

The Resource Center Newsletter

In honor of Mother's Day, we would like to share Sue Ryan's blog for the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence, originally printed May 2019.

Honoring Mothers through the Encouragement of Healthy Gender Roles

During the month of May, we celebrate Mother's Day, acknowledging our mothers and all they give each day. Mother's Day is a reminder of the importance of family and healthy relationships. Each family is unique, but the common hope is love.

Societal and community definitions of gender roles place enormous expectations on mothers: to be nurturing, self-sacrificing, and relentlessly giving. Sometimes the actual mother gets lost in these expectations. Mothers are expected to give, even at the cost of their own health and peace. Despite the personal cost, most mothers do just that: give and give. It is this generosity of spirit that we celebrate on Mother's Day.

As we recognize mothers, it is important to note the weight of unforgiving gender roles and the impact that they have on our families and relationships. Unhealthy gender roles create inequitable and harmful relationships. Ideas regarding the role of women as submissive to men, the societal privilege men experience which is best exemplified in inequities in pay, the often accepted belief that women are less than men, and, within a family, must obey men, all serve to reinforce harmful gender roles and toxic masculinity.

Abuse within a relationship arises from one partner's attempt to have power and control over another. The tactics used to gain control can include emotional and psychological abuse, financial control, threats, and physical and sexual assaults. Society, community, and family expectations that mothers should be submissive to the male in the home only serve to undermine the family and encourage an abuser's efforts to gain power and control over another through dehumanizing and violent tactics.

Unhealthy beliefs regarding gender roles can and do change. We can address them in schools, churches, work, and families, and in doing so undermine the roots of family violence and foster healthy relationships. This societal change requires a comprehensive commitment and an ever-vigilance to challenge policies and practices that may encourage harmful views of women and mothers. Our efforts to encourage healthy masculinity and equitable gender roles strengthen our families and empowers our children and become our greatest gift to our mothers and the next generation of mothers.

Sue Ryan is the executive director of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

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