

Dialogue with Boys

A reflection on International Women's Day 2022 by

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For the last three years, I have come to each of Ashram's functions with an expectation to learn, not only from the eldest in the crowd but from the youngest too. There's something about 'Dialogue with boys' that always puts a smile on my face and tears in my eyes at the same time because of the clarity of thoughts that the children of the next generation have. It gives me hope for a better tomorrow as I'm always clinging to that when I'm afraid of the ways of reality around me. *The forum started with two questions,*

How do we create a society without violence?

What do you think is today's scenario of equality? Do you think the world is accepting that women are equal to men?

And it began, each child coming up with personal experiences, reflections, and thoughts as answers to these questions. 'It begins at home,' I heard a 13-year-old kid say. 'It has to start at home. I don't think there should be different household chores for women and men. நாங்க க்ளீன் பண்ணினா, க்ளீன் ஆகாதா? (Would the room not become clean if we (men) clean it?)' and I looked at him in awe, hoping that the men were listening, the men of all ages.

Another tiny voice from the panel spoke up, answering the second question, 'It's there. Today women are equal to men. My brother and I do the same household chores.' with an innocence that if it's happening at her place, it's happening in the world too.

Amidst the many thoughts, opinions, and reflections came another voice from the panel reminding us that we have to look at both sides of the coin. Pavithran, 15, added as a concluding statement, 'I think we're stuck with stereotypes. Is the actual reality of equality as we see it? The thought that men are physically strong and women are more intelligent are playing a huge role in the kinds of jobs they get or don't get. I think that's a myth. We should not be stuck with the old school understanding of men are physically strong and women are emotionally strong. We wouldn't have a Mary Kom or a Viswanathan Anand if they both thought that way about themselves.'

Children of the next generation are reminding us that we as adults need to open our minds to changes, reflect on what's happening around us and act! *The world is watching, the children are watching, and we can do better than this.*



In March 2018, 'Dialogue with Boys' was developed against the backdrop of growing violence against women and girls in India. The International Centre for Child and Public Health (ICPH), the Indian Academy of Paediatrics (IAP) & Shanti Ashram, using an approach based on intergenerational dialogue and centered on the active participation of boys to challenge gender-based violence, started the 'Dialogue with BOYS'.

The programme is science informed. Experienced pediatricians educate and empower the boys with updated knowledge on adolescence, the physiology of growing up and the physical and the emotional changes that mark this critical period of development. The programme allows for a deep reflection on the root causes of inequality and violence. It aims at mobilizing boys to end gender-based violence in their families and within their communities.

Over 28 sessions and 3072 adolescent boys representing gen-next have joined us in this dialogue since 2018 and shared their opinions on

Shaping of societal values | Burden of socialization | Gender parity | Violence against girls
How they visualize their collective role in
| Pressing for Progress |



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