted male health awareness campaigns called *Young Men in Prevention* from various perspectives: psycho-emotional health, physical health, and sexual health, all of which emphasize self-care as a fundamental aspect of developing healthy masculinities. Here are some key aspects related to physical health and CSE:

- Physical self-care involves taking responsibility for your own well-being by scheduling routine medical check-ups, maintaining a healthy diet, getting adequate rest and sleep, practicing good hygiene, exercising regularly, and more—without relying on a woman to manage or remind you of these habits.
- Sexual health care goes hand in hand with Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), which allows us to understand our bodies and sexual organs, explore different ways of experiencing pleasure beyond genital-focused perspectives, approach sexual relationships with shared responsibility, and understand the importance of using contraceptive methods like condoms. These are not only to prevent unwanted pregnancies but also to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which could endanger both our lives and the lives of others. Additionally, understanding the differences between sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity is essential to fostering diverse, healthy masculinities that promote inclusion and eliminate all forms of discrimination.

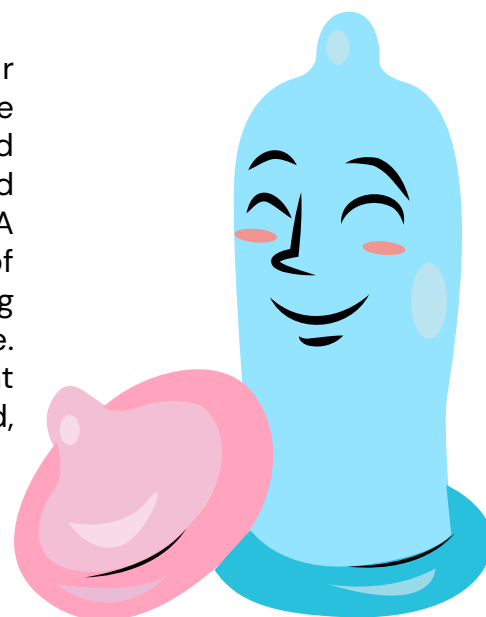


The Gingerbread Person diagram we shared in a previous section can serve as an educational tool to help introduce these concepts!

OYE, in collaboration with the organization Rumbo, has distributed contraceptives to young people in various communities across Honduras to normalize their use and promote a culture of prevention and sexual health. Through OYE's *Good Treatment Circles*, participants gained information and reflected on their sexuality. Thanks to OYE's partnerships with clinics and medical professionals, young people were able to access further resources and even receive consultations related to their sexual and reproductive health.



To develop similar initiatives in your community, we encourage you to educate yourself on these topics and build partnerships with health centers and organizations that specialize in them. A crucial first step is the free distribution of contraceptives, such as condoms, along with an explanation of their importance. This can help foster masculinities that approach sexuality in an informed, responsible, and respectful way.



ACTIVITY 6:

Masculinity Schools and the Privilege Race.

Building healthy masculinities requires us to critically examine the various forms of violence that affect both ourselves and our communities. Critical thinking enables us to recognize the privileges we hold and the oppression that exists in society. While these oppressions impact us, we may also unknowingly perpetuate them in different ways.

In collaboration with SerNiña, an organization based in Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, we present an exercise aimed at providing information, fostering critical thinking, and raising awareness of our rights. This activity helps participants identify privilege, understand life conditions, and explore different approaches to masculinity. It also illustrates that, although not everything is within our individual control, we can contribute to collective efforts to reduce inequalities and violence in our communities.

MOMENT 1

Masculinity Schools

1. Introduction:

The facilitator begins by introducing key concepts, including patriarchal masculinity, gender roles and stereotypes, and sexuality. This sets the foundation for understanding how masculinity is shaped and reinforced in different spaces.



2. Reflection on Socialization:

After the conceptual introduction, the facilitator invites the group to reflect on how they have been taught (or are still being taught) to be a man in various spaces. The facilitator asks the following question:

Church



School



Family



Workplace



Community



- Each participant can express their response through drawing, writing, or sharing verbally with the group.

4. Reflection on Masculinity Today:

The facilitator then asks a second question:

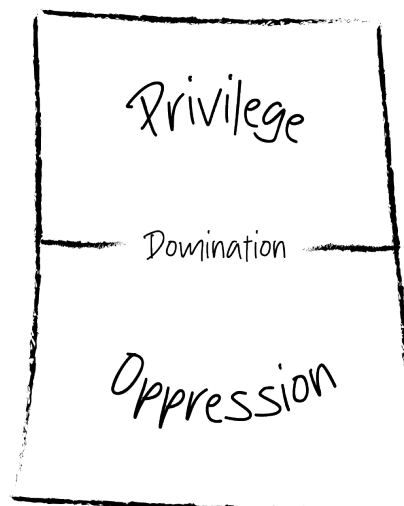


"What does your masculinity look like today, and why?"

MOMENT 2

Privilege and Race (For Young Participants)

- Divide the Group:** The group is divided into two or three subgroups based on the number of participants. If the organization has previously worked with non-binary identities, the groups can be Women, Men, and Non-Binary People. If the group is mixed and balanced, participants are divided into Men and Women, but the genders will be swapped (men will be assigned the female gender and vice versa). If the group consists only of men, they will be split into two subgroups, with each group assigned a gender.
- Create the "Privilege and Oppression" Line:** Draw a large rectangle on the floor using chalk or tape. A middle line divides it into two equal parts, known as the "Domination Line." The right end of the rectangle is labeled "Privilege," and the left end is labeled "Oppression."





3. Conduct the Exercise: All participants (previously divided into gender-based groups) will stand on the “domination” line, facing the “privilege” end. The facilitator will then read out a series of statements about different privileges. Each participant will respond with “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know,” depending on whether they experience the privilege mentioned. If the response is “yes,” they take a step forward toward the “privilege” end. If the response is “no,” they step back toward the “oppression” end. If the response is “I don’t know,” they remain in place.

- My family supports my education because they see me as the future provider.
- I earn a higher salary/wage for the same working hours compared to people of other genders.
- I can access recreational spaces without fearing violence.
- I can walk freely in the streets without being catcalled or subjected to offensive sexual remarks.
- When carrying out official procedures or tasks, people call me by my name and address me with respect.
- People refer to me according to my gender identity.
- I am not expected to “be careful” about an unwanted pregnancy.
- I can be absent without my family questioning me for not performing caregiving duties (such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc.).
- My family, friends, and colleagues encourage and support me when I want to participate in sports.
- Language is generally inclusive of my gender.
- I have always had access to my rights without any authority questioning them.



4. Reflection and Discussion: As the exercise progresses, participants will clearly observe how privilege and oppression manifest based on factors such as gender, social class, skin color, and place of residence. At the end of the activity, participants will be asked to reflect on why these privileges and oppressions exist. It is important for each participant to consider the concept of “domination” in the context of patriarchal masculinities and understand how it influences their lives, creating both advantages and disadvantages.

From all the activities shared in this section, we can work on (re)discovering and understanding our own masculinity. This involves reflecting on our life stories, identifying the violence we have experienced, learned, inflicted, and overcome. It also includes learning about our own sexuality and that of those around us, listening to our emotions and our inner voice, and sharing our experiences, feelings, and knowledge with other boys and young men. Through this collective process, we can create biographical ruptures and rethink our way of being men in the world we inhabit. As we progress through these activities, we can also begin to recognize certain systemic privileges and oppressions, allowing us to critically understand them and transition into our second phase of reflection.



(Re)lating to One Another. The second step in building healthy and diverse masculinities with children and youth across Mesoamerica.

After using the first phase of this Toolbox to encourage individual reflection and introduce key questions that promote biographical shifts in children and young people, it is essential to establish connections that link our personal experiences to the broader social, economic, political, and historical context. This approach allows us to move beyond an individual, therapeutic perspective and instead focus on the power structures that legitimize and perpetuate the patriarchal order.

From personal deconstruction and analysis, we transition to critically examining the social structures that reward men who conform to patriarchal masculinity, while punishing, excluding, and oppressing those who challenge the norm. Engaging in a collective, critical analysis of our local history, cultural products, media, political speeches, religious texts, or the expression of patriarchal masculinity in areas such as sports or labor, can help participants identify the “unspoken” or normalized aspects within the patriarchal system. These attitudes, norms, and values have been internalized over time, shaping stereotypes that generate suffering and inequality.



In this second phase, our goal is to expose the absurdity and violence of the patriarchal masculinity model, which, despite its harmful impact, remains deeply ingrained in our society. It is crucial to situate ourselves within our specific context, understanding our identity and ways of being as shaped by our life history, ethnicity, geographic location, social class, gender, skin color, age, and many other factors.



Let's continue!

Political Context and Masculinities in Mesoamerica.

To discuss Mesoamerican masculinities, it is crucial to consider our historical and political context. Understanding masculinity from the perspective of the Global South is key to reflecting on our identities within our own territories and developing policies, ideas, projects, and solutions that are relevant to our own realities (Celedón et al., 2020; Connell, 2020).

The Mesoamerican region stretches from the state of Sinaloa in Mexico to Puntarenas in Costa Rica. This entire region shares a colonial history that dates back to the 16th century, during which various European powers extracted vast quantities of natural resources, imposed exploitative systems such as slavery and the caste system, violently eradicated many cultural expressions of pre-Hispanic societies, and established identity constructs and labor models that relegated women to the exclusive responsibility of reproductive and caregiving tasks.

Though Mesoamerican countries gained independence in the 19th century, the colonial class system, racism, gender discrimination, religious ideologies, and identity constructs developed over four centuries remained deeply embedded in Mesoamerican culture. Additionally, the dispossession of land and resources by foreign countries and corporations has continued into the present day.



Given the historical context of our region, the Global North exerts significant influence on how we construct our masculinities. The dominant model of patriarchal masculinity from the Global North promotes an idealized image of the “perfect man”—an elite, professionally successful provider who is heterosexual, strong, a family patriarch, virile, rational, white, clean, well-traveled, educated, attractive, sexually assertive, and financially powerful. This ideal is often symbolized by his consumption of material goods such as cars and cutting-edge technology (Muñoz, 2020; Tellería, 2020). These patriarchal masculinity models from the Global North, being dominant in our society, become the most revered and desired form of masculinity, creating a growing homogenizing effect. For men in Mesoamerica, however, achieving this model is significantly more challenging, leading to greater frustration (Muñoz, 2020). The majority of men worldwide, particularly in the Global South, struggle to meet the demands of patriarchal masculinity (Fuller, 2020). The tension of failing to meet the nearly impossible standard of “being a real man” can lead to violence, both self-directed and directed toward others. This creates a complex mix of power, privilege, discomfort, and pain, shaped by the burdens and responsibilities men carry, as well as by their attributes and resources—such as class, ethnicity, age, and geographical location (Olavarría, 2020).

The privileges associated with patriarchal masculinity for men in the Global South come with a constant fear of losing that status. This fear often drives men to defend their position within the power structure in front of their peers, enforcing the hegemonic patriarchal mandate of masculinity and



labeling alternative masculinities as inferior (Muñoz, 2020; Madrid, 2020). As a result, men can also become targets of gender-based violence, whether through institutional violence in war or being victims of homophobic attacks, among other forms of violence (Connell, 2020).

Violence, then, is the primary negative consequence of hegemonic masculinity in our society (Parrini, 2020). It takes various forms, from verbal to physical and emotional abuse, and is often used as a means of conflict resolution. This violence is not only present in the personal lives of men, but is also deeply embedded in institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, hospitals, and the state as a whole.



Why is violence seen as a way to resolve conflicts?

This expectation stems from a history of oppression in our society, where an extractivist, competitive, war-driven, and patriarchal mode of production prevails. This system works to oppress and devalue anything that does not conform to the image of the hegemonic Western patriarchal man.

Hegemonic patriarchal masculinity in our region, therefore, aligns with a political agenda set by the elites, shaped by geopolitical dynamics in which Global North countries seek to maintain dominance over the Global South—not only in political and economic terms, but also in cultural and gender relations.

These dynamics influence how the role of a man is conceived, particularly the dominant man in Mesoamerica. Mesoamerican hegemonic masculinity is built on a colonial hierarchy that distances itself from pre-Hispanic and Indigenous identities, opposes femininity, marginalized classes, and sexual diversity. As a result, contemporary Mesoamerican masculinities vary across contexts, yet they all share common foundations of racism, exploitation, and violence.



What Does It Mean to Be a Child or Young Person in Mesoamerica?

Being a child or young person in Mesoamerica often means confronting significant socio-economic challenges and experiencing various forms of violence from an early age. According to UNICEF's 2023 annual report, 35 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, nearly half of children in Latin America and the Caribbean live in poverty (UNICEF, 2023). In addition, two out of three children face domestic violence, and four out of five children under the age of ten are unable to read. A growing number of children and young people, particularly from countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, are migrating at increasingly younger ages. These children are fleeing political, economic, social, and environmental crises in search of better life opportunities.

Child labor is another significant issue in the region. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023), in 2020, 8% of children and young people in Mexico and Central America were engaged in labor, highlighting the prevalence of exploitation and limited access to education. Gender-based violence disproportionately affects girls and young women in Mesoamerica. Practices such as economic, ethnic, age, and gender discrimination often deny girls access to education, force them into early marriages, subject them to unwanted pregnancies, and/or coerce them into domestic or sexual labor. Additionally, the region's increasing gang and criminal organization violence has a profound impact on childhood. Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence (Gendes, 2019), while boys and young men face violent coercion, often being forced into criminal activities.

Despite international agreements aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, Latin America and the Caribbean have made limited progress. Nine years after the signing of these agreements, the region has achieved less than half of the Sustainable Development Goals related to children and youth.



How Do Patriarchal Masculinities Affect Children and Youth?

Patriarchy is sustained by hierarchies that position men in dominant roles over women and children, creating a cycle of oppression that is deeply ingrained in societies (Hooks, 2017). When we consider the realities of the Global South—marked by racism, political instability, economic hardship, and environmental violence—this cycle of oppression becomes even more pronounced.

In Mesoamerica, our shared history and collective memory are shaped by dispossession, extractivism, injustice, and various forms of political and economic violence that have affected all countries in the region. Yet, this history is also one of resistance, solidarity, and a deep connection to the land. From this perspective, we can recognize that children and young people face numerous challenges within their communities, but they also possess the power to reclaim knowledge and worldviews that can help them imagine alternative futures—ones that are free from patriarchy, individualism, and commodification.

For instance, **the Mayan cosmovision** offers a liberating and autonomous understanding of gender, seeing men and women as interconnected elements within a larger cosmic network. This perspective provides an opportunity to rethink our present reality, drawing from the values and principles still upheld in some Mesoamerican communities.

We invite you to reflect on your own identity through this or any other cosmovision connected to your territory. What knowledge and memories can you recover and preserve, especially those that have been targeted by racism, colonization, and dispossession?





How well do you know yourself and your history? What aspects of your culture and identity are you proud of, and what would you like to change?

Being a child, boy, girl, or young person in Mesoamerica means facing significant adversity, but it also presents a world full of possibilities—one shaped by communal ways of organizing that offer inspiration for new ideas, reflections, and ways of inhabiting the world.

Here are two reflections from children living in Chamelecón, San Pedro Sula, Honduras:

"What I like most about being a child where I live is that I can paint, dance, play with dogs, and play with my toys."

Anthony, 7 years old.

"What I would like to change in the world is for parents not to mistreat or hit their children, but simply to correct them and talk to them. Problems are not solved with violence or shouting. I want to change violence against animals, especially stray dogs, and stop the discrimination against people living on the streets. People should be more humble and speak kindly to others. We should take better care of nature, plants, and our families."

Watson, 9 years old.



What do the children and young people in your community think? How do their reflections compare to the ones shared here? What similarities or differences can you identify in their ideas and concerns?





The Role of Fatherhood in the Lives of Children and Youth in Mesoamerica.

A key factor in fostering healthy and diverse masculinities among Mesoamerican children and youth is the legacy we pass down through their family environment, particularly in relation to fatherhood.

Children and young people form their masculine identities in various ways, often navigating an uncertain future that increasingly challenges traditional gender roles. This is influenced by critical perspectives from feminist movements and the growing recognition of sexual diversity. However, their identities are also shaped by values and experiences within their families, which are frequently rooted in patriarchal ideas of masculinity (Fuller, 2020).

In the historical Western conception of the so-called “traditional family,” masculinity has often been disconnected from caregiving roles. As a result, practicing active, responsible, and healthy fatherhood becomes complex and, at times, challenging. The social expectations surrounding fatherhood are deeply shaped by patriarchal norms. For instance, the role of the father as the primary financial provider can sometimes lead to a neglect of caregiving and domestic responsibilities due to the demands of an increasingly precarious labor market. Additionally, this provider role can sometimes lead to economic violence, where fathers exert control over other family members through financial dominance. Another patriarchal expectation is that men must be protectors, a role that, in some cases, involves exerting control over family members, treating them as property, and reinforcing unequal power dynamics. Furthermore, patriarchal masculinity often associates men with procreation, valuing them for their ability to father children, sometimes without regard for the consequences of their actions (Voces Mesoamericanas, 2023).

Fatherhood, however, is both an act of freedom and responsibility. Choosing to embrace this role, or not, always sends a message to children—whether one of responsibility, commitment, and affection, or of abandonment, irresponsibility, and violence (Voces Mesoamericanas, 2023). In our efforts to construct healthy and diverse masculinities, it is essential to also prioritize the cultivation of active and responsible fatherhood.



What Are Active and Responsible Fatherhoods?

First, it's important to acknowledge that the paternal figure isn't always the biological father. As stated, "Being a progenitor is not the same as being a father" (Voces Mesoamericanas, 2023). The caregiving role in fatherhood can be taken on by uncles, grandfathers, brothers, teachers, stepfathers, or even close friends.

Fatherhood, beyond biology, is defined by the bond a man forms with the children and youth around him. It's about the quality and depth of these connections and the caregiving responsibilities he assumes. Fatherhood is not a singular event but rather a process—a choice, and often a desire—that manifests through presence, consistency, willingness, availability, and emotional expressiveness with one's children. Through these actions, a father becomes a role model and conveys to the child what it means to be a man in their closest reality.

Caregiving within fatherhood encompasses participation in the planning, pregnancy, birth, and upbringing of children. It includes not only recreational activities but also domestic responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, education, ensuring good nutrition, emotional care, hygiene, and healthcare—vital aspects for a child's optimal development (REDMAS, 2013).

Moreover, active, responsible, and healthy fatherhood must be rooted in respect and radical tenderness, rejecting all forms of violence—whether directed at children, youth, women, or the environment (REDMAS, 2013).



What can you contribute to the fatherhoods around you? Do you practice healthy and responsible fatherhood with the children and youth in your life?



Ideas and Activities for Working with Children and Youth in the Second Phase: Towards (Re)lating to One Another.

Building on the previous overview of the Mesoamerican context, it is crucial for those involved in the development of healthy and diverse masculinities to recognize that doubts, struggles, and the negative consequences of the patriarchal system are not unique to them. The fact that they continue to perpetuate this system does not make them “bad people” or “failed men.” Rather, they are shaped by a system that teaches them to conform— a system embedded in sports, art, work, media, politics, and beyond, which rewards them for upholding the status quo.

Therefore, it’s important to move away from the idea of “individualizing guilt” (Delgado, 2019). Deconstruction should not be viewed as an individual effort to “become a better person,” but rather as a collective process of critically questioning and analyzing the patriarchal values ingrained during socialization, which men often use to their advantage in various social contexts. Below are some group activities designed to encourage a critical examination of our social environment and the patriarchal masculinity reinforced by existing systems of power and domination.



ACTIVITY 1:

Using Our Language to Reflect from Our Cosmovision and Context.

The communities of Chiapas in Mexico, like many other communities in Mesoamerica, experience multiple inequalities and forms of violence linked to class, ethnicity, and gender; these forms of violence become even more complex in the context of migration.³

The organization Voces Mesoamericanas, Acción con Pueblos Migrantes, in collaboration with the Coalición Indígena de Migrantes de Chiapas (CIMICH), established a School of Masculinities aimed primarily at Indigenous and rural communities. The program focuses particularly on young Tseltal and Tsotsil men (Mayan ethnic groups). It seeks to recover various concepts and cosmovisions from these communities to reflect upon, question, and engage in dialogue about gender and masculinity. The goal is to construct new understandings of masculinity that foster community transformation and encourage more empathetic and less violent ways of relating to one another.

As previously discussed, patriarchal masculinities have been shaped through various forms of oppression linked to colonialism, racism, capitalism, and more. The construction of masculinities in Mesoamerican Indigenous communities is no exception. However, Voces Mesoamericanas emphasizes the importance of reclaiming spirituality, communal life, language, communication, and collective organizational practices rooted in respect for the sacred. These elements are essential for reflecting on and rebuilding masculinities outside the framework of Western hegemonic thought. In this context, passing down ancestral culture to new generations is critical.

In this section, we share key lessons and insights from the Voces Mesoamericanas School of Masculinities that we consider both novel and significant. These teachings offer valuable perspectives for thinking about how to connect the creation of healthy masculinities to our own communities, and how this process can address the violence and inequalities that persist within them.

³ "At Voces Mesoamericanas, we begin by believing in the dignity, freedom, and ability of individuals to self-determine their life projects, recognizing ourselves as rights-bearing subjects who reclaim our own histories, as well as our unique and collective ways of feeling-thinking and acting in the world. The rights of both national and foreign migrants must be protected in a comprehensive and proactive manner, but it is also essential to ensure full access to justice for their families in both transit and destination countries." We share with you the fundamental rights of migrants: 1. The right not to migrate, 2. The right to migrate well, 3. The right to safe transit, 4. The right to enter another country, 5. The right to remain with dignity 6. The right to return to one's country of origin. (Voces Mesoamericanas, 2023).



MOMENT 1

Bats'íl vinic and Winikubel

In the Mayan language, **Bats'íl vinic** means “*the Mayan man*” and encompasses the expectations traditionally placed on men. Historically, this concept has evolved significantly. It originally emerged as an ancestral figure within Mayan culture, but with the advent of Western colonization, it became linked to servitude and oppression. Over time, **Bats'íl vinic** continued to shift, further impacted by counterinsurgency efforts and the militarization of territories.

Today, **Bats'íl vinic** is associated with a form of masculinity that emphasizes toughness and an “armor of the heart.” This ideal promotes the suppression of emotions, violence, and competition among men, all rooted in values connected to production and consumption.



Do you know of a similar concept in your language or in the languages of other communities? Do you think it's possible to redefine this concept towards a healthier vision of masculinity?

In the Mayan language, Winikubel refers to “the process of becoming a man,” or the way society shapes our masculinity. This process unfolds within the family, at school, among friends, and through the media and social networks. In many Indigenous and rural communities today, this journey is marked by suffering, sacrifice, shame, and family and community pressure to prove one's “manhood.”

Throughout this process, everything is stored in the heart, accumulating as a complex mix of pain, anger, rage, anguish, and despair, but also joy, intelligence, knowledge, and life wisdom (Voces Mesoamericanas, 2023). With Voces Mesoamericanas, we invite you to reflect on your own process, both individually and collectively, by answering the following questions:



*What has your winikubel been?
How are we taught to be men within our culture?
Do you think winikubel can change?
How would you have liked your winikubel to be?*



By critically examining *Bats'il vinic* and *Winikubel*, we can better understand how history has shaped and normalized certain forms of violence. This reflection also opens the door to imagining new ways to address these issues..



*What would a redefined **Bats'il vinic** look like?*

In the Escuela de Masculinidades, many young men reimagined ***Bats'il vinic*** as a man who has the right to cry, express his emotions, and be loving, understanding, respectful, and a good listener—someone open to dialogue. This new vision of masculinity values people and upholds the principles of Tseltal culture, with the goal of achieving ***lekil kuxlejal, ich'el ta muk***—a Good Life grounded in respect.

MOMENT 2

Achieving *Ya'telinel Ko'tantik* through *Ojtikin bahel*.

The Mayan phrase ***Ya'telinel Ko'tantik*** means “***to heal our hearts,***” and this can be achieved through *Ojtikin bahel*, that is, through ***self-knowledge***. A fundamental Mayan spiritual practice for healing is *Ojtikin bahel*, which involves invoking our ancestors, honoring their paths, and seeking strength. In the Escuela de Masculinidades, participants are encouraged to recall the teachings of their mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers, and to reflect on their male lineage and relationships with their ancestors. *Voces Mesoamericanas* also emphasizes the importance of recognizing ourselves in our land and territories, seeing them not only as physical spaces we inhabit but as social and historical constructs that reflect our relationships, practices, symbols, and senses of belonging.

By knowing, defending, and building our territory through ***lekil kuxlejal, ich'el ta muk***—the Good Life with respect—we strengthen our roots and gain a deeper understanding of the origins of our masculinity. In our community, this understanding is referred to as ***Mayawinik***, meaning “how I construct myself from my people and my ancestors.”

1. Understanding Our History and Territory:

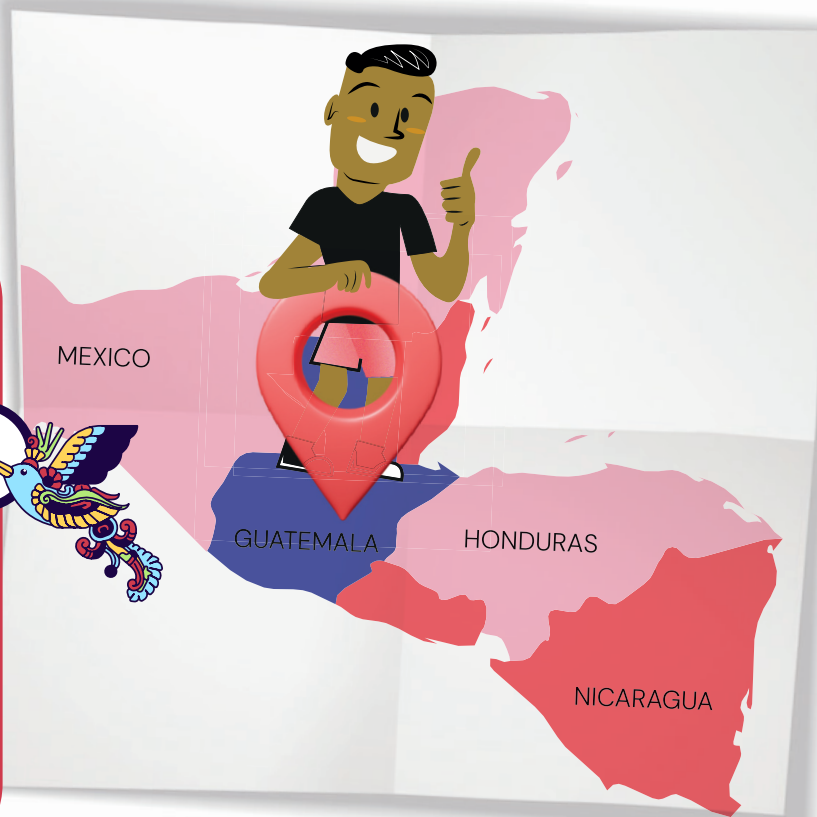
Knowing our history and territory helps us gain clarity about our personal journeys and the reasons behind our thoughts and actions. Let's explore the roots and origins of masculinity in our community! To begin, we invite you to collectively locate your community on a map.



2. Discussion Questions:

Once your community is identified on the map, discuss the following questions:

- Which Indigenous peoples are represented in this process?
- What are the main challenges faced by Indigenous men?
- What alternatives have Indigenous men developed to address these challenges?
- Are there similarities and differences between Indigenous communities?



3. Group Reflection:

Following the Ojtikin bahel process, we invite you to organize a plenary session with your collective, community, or friends to reflect on the following questions



- What motivates me to explore the topic of “being a man” in my town or community?
- Why is it important to discuss masculinity in my community?
- How do I relate to other men in my family, among my friends, and in my community?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a man in my community?

4. Self-Reflection

Exercise:

On a sheet of paper divided into four columns, each participant will write:

- What do I like most about myself?
- What do I like least about myself?
- What would I gain by changing what I don't like about myself?
- What would I lose by changing both what I like and don't like about myself?



5. Group Sharing:

Participants will exchange their sheets so everyone can read what their peers have written. This promotes collective reflection and dialogue. Through this exercise, we continue our journey into *Ojtikin bahel*—a process of self-awareness and deconstruction that leads us toward healing our hearts, or *Ya'yel Ko'tantik*.

MOMENT 3

Ya'telinel Ko'tantik with drums.

Voces Mesoamericanas shares one more activity to connect with the heart of *Ya'yel Ko'tantik*. For this activity, you will need a drum or any percussion instrument:

1. Build Your Drum:

You can create a drum using recycled materials. For example, take a can or jar approximately 30 cm in diameter (such as a coffee tin). Cut the neck off a 40 cm balloon and stretch it over the opening of the can, securing it with a rubber band. Alternatively, you can cover the can with a piece of fabric or construction paper, glue it in place, and then place the can's lid on top. For drumsticks, use two lightweight wooden sticks.

2. Assign a Drummer:

One person in the group will play the drum. Maintain a slow, steady rhythm, approximately between 30 and 40 beats per minute (bpm).

3. Synchronize Breathing:

All participants should synchronize their breathing with the drumbeat: inhale on the first beat and exhale on the second, continuing this pattern for five minutes. The goal is to feel the rhythm of the drum and connect with the rhythm of your own heart.

4. Group Reflection:

After the five minutes of breathing exercises, open a discussion where each participant can share their feelings after listening to their heartbeat and reflecting on the questions asked earlier.





This exercise allows participants to share their sensations, emotions, and thoughts, which can foster collective healing. By recognizing our shared experiences, cosmovision, and the cultural and communal context of our territory, we can work on acknowledging ourselves both individually and collectively. This process also creates space for new ways of relating to other men through respectful listening.

We invite you, your collective, and/or community to reflect on your territory, as well as your Winikunel and Mayawinik. If you want to delve deeper into the Escuela de Masculinidades and its processes with Tseltal and Tsotsil youth, you can watch the Voces Mesoamericanas video titled “¿Qué es el Mayawinik?” at the following link:



[LINK TO VIDEO](#)

In this video, you can listen to and see some of the experiences of participants in the workshops and processes focused on healthy masculinities developed by Voces Mesoamericanas.

Once you have watched the video, we invite you to reflect on the following Mayan concepts and translate them into the language of your own community:

Principles that can guide our behavior toward building healthy masculinities:

To think and feel ourselves: Ya'iyel sjo! ko'tantik

Care for yourself or Selfcare: Sk'ejel jbatik

Selfcontrol: Skomel jbahtik

Commitment: sc'ubanel jbantik

Principles for collective behavior toward the communal construction of healthy masculinities:

Greeting from the heart: Pat o'tan

How we relate in our thinking–feelings: Stsakel sba jol co'tantik

Caring for one another from the heart: K'uxotic ta ko'tantik

Phrases to help strengthen the new construction of masculinity:

My balance: Jmolol jts'akil.

Respect, holding each other in high regard, recognizing the greatness of others: Ich'el ta muc.



ACTIVITY 2:

The Jungle.

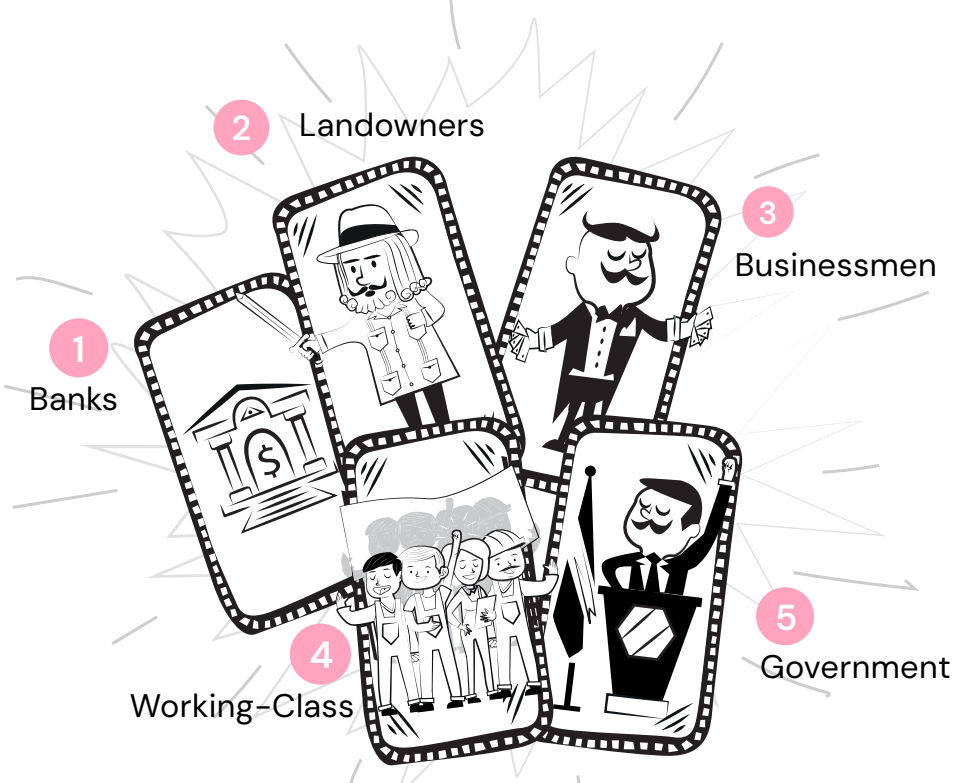
In collaboration with the Academia de Liderazgo Social, we present *The Jungle*, an engaging game designed to help participants identify various forms of oppression and understand how they contribute to discomfort and reflection. This process encourages social organization aimed at creating positive change in our communities.

To play *The Jungle*, you will need at least ten participants, although the game can accommodate many more. At the outset, it's important to provide an overview of how the patriarchal system oppresses society through the sexual division of labor. For a deeper exploration of these concepts, we recommend reading Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*.

The reflections sparked by the game will guide us in recognizing the exploitation and privatization of production and land as systemic forms of oppression that affect society in diverse ways. In our Mesoamerican context, incorporating these perspectives is crucial for developing a comprehensive analysis that can drive the creation of networks focused on building just societies. Within these networks, healthy masculinities, as well as the well-being of children and youth, will be central.

MOMENT 1

The facilitator will divide the participants into five distinct groups, each named as follows:





Each group will have specific characteristics:

- The **Banks**, **Landowners**, **Businessmen**, and **Government** groups may each consist of a single person.
- The **Working-Class** group must have a minimum of four participants, divided evenly into two subgroups: **men** and **women**. If there are additional participants, the Working-Class group may grow, but it must always remain the largest group.

Each group will also receive specific materials to represent their roles in the economy:

1

Banks

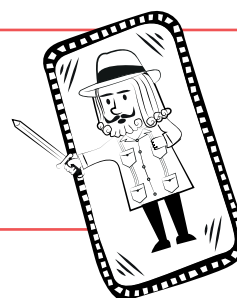


Fake money
(e.g., cut-out paper money).

Three poster boards or large sheets of paper to symbolize raw materials.

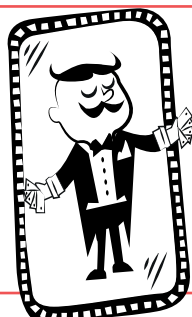
2

Landowners



3

Businessmen

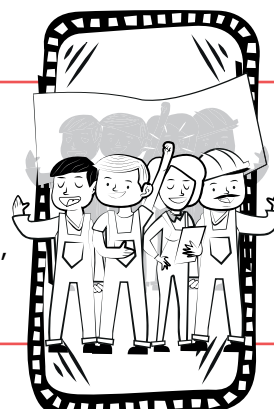


Scissors and colored pencils,
representing the means of production.

Only the women in this group receive three seeds each, symbolizing care and reproductive labor, which includes health, housing, food, and motherhood.

4

Working-Class



5

Government



A notebook and pencil,
symbolizing laws and regulations.



MOMENT 2

Explanation of Roles and Game Rules

The facilitator will begin by explaining the roles of each group in society, encouraging participants to reflect on the following questions:

- Who owns farmland, mining land, and housing in your country?
- Who owns the banks? What companies operate near your community?
- What jobs do your family, friends, and acquaintances have, and do their wages cover basic needs?
- Who leads the government, and do its laws represent your interests?
- Who performs care work in your family and community?

Next, the facilitator will explain the following **game rules**:

1. **Goal:** The primary objective of the game is for the **seeds** (symbolizing care and reproductive labor) to remain with the **working-class women**.
2. **Initial Law:** The **Government** group must write the following law in the notebook: "Working-class women must remain seated; all other groups may move freely."
3. **Production:**
 - The goal is to produce as many goods as possible, such as houses, cars, computers, tables, and chairs, using the **raw materials** (poster boards) and the **means of production** (scissors and colored pencils).
 - The **Businessmen** will decide, in discussion with the **Government**, what goods to produce.
 - **Working-class men** are responsible for producing these goods.
4. **Wages and Raw Materials:**
 - The **Businessmen** must pay wages to the **working-class men** for their labor and supply them with raw materials (which they must purchase from the **Landowners**).
5. **Wealth Accumulation:** The **ultimate goal** of the **Banks**, **Landowners**, **Businessmen**, and **Government** is to accumulate more **money** and **goods**. The **Banks** may generate more money based on the amount of goods being produced.



6. Hunger and Disease:

- After the first round of production, the facilitator will place a sticker labeled “Hunger and Disease” on one **working-class man**, who will then be unable to move or produce goods.
- The “**Hunger and Disease**” sticker can only be removed if a **working-class woman** gives one of her seeds to the affected worker.
- For every two goods produced in subsequent rounds, a new “**Hunger and Disease**” sticker will be placed on a working-class man.

7. Wages and Goods Exchange:

- The wages of **working-class men** must be exchanged for goods from the **Businessmen**.
- Working-class men must also pay a portion of their wages to the **Government**, a fee determined by the **Businessmen** and **Government**.

8. Restrictions on Working-Class Women:

- **Working-class women** cannot receive money, unlike the working-class men.

9. Government’s Role:

- The **Government** can create new laws if requested by any group, though they may also refuse requests. The **Government** may receive money, seeds, and goods from the other groups.

10. Wealth Accumulation:

- Each group’s goal is to increase its wealth and assets, whether through money, goods, or other resources.

11. Losing the Game: If all the **working-class women** lose their seeds, everyone loses the game.

12. Seed Exchange: Seeds can be exchanged between **working-class women**, but they cannot be regenerated.

13. Running Out of Seeds: If a **working-class woman** runs out of seeds, she receives a “**Hunger and Disease**” sticker. She can ask another woman for a seed to remove this sticker.

14. Proposing New Laws: The **working-class** group can propose new laws by giving **three seeds** to the Government.

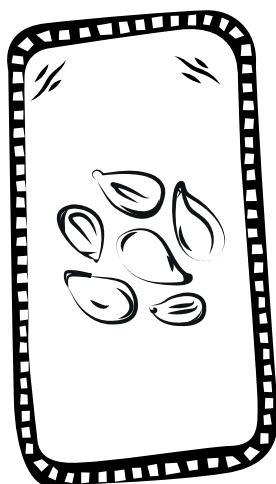
15. Negotiation: All groups are allowed to negotiate their goods or labor and request laws that benefit them to help accumulate more wealth.



MOMENT 3

Reflection and Discussion

After completing five production rounds (each round must result in at least one good produced per worker), the facilitator will gather everyone for a plenary discussion. The facilitator will ask the following questions:



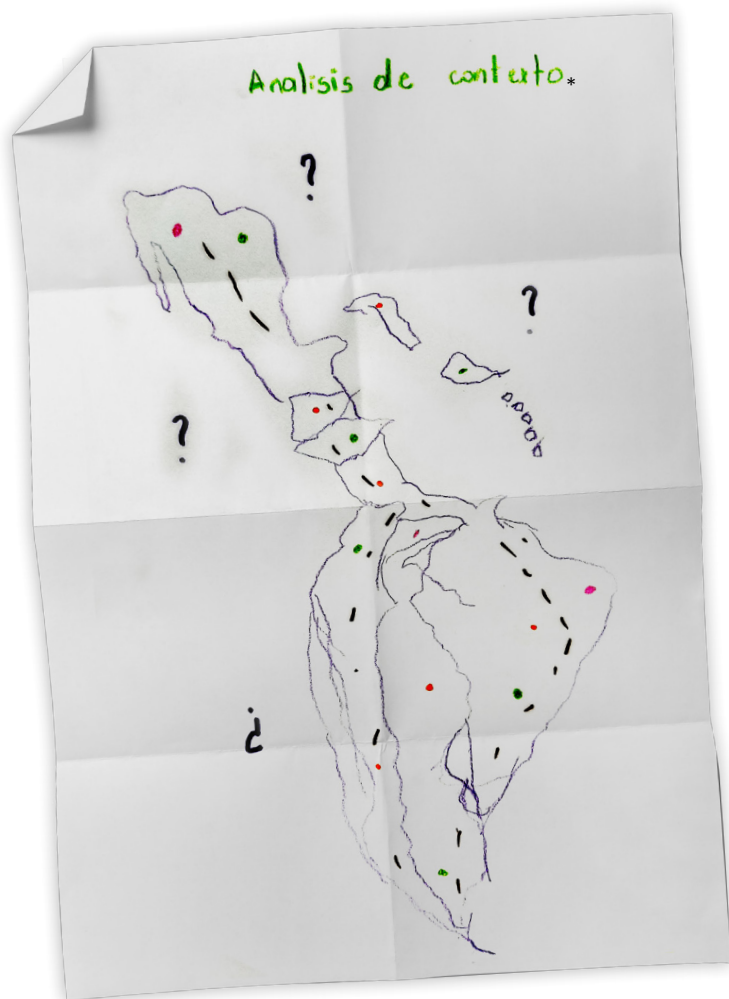
1. Why are the seeds (representing care and reproductive labor) the most important aspect of this game?
2. What does the depletion of seeds represent in our societies?
3. What can we do to preserve these seeds?
4. Do you think the game rules are fair for all participants?
5. Which groups benefit the most from this dynamic, and which benefit the least?

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of the game highlights crucial messages about community work, the oppression of the working class, and, most significantly, the exploitation of women in relation to care and reproductive labor. This labor is fundamental to the functioning of society and serves to legitimize patriarchal structures of masculinity.



Do you think this game reflects the reality of your own community or country? In what ways does it resemble your experiences? What steps could we take to break free from these different forms of oppression?



*Context analysis

Understanding our context is essential not only for grasping the concepts presented in this exercise, but also for developing strategies for meaningful change within our communities. While our realities share common themes of dispossession, colonialism, and exploitation, they are also united by struggles, resistance, and the hope nurtured by political movements across our region.



What important events or issues are unfolding in your context today? Can you identify a similar situation in other areas of Latin America or Mesoamerica?

By recognizing the systems of oppression shaping our context, we can better understand our roles in the struggle. This awareness allows us to engage actively in our communities, lead initiatives, and strengthen collective efforts by sharing ideas and political strategies.



ACTIVITY 3:

Raising Our Voice Is Our Right.

For several years, the organization **SerNiña** has been running a **Masculinities Laboratory in Sacatepéquez, Guatemala**, where they engage children and young people in various activities aimed at rethinking masculinity. Here, we present another activity that encourages reflection on our context and explores how gender identity is influenced by political dynamics.



MOMENT 1

Right to Protest/ Demonstrate

1. Introduction to Inequality

The facilitator introduces the topic of inequality, focusing on the different privileges and disadvantages related to gender, class, ethnicity, and geographical location. The discussion centers on identifying the presence of these inequalities within the participants' own spaces—such as their classroom, organization, or community. The group reflects on the following questions:

- What issues outrage me?
- What do I want to change?
- How can I make this change happen?

2. Team Formation and Role Assignment

The participants (children and/or youth) are divided into two teams: one composed of female participants and the other of male participants. The division should be as equal as possible

in terms of gender representation. Each team's task is to develop a well-reasoned argument, along with a proposed law or rule that could address and reduce inequality in their school, work, or community environment.

3. Appointment of the Director

The facilitator selects one person to act as the "director." The director does not participate in the debate but has absolute authority to select one of the proposed laws or rules for implementation. However, the director has a secret: despite the proposals, they will ultimately reject both and approve none.

4. Debate and Presentation of Proposals

Each team presents their proposed law or rule at the podium and engages



in a debate with the opposing team. The goal of the debate is to persuade the director and demonstrate why their proposal is the most effective solution to inequality.

5. Rejection of Proposals

At the conclusion of the debate, the director announces that neither proposal is convincing enough to address the issue of inequality and rejects both.

6. Call to Action: Organizing for Change

The facilitator then informs the teams that, while their proposals were rejected, their next task is to organize and actively work to get their laws or rules approved in their space or community. To achieve this, they are encouraged to stage a protest or demonstration. This could involve using signs, chants, and other forms of collective action to express their demands and push for change.

7. Reflection and Learning Goal

The goal of this activity is for participants to recognize that they have the right to protest and demonstrate freely. It is a reminder that even when authority figures reject their ideas, they still have the power to challenge oppressive structures and fight for a better, more just society.

Final Reflection: Plenary Session

In this closing moment, all participants come together for a group reflection. The facilitator guides a discussion centered on the following key questions:

- *How can we build greater equity within our collective or community?*
- *What are the real-life impacts of different forms of oppression—such as those based on gender, class, ethnicity, or geography—on individuals, groups, and communities?*
- *How do I feel after participating in this activity, and what personal reflections or insights have I gained?*



This reflective space encourages participants to connect their experiences during the activity with broader social realities, share personal perspectives, and consider concrete steps they can take to promote equity in their own environments.



ACTIVITY 4:

My Father's Legacy.


This activity, developed by the organization REDMAS, is designed to promote the construction of healthy, engaged, and nurturing fatherhoods through shared reflection in safe, supportive group settings. It encourages men to explore their roles as fathers, reflect on their experiences, and learn from one another.

REDMAS, through its workshops, aims to:

- Foster the development of parenting skills rooted in kindness and respect
- Support men in learning how to be and become fathers
- Prevent violence toward partners and children
- Promote gender equity in caregiving and household responsibilities

“My Father’s Legacy” invites fathers to engage in open dialogue, share their personal journeys, and reflect on the legacies—both positive and challenging—that they’ve inherited or want to pass on. By listening to others’ stories, discussing how different situations were faced or resolved, and expressing common concerns and challenges, participants gain new perspectives and practical insights into parenting. The activity strengthens mutual support among fathers and creates opportunities to reimagine fatherhood in more conscious, equitable, and compassionate ways.

This reflective activity is designed for fatherhood support groups and can help men overcome barriers to building committed, caring, and present fatherhood. It invites participants to explore the influence their father or father figure has had on their understanding of masculinity and parenting. By identifying both the positive and negative aspects of these legacies, men are encouraged to carry forward what they value and consciously choose to leave behind what no longer serves them or their families.

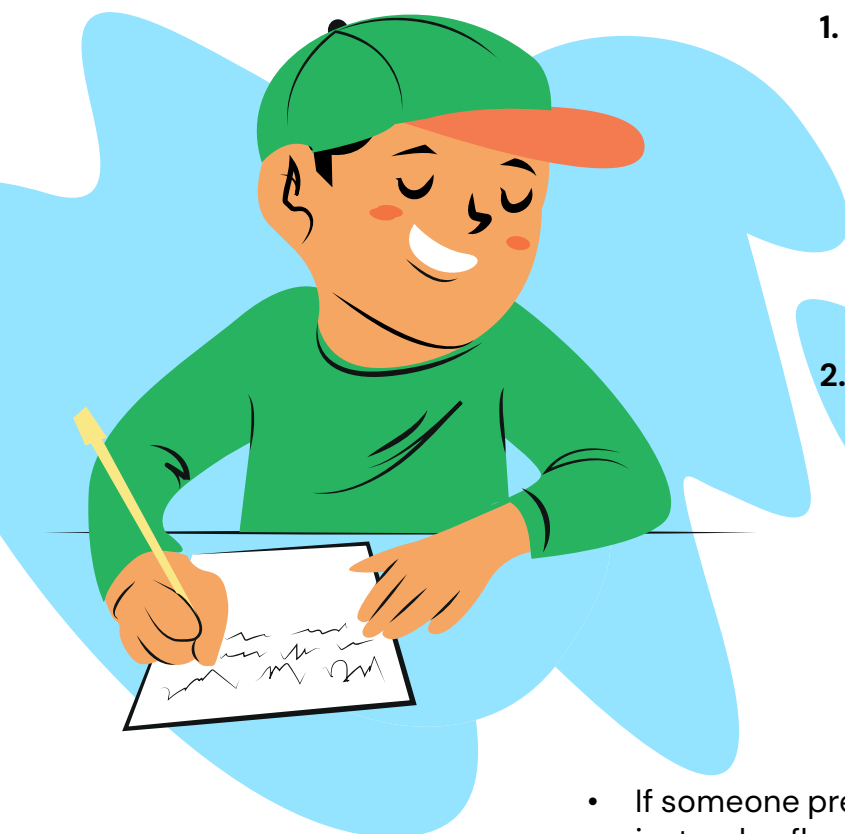


“Most men long for an intimate bond with their sons and daughters and want to play a more active role in their lives. But how can they achieve this when part of society still promotes traditional roles that see women as primary caregivers and men as financial providers? How can they resolve conflicts with their partners regarding parenting and education without resorting to violence?”

(REDMAS, 2013).



We now invite you to facilitate the activity **“My Father’s Legacy”** in parenting groups. The goal is to encourage reflection on the ways our father figures have shaped our beliefs and behaviors as men and fathers, and to foster a commitment to intentional, compassionate parenting.



1. Gather the Group

In your community, workplace, or organization, invite men who are fathers, father figures, or preparing to start a family. Choose a spacious, comfortable setting where participants can move freely, feel safe, and focus without distractions.

2. Individual Reflection: Letter Writing or Drawing

Provide each participant with a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Ask them to write a personal letter to their father or primary father figure. The letter can express thoughts, questions, gratitude, pain, or anything they feel compelled to share.

- If someone prefers not to write, they may draw a picture instead, reflecting what they would like to communicate to their father figure.
- This step should be done in silence, individually, with each person sitting apart from the others to encourage deep reflection. Allow approximately 10 minutes.
- Participants are not required to share the letter or drawing; it remains private unless they choose to share.

3. Identifying the Legacy

After the letter-writing exercise, provide a second sheet of paper and ask participants to complete the following two prompts:

- One thing I want to carry forward from my father or father figure in my relationship with the children I care for or will care for.
- One thing I do NOT want to repeat from my father or father figure in my relationship with the children I care for or will care for.



4. Group Sharing

Invite participants to sit in a circle. Those who feel comfortable may share their reflections from the second part of the exercise. Emphasize that sharing is entirely voluntary and that all stories and insights are to be respected.

5. Guided Final Reflection

Conclude the session with a facilitated group reflection using the following guiding questions:

- What stood out to you the most during this activity?
- What are the positive things you want to put into practice or teach your children?
- What are the things you want to leave behind or transform in your parenting?

This activity can be a powerful first step in fostering self-awareness and healing. By acknowledging both the gifts and the wounds of their own father-child relationships, men can begin to reshape their roles with greater intention and emotional clarity.

Closing Message

To close the session, the facilitator should offer a positive and supportive message. Acknowledge the emotional complexity of exploring one's relationship with a father or father figure. Remind participants that confronting and understanding these legacies is not only a path toward personal growth but also a meaningful contribution to healthier families and stronger communities.



ACTIVITY 5:

Analysis of Songs and Cultural Products.

Young Artists for Social Justice (JAXJS) is a Guatemalan organization that uses the analysis of cultural and artistic products to critically examine social issues impacting children and youth in their communities. One of its key activities focuses on reflecting upon and analyzing elements of popular culture—especially music—to identify and question misogynistic, sexist, and patriarchal attitudes that are often normalized through these cultural products.

This exercise emphasizes that such problematic messages can be found across all musical genres and historical periods. It also encourages participants to challenge adult-centered perspectives, including the notion that music from the past was inherently “better.” Importantly, the goal is not to shame personal music tastes but to foster awareness and critical thinking about the content we consume.

Activity Guidelines:

1. Divide participants into teams of equal size.
2. Assign each team a song from a different musical genre. Provide both the audio and printed lyrics.
3. Teams will analyze the song’s lyrics to determine whether they contain violent or harmful messages, and must justify their conclusions.
4. Each team will present their findings to the whole group, followed by a collective discussion to deepen the reflection.
5. Teams will then revisit their assigned song and identify the most problematic lyrics. These lyrics will be rewritten to convey a message that promotes respect and non-violence.



List of Songs by Genre for Analysis (you may expand the list)⁴

Corridos:

"Tu boda" Fuerza regida
"Sabor fresa" Fuerza Regida
"Ella baila sola" Peso Pluma & Eslabón Armado.

Pop:

"Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53" Shakira
"La media vuelta" Luis Miguel
"Prefiero ser su amante" María José.

Reggaeton:

"Safaera" Bad Bunny
"Las que no tienen papá" Dany Flow
"Cuatro babys" Maluma.

Rock:

"La planta" Grupo Caos
"Puto" Molotov
"Ingrata" Café Tacuba.

Ballad:

"Mujeres" Ricardo Arjona
"Mariposa traicionera" Maná.

Cumbia:

"El gran varón" Willie Colón
"17 años" Los Ángeles Azules.

Salsa:

"Te compro tu novia" Ramón Orlando
"Mi cucú" La Sonora Dinamita.

Ranchera:

"Mátalas" Alejandro Fernández
"El Aventurero" Pedro Fernández.

Bachata:

"Propuesta indecente" Romeo Santos
"Mía mía" Romeo Santos.

Building on the reflections and activities from the first stage, the second stage invites us to **engage and relate with our surroundings and systems of oppression in more conscious and constructive ways**. It involves recognizing ourselves as products of specific historical and social processes—situated within particular territories, shaped by our social class, language, and the ways we've been structurally taught to understand fatherhood and gender roles. Culture continually influences how we relate to others, and becoming aware of this influence is essential to collectively building healthier, more inclusive, and diverse expressions of masculinity. Reframing the messages found in cultural products, such as music, serves as a crucial foundation for progressing toward the third stage of this process.

⁴The songs featured are deeply rooted in the Latin American context, so facilitators are encouraged to select songs that are relevant to their culture.



(Re)volutionizing Ourselves and our communities: Third step in building healthy and diverse masculinities among Mesoamerican children and youth.

The third and final stage of our Toolbox focuses on generating alternatives, political actions, and cultural products that challenge patriarchal masculinity across different spaces. Building on the knowledge gained in stages 1 and 2, we identify opportunities for transformation at both individual and collective levels. This empowers participants and readers to envision and construct new narratives, fostering less violent and more equitable realities.

These reflections and practices can also inspire other young men and children to critically examine their own masculinity and embrace healthier models grounded in tenderness, care, and responsibility. In this way, participants become “multipliers” and advocates for gender justice within their families and communities, reflecting on their own practices, making changes, and motivating others to do the same.

Creating new songs, plays, and artwork that highlight the benefits of adopting anti-patriarchal masculinity, promoting community festivals,



issuing public policy recommendations, and facilitating intergenerational and cross-sector dialogues are powerful forms of resistance. We also encourage you to involve family members, local authorities, and other community stakeholders in learning about this work, fostering diverse conversations that can help identify fairer practices and combat gender-based violence and discrimination. Together, we can mobilize, amplify efforts, shift attitudes, propose new practices and policies, and create new ways of speaking to challenge harmful narratives and stereotypes.

Once we recognize how the patriarchal model negatively affects our lives, and understand that these experiences are not isolated but instead create lasting pain and struggles—often invisible or normalized—the next step is to ask ourselves:



What can we do about it? What actions can I take, both personally and collectively, to promote equality and respect for all people?

Other Masculinities Are Possible!: Toward Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Boys and Young Men in Mesoamerica.

In recent decades, the conversation around masculinities has shifted toward recognizing them as plural, distinct from the traditional, hegemonic model of “being a man.” New generations increasingly feel disconnected from these outdated models when asked: How should men be? What qualities should a father or partner possess? (Olavarria, 2020).

Breaking cycles of violence is not easy. Unlearning the patriarchal norms that have been imposed upon us, or imagining alternative futures within the context of our Mesoamerican region, requires significant effort. However, we can begin this process through reflection rooted in community:



What gives us hope? What would healthy masculinity look like in our community? Are there examples of healthy masculinity that we can look to?



Today, many, especially youth, recognize that sexism and homophobia must end. As a result, masculine identities must evolve. A critical and reflective attitude toward our past assumptions about what it means to “be a man” is where we can begin to make change.

One way to break the cycle of violence within masculinities is through critical self-reflection:

What role do my actions play in perpetuating violence? Am I a victim of violence, or do I enact it? In what ways do I exercise violence, and against whom? How has violence shaped the way I see the world?



To move beyond these cycles, reflection, creativity, and collective imagination are essential tools. They allow us to envision futures beyond the ones we know, where we can imagine the kind of society we want to live in, the lives we want to lead, and the relationships we want to build (Parrini, 2020). Envisioning other possible futures within our community is crucial to creating healthy and diverse masculinities—where we not only stop enacting violence but also stop experiencing it.



How can we build masculinities that align with our roots, languages, territories, cosmovisions, and struggles for justice?

In our Mesoamerican context, it is equally important to decolonize our understanding of masculinity—rethinking it from the perspective of our communities and cosmovisions. We need to reflect on the social patterns historically imposed on us by Western notions of ethnicity, geography, gender, and class.

Building new, healthy, and diverse masculinities means activating political processes that oppose patriarchal, colonial, racist, and classist societies. This involves eliminating violence against female and feminized bodies, promoting comprehensive sexual education, and challenging the conventional process of becoming a man.

Actively involving boys, girls, children of all genders, and youth in the struggle for gender justice is crucial to creating a different society and dismantling existing power structures. Children and youth are not just the future of our region; they are the present. They are protagonists and co-creators of the moment we live in, shaping their own history (Barraza, 2024; Ancheta, 2011).



Childhood is a critical stage of human development—cognitively, emotionally, and socially. During this time, we develop our basic thinking skills and our capacity to relate to the world around us (Lorente, 2013).

If, from this crucial moment in life, we begin to foster concepts of justice and equality, imagine the impact we can have!

Including children and youth in the fight for gender justice is key to breaking down the sexist norms and impositions in our society. But... how do we include them?



Pedagogical Pillars in the Promotion of Healthy Masculinities

The work around healthy masculinities, promoted by GFC and its partner organizations, is framed as a transformative political project. Its main goal is the liberation, recognition of agency and dignity of individuals, and the promotion of well-being. To achieve this, the work is grounded in two fundamental pedagogical pillars:

1

Popular Education

Popular education is a political and cultural movement that encompasses a diverse range of pedagogical practices, all sharing a transformative and liberatory purpose. It is organized with coherence, accessibility, and diversity in mind (Barraza, 2024).

Popular education helps us rethink and transform the reality around us by using dialogical, participatory, and reflective tools. It enables us to recognize ourselves as political subjects capable of recovering our history to reshape our present and envision dignified futures for everyone. Key principles and practices of popular education essential to promoting healthy masculinities include:



Horizontal, Feminist, and Critical Pedagogies

This approach focuses on creating educational models that move away from traditional, top-down structures, adult-centrism, and oppressive methods. Instead, it emphasizes play, tenderness, critical thinking, active listening, and equality in learning. One example of this is feminist pedagogy, which works to uncover and challenge sexist thought, bringing these discussions into community spaces with children and youth through mediums like children's literature (hooks, 2017). Another is the pedagogy of tenderness (Barraza, 2024), which views tenderness as a political virtue and fosters a reciprocal teaching-learning process between educators and students. This model recognizes children and youth as co-protagonists in the educational process, promoting various affective bonds between individuals of different ages. Intergenerational dialogue and listening are integral to this process, enabling us to learn from one another regardless of age, context, or gender. Everyone's knowledge is valid and crucial in challenging traditional norms and stereotypes, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more just world.

Play-Based Pedagogy and Artivism

Play, art, and creativity are powerful tools for imagining new masculinities, beginning from childhood. As stated by the collective La Mancha:

"Play-based pedagogy is a constantly evolving approach that centers on collective processes using play as the vehicle for transformative practices. This approach allows us to explore new ways of relating to others, to ourselves, and to the reality we inhabit." (Centro La Mancha, Uruguay).

Play offers a space to explore diverse experiences without prejudice, allowing us to experiment with alternatives to patriarchal masculinity (GFC, 2022). It enables us to rehearse new ways of thinking, acting, and relating to others, planting the seeds for other possible worlds.

Art, in turn, challenges us to question the status quo and imagine new possibilities. Artivism— a blend of art and activism— turns art into a tool for resistance, advocacy, and emotional mobilization aimed at social change. Through art, new narratives and spaces for connection are created, promoting the envisioning and realization of more just realities.

Engaging in multiple creative practices can be a powerful way to foster healthy masculinities from an early age in our communities, providing the foundation for long-term social transformation.



Working on Emotional Recognition and Self-Knowledge through the Creation of Safe Spaces

From a very young age, boys are taught to disconnect from their emotions and suppress their feelings. We must unlearn this fear of emotional expression through crying, hugging, singing, dancing, playing, laughing, and by seeking supportive connections with other men (Barraza, 2021). Working with emotions—through self-esteem and self-knowledge—is essential to ensure that the identities of children and youth are not built on dominance over others, but are instead grounded in love and tenderness. This requires critically examining male domination over the planet (Hooks, 2017) and recognizing that this should not be the ideal we strive for.

The ideal we should pursue, from a place of healthy self-esteem, is spiritual growth, community development, listening, and justice. For both young people and adults, it is important to focus on self-esteem and self-knowledge by reconnecting with our lost inner child (hooks, 2017), recovering collective memory to identify intergenerational trauma and violence, returning to childhood to question the roles and prejudices imposed on us, and beginning the process of overcoming them. This can lead to the development of healing strategies that foster a happier, more tender, and joyful life.

To achieve this, we must create safe spaces—environments where open dialogue can occur without judgment or punishment, and where learning, intimacy, and tenderness are nurtured. In a safe space, we can challenge patriarchal masculinity, reinvent life and social bonds, and develop emotionally in a secure, prejudice-free environment. This approach helps us move away from multiple forms of violence and risky behaviors (Barraza, 2021).



2

Transformative Intersectional Approach.

The intersectional perspective is a theoretical, methodological, and political framework that examines how different forms of social discrimination—such as gender, ethnicity, age, geographic location, class, and sexual orientation—interact at multiple, often simultaneous levels. These categories of discrimination, which are socially and culturally constructed, converge to create a matrix of oppression that reflects the intersection of various systems of social inequality (Viveros, 2016).

This approach allows us to understand that **masculinity** is not a singular, homogenous concept. Rather, it varies across different contexts. For example, being an Indigenous migrant man who doesn't speak Spanish is a very different experience from that of a middle-class young man in the city balancing studies and informal work. Intersectionality helps us move beyond abstract theories of masculinity and instead recognize how it is shaped by the specific lived experiences of individuals.

Therefore, it is crucial to implement culturally **sensitive programs and methodologies** that reflect the realities of children and youth, respecting their language, identity, and culture. These programs should not only acknowledge the specific experiences and challenges of individuals but also honor the diversity of those experiences in their design and implementation.

At the same time, our approach is transformative because we believe that creating safe and reflective spaces is important, but not sufficient on its own. We must ensure that discussions and learnings are translated into tangible changes in the community. Efforts to engage with masculinities must be focused not only on emotional release but also on fostering personal and collective transformation.

To incorporate a **transformative** and intersectional approach in promoting healthy masculinities, we recommend the following strategies:

1. Practice Active Listening

Listening to boys, girls, and young people is critical in understanding their world, perspectives, and reflections. Active listening, when conducted in a horizontal and empathetic manner, allows us to develop a deep, nuanced understanding of their needs and experiences. This understanding helps identify the aspects of masculinity that require attention (Barraza, 2024). Active listening also reveals the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts



of the children and youth we work with, enabling us to generate collective knowledge and create solutions tailored to their needs.

To implement active listening effectively, we should start by centering individual experiences. From there, we can draw on collective memory and local history to guide community processes and shape public policies that promote respect, justice, and equality.

2. Challenge Adultcentrism

Adultcentrism is a form of domination that devalues the perspectives of children and youth, viewing them as inferior to adults. This system can manifest in physical and psychological violence. To counteract this, adults must recognize that children and youth possess valuable knowledge, reflections, and autonomy. By engaging with them as equal partners in the process of change, we can help children and young people become agents of social transformation (Barraza, 2022).

Shifting away from adultcentrism enables us to see children and youth as political subjects with ideas, proposals, and agency. It creates the foundation for horizontal dialogue and collaborative efforts, allowing them to emerge as community leaders and change-makers.

3. Critically Reflect on Cultural Products

From toys to TV shows, songs, political speeches, and social media content, cultural products promote ideas about gender roles and masculinity. Critically analyzing these products allows us to question the masculinities they portray. Are these representations reflective of who we are? What alternative forms of masculinity can we create and promote through cultural products? By engaging in this reflection collectively, we can challenge stereotypical notions of manhood and generate new, healthier representations.

4. Promote Responsible Parenting and Care Work

Involving boys and young men in care work, including parenting, is vital for promoting responsibility and dismantling gender inequalities. Care work is political; it sustains life, promotes well-being, and drives social change. By encouraging boys and young men to participate in care from a young age, we cultivate a sense of collective responsibility and help them confront privileges, identify violence, and heal wounds (Barraza, 2021).

Raising children in non-violent, respectful ways—free from patriarchal and militaristic ideals—is essential for challenging harmful gender norms. Parents, both men and women, must engage equally in the process of child-



rearing, and this effort must extend beyond the household to involve the broader community. This collective engagement fosters a safer, more just environment for children and helps challenge discriminatory practices across society.

5. Foster Inclusivity and Emotional Expression

It is essential to create spaces where boys and young men can express their emotions freely, without fear of judgment. Encouraging emotional literacy helps break down rigid norms of masculinity that suppress vulnerability and emotional expression. Additionally, we must encourage boys and young men to actively engage in tasks traditionally viewed as “women’s work,” thus deconstructing gendered divisions of labor and fostering equality.

Moving Forward:

We invite boys, young men, and adults alike to reflect on their privileges and challenge stereotypes about what it means to be a man. This can include engaging in domestic labor, expressing emotions openly, recognizing violent behaviors, and promoting comprehensive sexual education.

By including boys and young men in efforts to **build healthy and diverse masculinities**, we can help them grow into compassionate, responsible individuals who not only reduce gender disparities but also take an active role in dismantling social inequalities and discrimination.

Ideas and Activities for Working with Children and Youth in the Third and Final Stage: Toward (Re)volutionizing Ourselves and Our Communities

This section seeks to address the question: How can we respond to today’s world, where patriarchal masculinity continues to dominate? Below, we share practices and activities that can be implemented with children and youth in your community, organization, family, or school, with the ultimate goal of fostering the creation of alternative, more inclusive worlds from an early age.

The exercises presented here are drawn from the collective knowledge and experience of the partner organizations within the HEEL Initiative. Over the years, these organizations have developed critical perspectives, political stances, and effective strategies in their communities, leading to real, tangible change in the promotion of healthy and diverse masculinities.



ACTIVITY 1:

My Gifts to the World and Commitment Competition

The organization SerNiña from Guatemala presents two exercises designed to encourage participants to reflect on their actions in the world, building upon the lessons learned from the first two stages of this Toolbox.

MOMENT 1

My Gifts to the World.

1. The facilitator distributes sheets of paper and colored pencils to each participant.
2. Participants will reflect and either write or draw five “gifts” they can offer the world in their effort to promote healthy masculinities and create alternative possibilities for the future.
3. Once everyone has finished, each participant will share their five gifts with the group, explaining how they intend to implement them.

Example: “I offer the world my commitment to always respecting women’s decisions regarding their own bodies, without judgment or shame.”

MOMENT 2

Commitment Competition:

1. The facilitator asks participants to pair up.
2. Each pair will take turns coming to the front, where they must compete by stating a commitment to building healthy masculinities. They must do so in under 30 seconds in response to their partner’s commitment.
3. The person who either repeats a commitment or fails to come up with a new one loses the round.





ACTIVITY 2:

Creating an Anti-Patriarchal Play

Zankistas Fuego y Son, an organization committed to empowering children and youth, shares its experience of using diverse artistic disciplines—such as dance, theater, and stilt-walking—to foster unique learning experiences. Through art and performance, they address important themes like gender, feminism, sexuality, and healthy masculinities. Involving children and youth in the creative process allows these issues to be explored from fresh, engaging perspectives.

We invite you to create a play with your group, collective, or community, utilizing the artistic talents of each participant. Below, we outline the approach taken by Zankistas Fuego y Son in their play *Perfectly Imperfect*, as well as the steps they followed to develop it.

1 Understanding Your Community

A play addressing social issues must first connect with the community it seeks to impact. Zankistas Fuego y Son begins by conducting a thorough diagnosis of the territories where they work. This process helps them understand the specific needs of the community, ensuring the play resonates and has a meaningful impact.

Key Steps for Conducting a Community Diagnosis:

- Define your community or group.
- Create safe, honest spaces for open dialogue and trust-building.
- Understand the community's history and context.
- Develop targeted questions for community members.
- Conduct interviews and/or surveys.
- Analyze responses to prioritize the most pressing needs.

Tip: Each community is unique, and the process may take time. However, it's better to have a deep understanding of the community than to rush into a theme that might not resonate. Identifying a current or latent conflict and asking, "What can we learn from this situation?" can help foster openness and create a more genuine reflection. Nonviolent communication should always be a core principle during these exchanges.



2 Focusing on Gender and Masculinity

When exploring topics like healthy masculinities and gender in children and youth, it's important to tailor your questions to the community's specific context. Keep your language simple and clear to ensure participants understand the intention behind your questions.

Gender-related needs may not always be immediately visible; they may intertwine with other issues like economic, ethnic, or political concerns. After conducting your diagnosis, focus on developing questions that help you explore the subject of healthy masculinities.

3 Defining the Play's Message

Once you've identified the community's needs, decide on the central message of your play. For example, Zankistas Fuego y Son, after analyzing one of the neighborhoods they work in, chose the message:

*"When we balance our emotions, we
can see all our options."*

This message promotes nonviolent communication and emotional awareness as key elements of healthy masculinity, encouraging individuals to approach conflict with calm and respect.

4 Brainstorming and Generating Ideas

In a collaborative creative session, brainstorm keywords or concepts you want to explore in the play. Zankistas, for example, focused on themes like polarization, conflict resolution, cooperation, nonviolent communication, and respect.

5 Creating the Play's Structure

Once you've established the core themes, think outside the box to creatively convey your messages. Zankistas used dance and stilt-walking to represent different characters. They even incorporated animals and magical beings, creating figures like a fetus, a hopeful magical being, a pessimistic magical being, a passive giraffe, and a frantic jackal. These characters, inspired by Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication model, symbolized different ways of approaching conflict and human needs. Remember, you can use metaphors or any creative tool to bring your characters to life in a way that supports your message.



6

Telling the Story

How do these characters contribute to the story? Zankistas' play follows a narrative in which humans and animals navigate conflicts, while magical beings comment on the events. These beings serve as reflections of the play's core themes and deliver the messages to the audience. Sample reflections include:

1

"Do humans need us to constantly guide them? Can't they find solutions on their own?"

3

"What if humans focused on values like communication, listening, empathy, and peace?"

5

"Humans have incredible potential to live beautifully."

7

"There are no bad people—only those influenced by environments that misguide them."

2

"If they connect with their hearts and humanity, they can find solutions that benefit everyone."

4

"When humans didn't have words, they solved problems. Why is it harder now?"

6

"Creating calm and balance requires no domination, just harmony."

These reflections help guide the audience toward deeper insights about healthy masculinity and conflict resolution.



7 Creating the Setting and Costumes

To bring the play to life, you'll need a setting and basic costumes. Zankistas painted a canvas to create a jungle environment, with lighting effects to enhance the mood. They also used recycled materials to construct masks and stilts, emphasizing the magical elements. You don't need expensive props or elaborate sets—creativity and imagination are key.

8 Performing and Engaging the Community

The process of creating and performing a play has been incredibly effective for Zankistas in engaging children and youth, sparking new ideas, and building strong networks. The play serves as a tool to reflect on real, localized issues while promoting healthy masculinities and breaking cycles of violence. By involving the community in the creative process, participants are not only entertained but also empowered to reflect on their own relationships and behaviors.

Conclusion: Get Inspired!

We encourage you to embark on the journey of creating your own play on healthy masculinities. After conducting a thorough diagnosis and engaging your community, use creativity to explore the messages you want to communicate.

Through collaborative storytelling, you can challenge harmful norms, inspire reflection, and help build a more peaceful, empathetic future for all.





ACTIVITY 3:

Hip Hop Culture – The Jam and the Cypher to Build Communities of Healthy Masculinities with Children and Youth

The organization Warriors Zulu Nation Honduras (WZNH), based in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, employs Hip Hop methodology to address a variety of issues impacting the rights of children and youth in their community. A key focus is advocating for the right to recreation and art, which also encompasses the right to safe, violence-free spaces.

Hip Hop, as a tool for social reconstruction in communities affected by violence, provides a valuable means of creating spaces for encounter that aim to dismantle stigmas within different territories. The artistic movement of Hip Hop encompasses diverse perspectives on social issues, including class struggle and the ethnic and cultural origins of various communities. Historically, it has been a powerful medium for exposing different forms of violence and advocating for a dignified life—ranging from access to a healthy environment to healthcare, housing, and justice.

Moreover, Hip Hop culture promotes a culture of peace by offering outlets for frustration and stress, mediating conflicts, and encouraging self-expression through music, art, dance, and words. In this light, the **Hip Hop Declaration of Peace**, presented before the United Nations in May 2001, outlined 18 principles that we encourage you to read and reflect upon.

Originating in the United States, Hip Hop was driven by Afro-descendant and Latinx communities who sought to express themselves in response to discrimination, poverty, and systemic violence. From the 1970s onward, it became a powerful force for community building and addressing youth issues. The movement spread to Latin America as migrants brought it back from the U.S., adapting it to their own local contexts and languages.

Do you know any Hip Hop groups or artists in your country or community? What themes do they explore in their work?

From the Chamelecón neighborhood in San Pedro Sula, WZNH shares Hip Hop principles as a global culture of peace for children and youth, with a focus on gender equity, encapsulated in the mantra **“Each one, teach one,”** which emphasizes the transfer of knowledge within a community.



WZNH identifies 9 key elements of Hip Hop culture:

1. Breaking (Dance)
2. Graffiti and Muralism
3. RAP
4. DJing
5. Beatboxing
6. Street wisdom and popular knowledge
7. Fashion and dress codes
8. Entrepreneurship and sustainability
9. Knowledge generation

These elements are shared within the community through jams—gatherings where individuals practice and showcase their art.

What is a Jam, and How Does it Promote a Healthy Community Environment?

A jam is a cultural gathering, often held on weekends in public spaces like squares, streets, or parks. Here, people practicing various forms of Hip Hop culture come together to share their art. While there might be a loose agenda, jams are spontaneous, often multidisciplinary events where rappers, dancers, beatboxers, skaters, and others contribute their unique skills and art forms.

As one participant notes:

"There might be an agenda, but it comes together in a very organic way as artists and athletes arrive. Jams are usually diverse and, in some cases, multidisciplinary, with participation from rappers, skaters, beatboxers, poppers, and any other discipline present within the community"

(Enamorado, et. al. 2024).

Jams provide a space for local individuals to come together, present their art, and foster a sense of community through mutual respect and healthy self-expression.



What is a Cypher, and How Can it Foster Healthy Masculinities?



Within jams, **cyphers** emerge as spontaneous circles formed by dancers, beatboxers, and rappers. These circles allow participants to express themselves freely—through rap, dance, or beatboxing—without physical contact, prioritizing respect and enjoyment.

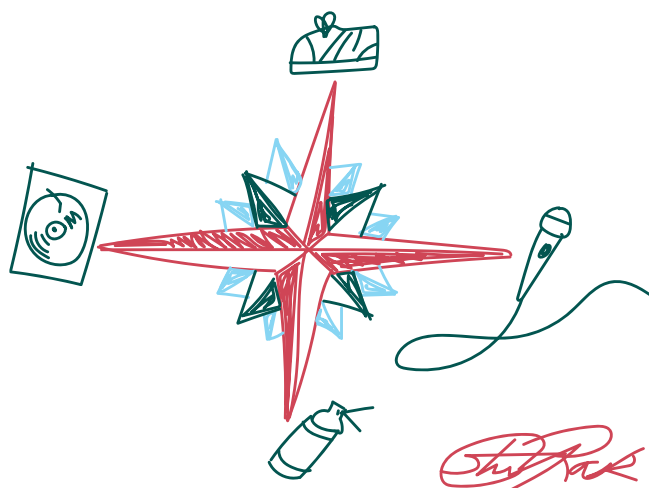
Cypher **battles** are integral to this process. These battles are a way to address misunderstandings or resolve conflicts, leaving issues on the dance floor or through words. This makes the cypher an important **community peacebuilding strategy**. In contexts marked by violence and systemic discrimination, cyphers provide children and youth with a healthy way to navigate conflict, build community, and support one another.

Healthy masculinities can be nurtured within cyphers through active reflection, dialogue, and listening. In this space, participants can express themselves through both their bodies and their voices, breaking harmful cycles of violence and redefining how we relate to one another. The structure of cyphers—where participants respect the flow and don't interrupt others—encourages a healthy and respectful way to engage with conflict and coexistence.

WZNH invites you to facilitate your own cyphers—one for **Break Dance** and another for **RAP**. Below are two reference links showcasing how Break Dance and RAP cyphers are conducted. Share these with the children and youth in your community to challenge patriarchal masculinities and rethink how we engage with both language and body.

↗ GO TO THE LINK

↗ GO TO THE LINK





RAP as Storytelling.

RAP stands for *Rhythm And Poetry or Respect And Peace*, though it can also represent Poetic Artistic Revolution. At its core, RAP blends rhythm and poetry, immersed in a culture of peace and respect. It teaches us to express ourselves authentically—whether that’s channeling anger, joy, frustration, or sadness. RAP is a form of popular poetry, a platform where people without access to traditional or elitist poetry spaces can use words to speak their truth. It is the poetry of the streets, a medium for telling personal stories and sharing them with others.

In this exercise, we invite you to write a poem that you will later perform as a RAP for your group or community during a cypher. Below are the key steps and tips to help you craft your bars:

1. Understanding “Bars”

In RAP, rhyming lines are called bars. You aim to “drop bars” that build a coherent argument or narrative through rhyme and flow. Flow refers to how you deliver your bars with rhythm, style, and a beat in the background.

2. Building Positive Bars

To create bars that break cycles of violence, avoid using language that promotes hatred or harm. Your bars should not include derogatory comments about bodies, harmful sexual innuendos, or any expressions of racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, or lesbophobia. The goal is to foster equality, and the language you use should empower others while rejecting violent expressions. Focus on your message and the positive impact you want it to have.

3. Storytelling in RAP

Storytelling is the heart of your bars. Think about what you want to share—whether it’s cathartic or transformative. Speak about the challenges you’ve faced, how you’ve resisted oppression, and how you’ve survived. You can also write collectively, sharing experiences with others in your group. Consider reflective questions such as:

- What was my relationship with my father figure like?
- How was I taught to be a man?
- How do I feel today, and why?

Alternatively, use the M.A.T.E.A. approach (Fear, Joy, Sadness, Anger, and Love) to build your bars around your emotions. Channel your rage against oppression as a healthy form of self-expression.



4. Structuring Your RAP

Once you've chosen a theme or narrative, follow a basic structure:

Introduction: Capture the audience's attention and introduce your topic.

- Content: Develop your message. This is where your bars should flow and may include a chorus.
- Closing: End with your most impactful idea or reflection—something memorable for the audience.

5. Rhetoric in RAP

Rhetoric plays a key role in RAP. It helps you argue, persuade, and connect through your bars. You can use references, examples, generalizations, and even rebuttals. Think of your RAP as a verbal struggle or debate, with your punchline being the strongest line that seals your argument.

6. 4/4 Structure

RAP often follows a 4/4 time signature, where each bar is a set of four beats (or four quarters of a measure). A bar consists of one line of your verse. There are different ways to structure your rhymes—some common patterns include:

- A A A A: All lines rhyme with each other.
- A A B B: The first two lines rhyme, and the last two rhyme with each other.
- A B A B: Alternating rhymes in a natural flow.

Example of an A A A A pattern:

A: "Today I wanna talk about my house"

A: "'Bout my city, 'bout my race, about the crowds"

A: "Where the money is not enough, there is no doubt"

A: "But my people's rising up towards the clouds."
(Pony MC)

Example of an A A B B pattern:

A: "Today I want to talk
about my home"

A: "'Bout my city, my
roots, where I roam"

B: "Where money runs
short, of that there's no
doubt"

B: "But my people rise
strong, breaking
through every cloud."
(Zael MC)



7. Finding Your Flow

After you've written your bars, you'll need to find a beat or rhythm to rap to. There are many websites offering free beats. Your *flow* is about aligning your bars with the rhythm, delivering them smoothly while staying on beat. Play with pauses, speed, and phrasing to make your bars cohesive and dynamic. Diction is crucial—speak clearly, breathe properly, and manage your nerves when performing. Gestures and body language will help bring your performance to life. Your bars can also be brought to life with gestures and body language. Practice is key to improvement!

8. Strengthening Your Bars and Flow

To refine your bars and flow, listen to a lot of music, read widely, and stay engaged with your community and the world around you. This broadens your knowledge and strengthens your ability to argue and express your ideas effectively. If you feel inspired, try freestyle rapping—improvised battles where you create bars on the spot, responding to other rappers.

9. Practice in a Cypher

Finally, use these tips to organize a cypher—an informal gathering where members of your collective or community can step up and drop their bars.

We encourage you to rap about topics such as healthy masculinities and social justice... Write some battles where you question gender roles!.





Breaking: use your body to express yourself and break stereotypes.

Breaking is a dance with diverse influences, ranging from artistic dance to martial arts. Its fundamentals are divided into four categories:

“ Toprock, upright movements that engage the entire body; footwork, movements on the ground at different levels; powermoves, which require skill, technique, balance, and coordination and usually catch the most attention from the audience; and finally, freezes, which often end a set but can also be used mid-performance to structure the dance, as if posing for a photograph while marking a specific beat (rhythm)

(Enamorado, et. al., 2024).

”

Men who practice breaking are called Bboys, and women Bgirls. It is worth noting that breaking battle categories for women are very recent, women only began competing professionally in international competitions in 2017. WZNH recognizes that sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes often hinder girls and young women from getting involved in this dance. However, they aim to highlight gender-related issues so that their community can become more inclusive and gender-equal within hip-hop culture.



How Can Breaking Help Us Generate Healthy Masculinities?

Breaking, or breakdancing, offers a powerful way to challenge and reshape traditional ideas of masculinity. Often, masculine stereotypes emphasize strength and toughness. Breaking, however, encourages us to express ourselves through our bodies in more creative, harmonious ways that avoid aggression or physical confrontation. By using our bodies in fluid and artistic movements, we can connect with different aspects of ourselves, fostering emotional expression and creativity. In a breaking battle, the goal is to convey emotions and ideas without physical contact with others, offering a peaceful and expressive outlet for conflict, particularly in neighborhoods and communities.

In partnership with WZNH, we are sharing a basic tutorial on key movements to help you get started:



1. Find Your Beats

Pick music that resonates with you—this could be from genres like Latin breaks, funk, breakbeat, rap, or others. Play it through speakers and feel the rhythm.

2. Warm-Up and Self-Care

Preparing your body for movement is essential. Stretching helps to relax your muscles and prevent injury. It's equally important to cool down after dancing. Taking care of your body is a form of practicing healthy masculinity—challenging the stereotype that men don't care about their health.

3. Adapt to the Rhythm and Space

Start by marking the rhythm with your head (this is called rocking), and gradually work your way through your shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees, allowing your whole body to move with the music. Stay loose and let the music guide you. Pay attention to the structure of the music and your surroundings. Knowing the rhythm and understanding the space you're in will help you move more fluidly. You can also walk to the rhythm to explore the space, engaging with other dancers.

4. First Breaking Step: Cross Over Indian Step

Begin standing. Step forward with your left foot and return it. With a circular movement, bring your right foot forward, then return your left foot. Once your right foot hits the ground, lift the left foot back. Continue this circular motion, swinging your right foot forward, then returning to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.

➤ WATCH TUTORIAL

5. Hooks

Start in a squat with a straight back and your feet on tiptoes. Extend your right foot and place your right hand on the floor. Hook your right leg behind your left, place your left hand beside your right hand, and return to the initial position. Repeat on the left side.

➤ WATCH TUTORIAL

6. One Step

Begin in a footwork squat with a straight back and feet on tiptoes. Place your right hand behind you for support. Extend your right leg, then place your left hand on the right side as your right leg swings backward. Repeat on the other side.



7. Shoulder Freeze

Lower your right knee to the ground while keeping your left knee raised. Place both hands on the floor to the right side, lower your head to the ground, and then lower your right shoulder. Swing your left foot back, and with a push from your hand and shoulder, lift both feet above your head.

[↗ WATCH TUTORIAL](#)

8. Up Rocking

A standing dance style with three variations:

- **Straight Drops:** Jump up, cross your arms, and step forward, opening your arms before crossing them again. Contract your hips and bend into a squat, then jump again. Repeat on the other side.
- **Shuffle Drops:** Similar to straight drops, but with foot variations and additional jumping steps forward and backward.
- **Jerk with the Fold:** Cross one foot in front of the other, bend your knees, and touch the floor with both hands.

[↗ WATCH TUTORIAL](#)

9. Advanced Moves

For those looking to advance, check out WZNH's intermediate-level tutorials:

- Powermoves like the Swipe:

[↗ WATCH TUTORIAL](#)

- Go Down movements:

[↗ WATCH TUTORIAL](#)

- Practice the Front Jump Switch:

[↗ WATCH TUTORIAL](#)

10. End with Stretching

After dancing, take time to stretch and cool down your muscles.

We invite you and your community, organization, or collective to learn as many breaking steps as you can and create a cypher (a circle where everyone dances together). You'll experience how expressing yourself through movement can build connections and heal old wounds.



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ACTIVITY 4:

Building Alliances for Working on Healthy Masculinities in a Network

The *Red de Masculinidades por la Igualdad de Género* (Network of Masculinities for Gender Equality, REDMAS) is a coordinating body that brings together 20 Nicaraguan organizations that carry out a wide variety of work on gender and masculinities with different individuals and communities throughout the country.

In this Toolkit, we highlight the promotion REDMAS has undertaken to create collective spaces and networks of collaboration between organizations that aim to generate reflection and analysis on patriarchal masculinity, sexist attitudes, gender roles, and relationships among children and youth, in order to build alternatives grounded in non-violence, justice, and equity in the development of their communities.

Here are some of the benefits of building alliances between organizations that work on gender issues, masculinities, and human rights:

- They help garner more attention from the government, media, and the general public in order to develop programs and/or projects aimed at positively influencing men's behaviors (such as changing traditional views on fatherhood, for instance) and eliminating various forms of violence in society.
- They allow for feedback among organizations and offer different points of view and approaches to the same issue.
- They strengthen proposed programs and activities by ensuring there are more people to sustain them.
- They improve the effectiveness and reach of efforts to engage men in healthy masculinity practices and in the prevention of gender-based violence.



Together with REDMAS, we share an exercise for building alliances among organizations.



Remember that there are no limits to forming them, thanks to the virtual world!

These alliances may include local, national, regional, and international organizations, as well as diverse groups from civil society, the private sector, and government. It is also important to keep in mind that borders are social constructs which, through organization and collective action, we can politically dismantle in many ways..

1. First, it's essential to be very clear about why we need to create alliances in terms of working on healthy masculinities and a gender perspective: What is the goal of this alliance, and what are we seeking to promote together?
2. Creating new alliances is a long-term process that should not be taken lightly. Initially, it is important to explore feelings and generate discussions about the possibility of forming them. Let's start by reflecting on the creation of new alliances:

“ How do you and/or your organization feel about working in alliance with other organizations? What could the benefits be? What could the challenges be? Have you ever imagined working with people you've never seen as allies before? How would you feel working with them? How is our group perceived by other organizations? Could these perceptions be a barrier to collaboration? ”

(REDMAS, 2013).



Asking these types of questions will help identify our expectations, benefits, and barriers regarding the creation of new alliances and work networks, as well as develop strategies based on our answers.

3. Review examples of successful alliances in other historical moments or even in different regions in order to learn from them:

“ How did they work to break down barriers in the construction of new alliances and involve men and boys? What achievements did these alliances reach? What challenges did they have to overcome? ”

(REDMAS, 2013).

4. The next step is to identify potential allies. To do this, we suggest drafting the following in five columns:

“ Potential allies	Benefits and reasons for working together	Barriers to working together	Resources and ideas for overcoming barriers	How working with this ally may or may not align with our priorities and strengths ”
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(REDMAS, 2013).

It's important to note that we should also consider potential allies in spaces that may not be as common for example, organizations that work with marginalized groups such as migrants, organizations that offer services generally appealing to men such as sports associations, or even organizations that influence a large number of men like labor or trade unions.

5. Once the table with the five columns is complete, the group should categorize the potential allies as A, B, or C:
 - A. High potential for alliance with several advantages to working together.
 - B. An organization with good potential, but success is not guaranteed.
 - C. An organization that may offer benefits but has more barriers to making the alliance successful.



6. Develop an action plan that will initially focus on the A-list, and ask the following questions: Are there specific initiatives, campaigns, events, or community issues through which we can approach this organization? Do we want to develop independent initiatives or attempt to form a coalition? (Note that your organization will need to meet separately with each group.) How can we get involved in this initiative and share the information? Who will be in charge of preparing a proposal or making the first contact?. These questions can also be repeated for the B-list group if considered appropriate.

For REDMAS, building these types of networks is very important because it allows us to take another step forward in the construction of a just society that integrates and promotes new models of masculinities with children and youth.

Networks of organizations enable us to imagine and create equitable gender and generational relationships where human rights and diversity are respected. where human rights and diversity are respected.



Building networks fosters solidarity and shared responsibility among everyone!



ACTIVITY 5:

Letter Writing..

The organization *Young Artists for Social Justice*, from Guatemala shares with us an activity intended to provide a kind of closure after everything that has been learned and worked on in this Toolkit. This exercise is divided into 3 stages: the trigger questions for writing, the act of writing itself, and the metaphorical performance.

MOMENT 1

Trigger questions: The person writing can choose two or more trigger questions to begin their letter.

1. How do you feel after reading and reflecting on concepts such as patriarchal masculinities and violence?
2. What concept, analysis, and/or reflection impacted you the most?
3. What emotions have you felt?
4. How do you act toward other people?
5. How do you practice your masculinity with others?
6. How do you practice your masculinity with yourself?
7. What would you change, did you change, or will you change as a result of these reflections and learnings?
8. What are you willing to change and what not, and why?
9. Based on the analysis and reflection on masculinities, what actions did you identify in yourself that you don't like?
10. What things impacted you after the different reflections and activities?



MOMENT 2

Writing

The writing of the letter also aims, if possible, to identify a situation that the person finds conflicting and that is in some way related to the topic of masculinities. Upon choosing the situation, they should write about it in order to release their anger and frustrations in writing, narrate what is happening and write about how they would like the problem to be resolved.



MOMENT 3

Metaphorical performance

Based on what was written in the letter, each person must perform in front of others, attempting to describe what they wrote, but without words, only using their body. They do not have to describe the situations exactly if they don't want to; they can do it metaphorically, that is, through a dance or using their body in whatever way they want and are able to.

At the end of this exercise, each person in the plenary can share how they felt while watching the performances of the other participants. Writing activities foster creativity and make it possible to put into words the plans that children and youth have for building new possible worlds. This exercise revolutionizes the groups and communities we work with, as it involves putting in writing the desires that can soon be transformed into actions toward the construction of healthy and diverse masculinities.

Through all these practices and activities, children and youth learn tools that challenge





stereotypes and the teachings associated with patriarchal masculinity. They also foster the development of change agents who can bring these new ideas into their communities and families, generating a domino effect that can eventually extinguish the fire in the jungle, the fire of patriarchal masculinity that Yutsil so strongly seeks to stop. **Fostering these types of actions in communities with children and youth is (Re)volutionary, to the extent that it allows for free action, reflection, critical thinking, and creativity in all its forms.**



And you... What are you doing to promote gender justice in your family, at school, with your friends, and in your community?



Closing Remarks.



We've reached the end of *Tenderness as a Horizon: A Toolkit for the Promotion of Healthy and Diverse Masculinities with Boys and Youth from Mesoamerica*.

We are deeply grateful for the journey you've undertaken—through reading, reflection, and practice, both individually and collectively—on the many themes explored in this document.

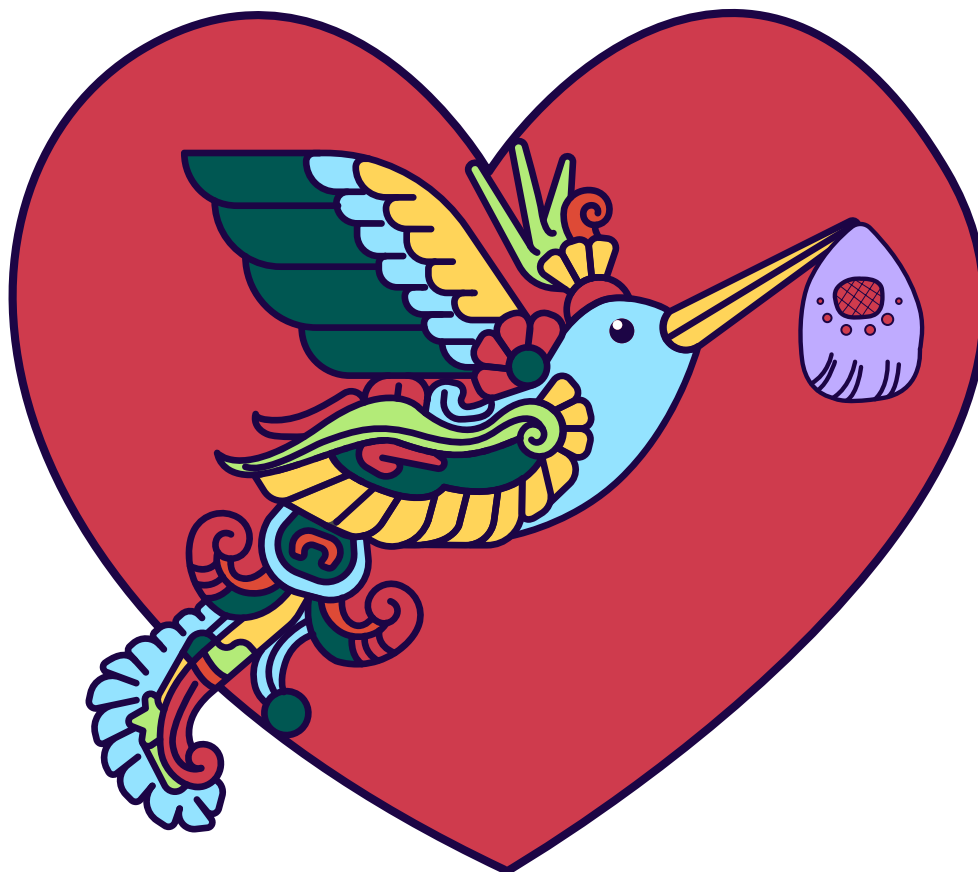
Like the hummingbird in the forest that carried drops of water in its beak to help extinguish a great fire, we know that you, your friends, your family, and your community are taking meaningful steps to challenge and transform patriarchal masculinity, which causes so much harm around the world. We recognize that a few drops of water cannot put out the fire alone. But if we spread critical and creative thinking, grounded in collective and communal efforts to reshape what it means to be a man, we are confident that step by step, we can transform our society into one where tenderness, mutual care, active listening, equality, and social justice flourish. The formation of promoters of healthy and diverse masculinities from these teachings becomes a flowing stream—one capable of bringing more change than we can yet imagine.

This Toolkit is not the only path toward building healthier, more inclusive masculinities; it is just one starting point among many. Take from it what is useful to you—based on your needs, your context—and feel free to adapt and transform it as needed.

This work is the result of the collective creativity and collaboration of many individuals and groups from across Mesoamerica. It is a living, evolving resource—shaped by the shifting social, political, and cultural realities we face. We invite you to continue this co-creation with your organization and community. Dare to imagine, experiment, and build new ways of being and relating.



Like **Yutsil**, we can become more heart than body—we can fly backward to learn from our histories, and we can carry in our voices the ideas and dreams that build, together, other possible worlds.





ANNEX:

International and Regional Regulatory Framework on Gender Justice and Masculinities.

Patriarchal masculinity does not prevail solely through individual and local thoughts and practices—patriarchal violence is fueled by States and various public policies that influence the economy, education, and culture. This is what we call the “politics of masculinity”; this policy is constantly renewed and reinvented, resisting regulation by different laws (Connell, 2003; Aguayo, 2020).

We can find the politics of masculinity in advertising, media, and various cultural products, but also in public policies that reinforce gender roles and mandates. In Latin America, for example, most policies on family and caregiving place women at the center of caregiving responsibilities and continue to portray men as those who must provide and sell their labor power (Aguayo, 2020). Policies on sexual and reproductive health in Latin America are also, for the most part, directed toward women, which undermines male awareness and responsibility regarding reproduction and care in terms of sexuality and health (Ramírez, 2020).

Broadly speaking, the topic of masculinity has been addressed little in international regulatory frameworks. However, it is important to consider the various declarations and conventions that have been made regarding the elimination of violence against women, as well as those related to gender justice. While their titles may not explicitly refer to healthy masculinities, addressing the specific issue of gender-based violence opens the possibility of working on masculinities that are different from patriarchal ones, based on alternative conceptions of gender roles, equality, and justice.

Here, we present some regulatory frameworks and international treaties that encompass the issue of gender justice:

- **Commission on the Status of Women (1946):** the first international initiative seeking to generate an agenda for equality and non-discrimination against women.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979):** an international legal instrument that recognizes discrimination based on sex and gender, and highlights the need for equal human rights and respect for women’s human dignity. It has been ratified by 90% of countries worldwide and sets out state obligations to eliminate discrimination and achieve substantive equality. This convention includes



men and states that it is essential to “modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women” to eliminate gender bias and sexist practices (United Nations, 1979).

- **International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994):** highlights the need for shared male responsibility in caregiving, domestic work, and family life, and advocates for the inclusion of men in gender equality public policies, given their key role in most spheres of social life.
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):** emphasized that the participation of men in all areas of caregiving and sexual and reproductive health is necessary to ensure equality.
- **Rio de Janeiro Declaration (2009):** included the topic of involving men and boys in achieving gender equality, recognizing them as allies.
- **Delhi Declaration (2014):** approved five guidelines to close gender gaps, including men in topics of caregiving, public policies, gender-based violence prevention, and sexual and reproductive rights.
- **Goal 5 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** stresses the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, proposing boys, youth, and men as allies in the fight against gender discrimination.
- At the regional level, several specific treaties and strategies can be mentioned:
- **Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Belém do Pará Convention, 1994):** ratified by 32 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, it establishes the right to live free of physical, sexual, and psychological violence in domestic, community, and workplace settings. It falls under the Inter-American human rights protection mechanisms and explicitly states that violence against women is a crime that must be punished (CNDH, 2013).
- **Montevideo Strategy (2016):** framed within the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, it seeks the implementation of a regional gender agenda. This is a political-technical instrument for the implementation of public policies that guarantee women’s human rights and autonomy (ECLAC, 2017).

Thanks to feminist and sexual diversity struggles, these and many other international conventions and treaties against violence and for gender justice have been implemented, achieving significant legal advancements. However,



institutional responses to various forms of patriarchal violence remain slow and ineffective in ensuring protection and equality.

It is worth noting that children, youth, and masculinities are not usually deeply included in some of these treaties, leaving a gap in terms of possible public policies that account for intersectionality in constructing healthy masculinities and overcoming stereotypes.

For all these reasons, we must continue advocating for the development of laws, treaties, and public policies that support gender justice for all.



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