



THE
COUNCIL
FOR BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

Living a Legacy: A Rite of Passage



**10-WEEK FACILITATOR
ACTIVITY GUIDE**

For Ages 13-18

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Written: 12/06, Revised 11/09



Week Five Theme: UNLOCKING THE CODE

ACTIVITY: Boys Boxed In

MATERIALS: Masking tape, flip chart paper, easel, markers

PURPOSE

- To explore the boy/manhood “code” - the unwritten expectations of what it means to be a man
- To provide council members an opportunity to share their experiences of growing up male in society
- To provide council members a framework for questioning and challenging male societal expectations

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

- 1 Choose a Warm-Up Activity from the tabbed section of this guide.
- 2 Use the masking tape to create a 6ft. by 6ft. square box on the floor. The box may be larger or smaller depending on the number of boys in the council.

Harvard psychologist, Dr. William Pollack coined the term boy “code” to describe the messages boys get from home, school, and society in general. Examples of the unwritten rules of the code include: big boys don’t cry, be a man (strong, independent,) it isn’t cool to excel in school, keep a lid on emotions, dominate and control (often through violence and aggression,) see women as sexual objects, show no fear and excel at sports and indulge in sexual exploits you’ve never had. The code becomes so restrictive, it can put boys in a gender straitjacket and can lead to an insincere life or a “double life” that boys are forced to live. The outcomes of the code are often bullying, bad grades, delinquency, sexual violence, and low self-worth.



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OPENING RITUAL

Open with your chosen ritual that marks the beginning of your council. The Opening Ritual invites participants into the unique space and time of the Council.



THEME INTRODUCTION

Introduce the “theme” of the week. Your comments should be brief and to the point. Allow some time for questions and answers but leave the detailed discussion for later.

Review the council guidelines.



WARM-UP ACTIVITY

(Choose from tabbed section.)



CHECK-IN

“Check-In” is a time for the boys to check in with the group and express feelings, successes, and challenges of the past week. Using the talking piece, go around the group, have each boy take one or more minutes to speak to what is on his mind.



ACTIVITY

Boys Boxed In

Introduction: Begin the activity by facilitating a brainstorming session and record the responses on a flip chart or board. Ask:

- “What have we been taught about what it takes to be a man?”
- “What are some of the characteristics?”

If the group is having trouble coming up with responses, pose other questions such as:

- “If there were rules to being a boy or a man, what would they be?” or
- “How are boys/men viewed in/by society?”

Allow for a brief discussion on the questions and responses.

Directions for Activity:

- 1 Instruct the members to stand up and form a circle or stand on the outside of the box on the floor. They should stand at least 3-4 feet away from the box.
- 2 Say:
 - “I am about to read a series of statements to the entire group that some boys/men experience.



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- “If you agree or have experienced the situation described in the statements, you should physically take a step “into” the box and remain for a few seconds until you are asked to step out.
 - “This is a silent and serious activity. Time for questions and processing the activity will be afforded afterwards.”
- 3 Begin reading the following statements to the group. (Your tone and demeanor should be serious and concerning). If the boys relate to the statement and step into the box, have them remain there for about five seconds and then ask them to step out before reading the next statement.
- 4 Start by saying: “Please step into the box if you have ever...
- a. *Been late for something important*
 - b. *Thought you were not athletic enough*
 - c. *Thought you were not tough enough*
 - d. *Worked out or took supplements like creatine to make yourself look tougher*
 - e. *Hit or hurt another person to prove you were tough*
 - f. *Had a problem or were in pain, but you kept it to yourself*
 - g. *Been called a wimp, queer, gay or a fag*
 - h. *Been told not to cry*
 - i. *Been hit to make you stop crying*
 - j. *Been told to ‘man up or ‘take it like a man’*
 - k. *Seen a grown man you looked up to hit or emotionally brutalize a woman*
 - l. *Had a grown man you looked up to humiliate or hurt you*
 - m. *Pressured a girl into saying ‘yes’ even though you knew she wanted to say ‘no’*
 - n. *Been ashamed because you were part of a group that disrespected another boy or girl*
 - o. *Feel like people, including parents and friends, don’t really know the real you”*
- 5 Instruct the members, while still standing around the box, to take a moment to reflect on the activity and their personal experiences. Then, have members return to their seats in the council.



REFLECTION

This portion of the activity should focus on allowing members to react to the activity and share their personal experiences and comments. Ask the following questions to help guide the discussion:

- How are you feeling right now?
- What are your reactions to the activity? To the statements?



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- How have these experiences (described in the statements) shaped your life?
- Does this activity (and the statements) really represent what it is like to be a boy and the things you have to face? Why/why not? Please share your experiences.

Introduce the concept of the boy/manhood “code.” Most likely, the boys will have talked about it but have not named it. You may want to call attention to some of the things they put down at the beginning of the activity on the flip chart to help them identify the rules or characteristics of the code. Circle them if needed. To help them explore the code a bit more, ask the following questions:

- Why do you think the activity used a box? What is the metaphor between the box and boys/men? What is the point of having you step in and out of it?
- What are some other “rules” of being a boy/man?
- How does the code affect boys/men’s lives?
- How do boys enforce the code upon other boys?
- Are there some positive things about the code?
- Where did the code come from? Who created it? Why does it continue to exist?
- What can we do to “unlock” or challenge the code? (Brainstorm a list of pro-active things that the members can do individually and collectively.)

Important Unit Points to Cover:

- Depending on the age and maturity of the boys, members will have experienced the code at different levels and intensity. Some may be better than others at articulating their experience. It may be important for the facilitator to help members connect their experiences to rules of the code.
- For some, the code may be a means of survival. They have been raised in the code by their parents, family and peers. It is important to respect this while also dissecting it and allowing for the member to draw their own conclusions about what they have been taught.
- The box is used in the activity as a metaphor for showing how boys/men are “trapped” or “boxed-in” when it comes to the code. The code dictates to boys a narrow view of who they can be, what type of attitudes or behaviors they have, and what it means to be a man. Ask the question to the group, “Are boys boxed in?” Boys face pressure to adhere to the code that often goes unspoken about or unrecognized. Many boys find it extremely hard to act or think outside of the box, i.e., being their own person or going against the code, because of fear of ridicule and harassment.



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- A great point of dialogue is the question of whether or not there are positive aspects of the code. Some say that acts of courage, valor, and things like “never leave a man behind” and putting one’s pain aside for the benefit of others or the “team” are all parts of the code which have provided society many positive benefits. These aspects can be part of the healthy development of boys when they are taught in a meaningful way and in a supportive environment. For example, use the “never leave a man behind” concept and translate it: challenge boys to think about boys (or girls) who sit by themselves in the cafeteria, are picked on or don’t seem to fit in or who are the last ones to get chosen on the field. How can boys “never leave a man behind” by sitting with those kids who are alone, sticking up for the “unpopular” kids, or making sure everyone is included in the game? Be mindful still that placing boys in a “box” can deny them of being individuals no matter if the expectations or characteristics are positive.
- The following question may arise by the end of the session, “**What then makes a man?**” This session does not go deeply into providing the answers. However, the members may come to their own definition within the session. If appropriate, the facilitator may do a brief brainstorming session on this question. It may help to close the session. However, it is the goal of the curriculum that by the end of the ten sessions, the members will have crafted a true vision for themselves and thus will have ultimately answered the question of what it means to be a man.



CLOSING RITUAL

Bring the council together for your closing ritual.