

Hugh Galligan: It is now my pleasure to introduce to you our keynote speaker and my friend, Dr. Eli Newberger. Dr. Newberger has dedicated his life's work to children and families. He's a teacher at Harvard Medical School and founder of the Child Protection Team and Family Development Program at Children's Hospital in Boston. He has over thirty years of experience working on issues related to the strengths and resilience of the parent-child relationship.

Additionally, I'd like to add I know Eli personally in three contexts: one, through his work with the For Fathering Board of The Medical Foundation in Boston; two, with his wonderful book about healthy child development and, in particular around boys, *The Men They Will Become*; and the third context is that, many of you perhaps don't know, he is a consummate jazz musician, and I've had the opportunity and pleasure to attend several of his concerts.

And whether we're talking about his day job or his night job, Eli approaches everything with commitment, talent, and passion. So, my friends, let's give Dr. Eli Newberger a warm welcome. (Applause)

Eli H. Newberger, M.D.: Thanks, Hugh. That's very gracious and I appreciate it. I'm a delighted participant in this meeting this morning. Windy, Hugh, and their colleagues are to be congratulated on having attracted so many men to participate in this session. (Applause) I've given talks at a number of conferences sponsored by Project Head Start and, in general, it's women whom one speaks to. This is a real accomplishment, and a lot of what I say is going to be, perhaps, of interest, especially to the men.

My task this morning is to talk to you about the characters of boys and men and what we can do to strengthen them and the many roles that fathers do play and can play. There are three parts to the talk. First, I'm going to talk about our natures, how we're wired, how our bodies respond to the hormones that flow through our veins. Second, I'm going to talk to you about character, and I'm going to tell you one particularly rich story involving a father and a stepfather.

It contrasts roles and brings out vividly certain key issues and concerns for the agenda of this conference and for all of us as individuals, both in our personal lives and our professional lives. And third, I'm going to close with the five most important things that I think we can do to strengthen the characters of boys and men and to improve their performance as fathers – fathers-to-be, fathers in the present day. So I'm going to start with a little bit of biology – our natures.

And I want to call to the attention of the guys in this room of their feelings on walking into this room and looking at the other guys. Just think about it. You walk into the room, some of you are with colleagues and friends, but you see a lot of other guys that you've never seen before. And a lot of us, when this happens to us, see those other guys and we wonder, “Can I take those other guys? (Laughter) Or am I going to be vulnerable to being physically subordinated, put down by them?” The women here laughed. Can we beasts really be like this? What's going on?

The women in this room, you walk in and look around at the other women in the room. Some of you are sitting with friends and colleagues. Generally speaking, women walk in a room, and they're not wondering about whether they can take the other women in a personal situation of combat. What are your reflections as you look and see those other women? Well, I don't know about you – and I'm not a woman, so who am I to say? – but women, generally speaking, in such situations look around and wonder whether or not they're going to be received in a friendly way.

Will there be relationships for them or will they possibly be not welcomed? These are the concerns, generally, for women walking into an odd and unusual environment like this. My wife, Carolyn, who, as Hugh knows, is a very witty child psychologist who, like me, has dedicated her life to the improvement of parent-child relationships and the protection and care of children, sometimes teaches with me.

Carolyn's heard me say this a time or two, and she has no hesitancy about speaking up, and said, “When I walk into the room, I wonder if those other women are going to be thinner than me,” which is always an interesting and lively concern, and both of us have had struggles with our weight over the years.

Anyway, why do I bring this up? It's because we ignore our natures at our peril. And what's going on with us guys?

Well, all of us males, beginning in early childhood, are concerned to locate ourselves in the pecking order, or the social dominance hierarchy as students of evolutionary biology would put it. We are wired to protect ourselves and the people who depend on us from the intrusions of other men. That's what goes into this, and our bodies with the hormones, especially testosterone, and the way our brains are constructed give us certain particular behavioral tendencies.

Women, by contrast, also as a result of generations and generations of evolutionary adaptation, are wired to form and sustain relationships in order that they can protect and give care to the people, especially kids, who uniquely will depend on them. I want to be clear. When we start talking about character, we're talking about choice, and wired as we are, that doesn't mean that all of our actions are determined by our biology. Now, let's talk a little bit about what character is, and I want to get to the second part of my lecture.

Character expresses itself. It's manifested at that moral nexus where we need to reconcile our desires, our impulses, against the needs and the rights of other people. This is what character means. And we have to take a number of things into consideration when we make these choices, but for many men they don't see – we don't see as individuals – that life is an unfolding series of choices. This last week, we've seen an impressive celebration of the life of Ronald Reagan, who was revered for his archetypically manly qualities.

It's a very interesting, strange coincidence that of the millions of pictures that have been taken of Ronald Reagan over the years, in this last week both Time and Newsweek selected the same photograph of Reagan for the cover, and it was Reagan wearing a cowboy hat, a wonderful fine smile – gracious, welcoming, mature, but very manly. But there were things about Reagan's very careful styling of himself as a national leader which conveyed a message that was also archetypically male.

I don't know if anyone here may remember, but at the time when he challenged Muammar Qadhafi in Libya, he paraphrased another actor, Clint Eastwood, and he challenged Qadhafi. “Make my day,” is what he said, or else he was going to bomb him. Well, Qadhafi gave him the excuse, and Reagan did exactly what he felt he should do. The problem is that for many men, we see that it's manly to do what you have to do, and we don't always think of life as an unfolding series of choices.

Now, I signed the contract to write my book on boys' and men's character in the summer of 1997, and I was immediately cautioned by the editor of the publishing house that brought it out, Perseus Books, who actually I've known for years because she edits my colleague, Berry Brazelton. And I absolutely was delighted in our hotel last night – I gather this is in all of your hotels – that there's a channel that's running wonderful child development videos and a lot of them include my colleague, Berry.

Anyway, Merloyd Lawrence, the editor, said to me, “I know what you've done over the years. We know that for the last 26 years you've been immersed in working on child abuse and domestic violence.” She said, “This book can't be about abuse and violence. You're going to have to get out of the hospital and find real live people with - have real live boys encountering the challenges of life in the modern world. We want inspirational stories.” Well, she didn't really have to tell me that, but that was an important encouragement.

So I networked with family and friends and friends of friends and family, and many of my professional colleagues were helpful. And a wonderful elementary school principal in one of the western suburbs was willing to make contact with a family where there was a fifteen-year-old boy who she said was a terrific kid to talk to, a boy with a wonderful emerging sense of character, she said. And so on a cold winter's day ten months later, after signing this contract, I found myself walking with my tape recorder in hand up to a modest home in one of the western suburbs of Boston.

And I was expecting to meet at the door on this Saturday morning this fifteen-year-old and perhaps one of his parents. The door opened and here was the whole family, all five of them: the mother, who looked as if she was from Southeast Asia; the father who looked like a white middle-class guy, like me; and three interracial children – this fifteen-year-old, whom I call Pascal to preserve his confidentiality, and his two younger siblings, a boy, twelve, and a girl, eleven.

And the family invited me into their home. We sat down at the dining room table. I explained what I was about. I said,

“At this point in my project, what I'm exploring is how boys are making choices about moral conflicts,” and I said a little bit about this. And one interesting thing to do is always to listen to what kids have to say, including kids in their preschool years. I want to be absolutely clear about this. Children have original and honest perceptions and these kids sort of tuned into my idea. They thought this was a very good approach, but they all wanted to listen to the interview with Pascal.

I asked if it was OK to tape, and they said it was fine. So I'm reaching over here to pick up a copy of this book because I want to read you the real words of the people in this family as I tell you a story that has many lessons in it about father-child relationships, as well as a story about the strengthening of character in a family that is, in many ways, a family representative of the struggles that many of us face in the present day.

I asked the mother, when we sat down and she said it was OK to turn on the tape recorder, how she and her husband met, and she took pains to tell me that the boy whom I'd come to see, Pascal – that's the name I've given this boy – was the product of an earlier relationship. And this was a woman with a wonderful poetic gift. As she talked, I was happy that the tape recorder was running. And she talked about coming to Boston and studying at Boston University in these words. She said:

"I was like a bird that had never flown before. I was crazy about the freedom. I never neglected my education, but otherwise I tried everything. I met my first husband, a foreign student like me, but from the Balkans, and I had sex for the first time, and it was like Pascal's spirit said, 'Oops, this is what I want, coming in,' and there I was, pregnant from my first sexual experience. I came from a family with very strong values, which included getting married when you were pregnant. So I did, but it was a tempestuous relationship, and Alex and I soon separated.

When Pascal was nine months old, and I was still nursing him, Alex kidnapped Pascal and took him back to his native country." Now, I think you'll agree that this is a remarkable set of disclosures to share with a stranger, even though I was a professional person represented as doing a serious project by the principal of two of her children's school. I listened to this with my jaw dropping – really – because it was so honest, so forthright, and also so clear and specific about her first sexual experience. I could tell that the kids sitting at this table had heard this story before.

They weren't surprised. They knew exactly what she was talking about. And I realized that I was privileged to hear a kind of family myth, not that there was anything false about it, but that this was a story that had tremendous resonance to this family's values. And I thought to myself, this really is quite a story, a story about how one must trust one's intimates with information about oneself even if it's shameful or embarrassing.

It's a story of how the people who profess to love you can really hurt you, and we need, all of us, to be vigilant and to stand together against the dangers that can present to any of us, even by someone whom we think that we love. And here, of course, she was referring, I thought as I was thinking about what she was saying, to this incident that she described when she was still nursing Pascal when he was nine months of age, and he kidnapped him back to his home country in the Balkans. Now, I just want to pause here for a second to make sure that you understand what my concern is.

Let me put it as a question to you. Do you think that Alex, Pascal's father, kidnapped that boy from his nursing mother and brought him back to his home country because he so loved the child and he wanted to show the child to his family and friends? Is that the reason that he took that child? No. The answer is no. What was going on? Think about this for a second. Why did he do this?

It was to show this woman, in the most powerful way that he knew, that it was he who held the levers of power in their relationship. This was, if you will, an act of abuse even though it didn't involve any direct physical or sexual assault against this woman. Now, I knew this from all the work that I'd done at Children's Hospital, including ten years before establishing a domestic violence program in my outpatient family clinic that now extends all through Children's Hospital.

But I was very surprised to hear this in the first interview, particularly after being cautioned by my publisher to not make this a book about abuse. I then asked her the question, “How did you get him back?” I suspect that's a question

that's on some of your minds. She said, "The United States Embassy and my father hired the best lawyer." And I asked whether the local authorities had been helpful in repatriating Pascal.

She said, "No, but my father was a military officer and he had some mafia connections." (Laughter) She said she got a telephone call. And she said, "I was asked whether I wanted Alex killed or just hurt." And she said, "I didn't want him hurt at all, and in five weeks I had Pascal back." (Laughter and applause)

Now, that's a great bit of relief, right? That's a wonderful story. But I think it's not inappropriate to mention that we have a big problem in this country with international abductions, very many of them in the setting of controlling behaviors towards the mothers of children, and sometimes it's the torture of the damned for the women to get these kids back. Anyway, she went on to say that she returned to the United States after graduating from BU, after a short interval of a visit with her family, when Pascal was three years old, and she met this man sitting at the table on a blind date.

He fell in love with her, she said, and with Pascal. They married and then had these two other kids who were sitting at the table. And I asked what they did as work, and she said that she worked as a counselor. She got a Master's Degree in counseling at BU. She works as a counselor at one of the Boston colleges, and her husband is a person working at one of the big Boston electronic media companies. They have very busy lives and jobs. And I asked if they had any help in the house in terms of giving care to their kids, and they said, "No, we do it all ourselves."

And I said, "How do you do that? How do you spend time together?" And this is what the stepfather said. He spoke up at that point and said, "It's tough. We pray at five o'clock in the morning, before dawn. I converted to Islam, so we all pray together as a family. That's the one time of day we are always together, from prayers until we leave for school and work. I work very long days, but the children are in after-school programs and sports until Lani gets home to pick them up."

Now, I want to be clear. Of the many stories I could have told you, this particular story, I think, is worth telling now because this is an Islamic family, and Muslim religious beliefs and practices figure not unimportantly in Pascal's emerging sense of character, as you'll see. Now, why do I do this? Why do I feel it's important? Let me put it this way: many of you in this audience have had personal experiences of prejudice based on ethnicity, on religion, on the many attributes of yourselves and of your families.

In this country today, we have a tremendous amount of anti-Muslim prejudice, and I hope that, in some small way, telling this story today will help to cure that for you. (Applause) The relationship between Pascal and his stepfather was cemented when Pascal was five years old. Pascal, seeing how taken I was by his mother's telling of his kidnapping when Pascal was nine months old, said a little later in the interview that he wanted to tell me of a second abduction attempt by his father.

It turns out that the Massachusetts court, as courts everywhere, in the face of divorce, if a father declares an interest in giving care and sustaining a relationship with a child, will do all possible to sustain that. And even though this man had successfully kidnapped Pascal before, he was still given visitation access to Pascal, and it was the mother who was responsible for supervising those visitations. But this is what happened, in Pascal's words, when Pascal was five. Here's what he said.

"We were in the lobby, and the next minute my father was walking out the door with me in his arms, and my dad..." Joe, the name I've given to his stepfather, so he's distinguishing here between his "dad" and his "father" – get it? "... and my dad was like, 'Wait a minute. Where are you going?' I struggled out of my father's arms and ran back into the elevator. My father ran after me but my dad blocked him. My dad was like, 'Give me your best shot,' but my father didn't do anything. Then my mother called the police. I'll never forget that.

From that day on, I knew my dad was going to protect me, so I didn't need to be scared. I used to be scared of robbers and stuff, but after that I wasn't. I was fine after that." Now, this is also very interesting the way he tells the story. A lot of you work with five-year-old kids, and this happened, this abduction attempt happened when Pascal was five. Here he's talking as a fifteen-year-old, but he's almost talking as a five-year-old. This experience looms in his mind –

the emotions and the anxiety and the sense of his dad's being there to protect him – almost as if it would have been when he was five.

He comforts himself by saying three times, “I used to be scared of robbers and stuff but after that I wasn't.” He knew my dad would be there to protect him. “I was fine after that,” he said. So this is really something. It shows very frequently how traumatic experience can resonate forward and affect children in important ways. But what he was saying was that he knew his dad was going to be there for him.

I'm thinking actively, as one has to do in an interview like this, about how all of this prefigures in the ability to make good choices on Pascal's part. I asked him a question, which turned out to be a lucky question, lucky for me as an interviewer. I said to him, “I don't want to put you on the spot, but have you ever faced a situation where you saw violence and the possibility of danger and there was a decision to be made by you with regards to what to do and whether to tell your parents?”

Well, it turned out that there was such a situation. It involved high school wrestling. When Pascal entered the local high school at the age of fourteen, he made varsity in the high school wrestling team. Like his stepfather, Pascal began to wrestle in his early teenage years. He got coaching, including coaching from his stepfather, and he became a varsity player in his freshman year, and this is what he said:

"When I was a freshman wrestler, the captains were great. They didn't believe in freshman initiation. They'd maybe give you a hard time once in awhile but not enough to make kids quit the team. I've never told my parents about this, but the captains this year started freshman initiation again. The juniors and seniors would beat up the freshmen, push them into lockers, turn out the lights, and start to shake the lockers. Kids were quitting the team.

I didn't say anything during practice because I didn't feel it was my place. But after practice, I went to one of the captains and said, 'Our program's not so strong. I don't feel that initiation is a smart thing to do because we're losing kids. They're quitting.' The captain called me names, pussy and stuff, but he didn't do anymore hazing either. But later there was another heated discussion, and I said to him, 'If you want to hurt these kids, then you're going to have to hurt me first.'"

Now, that's a remarkable act of courage, I think you'll agree, for a fifteen-year-old facing a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old co-captain of the wrestling team, and it really gives you the sense that here's a kid who can make some pretty courageous decisions. And his stepfather spoke up at this point and said, "Pascal has some gifts that other students don't have. It's a rarity, for example, for a freshman to make varsity as he did last year. We believe these gifts are given from God because we're a religious family, and that we have to do more.

It's important to take a stand like that, to show courage, to stand up when you see injustice, especially among your own. I'm glad that he does it and I don't even know about it." So this is the first time the stepfather heard that, but he connected it to the family's religious observance. In fact, the struggle against injustice, “especially among your own,” to which the stepfather referred is at the core of the concept of “jihad,” again, part of Islamic observance that has been, if you will, been hijacked by the fundamentalists.

But here you see in this family how important is their faith tradition and how experiences of this kind get interpreted in relation to their beliefs and their values. But I'm thinking, of course, also about Pascal and the unusual nature of his confrontation, taking his life in his hands possibly against this wrestler who was doing very cruel things to the new freshmen wrestlers who were coming onto the team.

And I'm thinking to myself, boy, if you are living in Saddam's Iraq or Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia or Amin's Uganda or Hitler's Germany, you don't take on yourself sticking your neck out in defense of other people and challenging authority unless – and this has been studied – unless you've got a fallback position, unless you've got a line of retreat and can be protected. And so rescuers in a variety of settings have been studied by people who are interested in children's and adults' moral development.

And I was thinking it would be interesting to ask the question to Pascal, and here you will see an important – perhaps

the most important – clue to Pascal's strong emerging character. I asked him the question, “When you challenged the captain, did you have any fallback plan in mind? Would you have told your parents or someone at the school?” And here's what Pascal said – it's simple, but it's enormously revelatory – “If he'd gone against me, I would have told my dad, and we would've gone to see the athletic director or something like that.”

So when Pascal confronted the captain, he knew that his dad – his stepfather – would be there for him. There was no question in his mind that he would be backed up, so he's got the courage to make a fine moral choice because, in his heart, he knows that his stepfather is there. I then changed the subject a little bit in the interview. and I said, “Star athletes are often revered by other kids and they have a tremendous amount of power. If they behave toward others as they did toward the freshman wrestlers that could be dangerous. How did these athletes behave toward girls?” Now, why did I ask that question?

It's pretty obvious, right? We have a national scandal on our hands with athletes who do terrible things to girls and women in high school and college and especially in professional athletics. But because we so prize their athletic accomplishments, we very often sweep these offenses under the rug. And here's what Pascal said: "The captain couldn't stop talking about sex. It's all he can think about. And he'll lie because he doesn't really have a lot of friends. I guess it's normal to have locker room talk about girls, but he would talk about them nonstop.

Some kids thought he was serious, but I didn't take him seriously." Well, I want you to know that I, Eli Newberger, do take it seriously if what Pascal was referring to was salacious talk about girls. Here's a guy who's bullying freshman, who is someone who won't listen to reason with Pascal – Pascal had to challenge him – and this guy is a dangerous character. My point is he has no place being the captain or co-captain of a high school wrestling team. (Applause)

We have a belief that sports build character but, very frequently, sports permit on the field of sport – particularly in contact sports like football and hockey and in wrestling, as we can see here – all kinds of offenses against other human beings by men, legitimized in that setting and also broadcast to boys and men around the country as being the work of these great important role archetypes. So this influences boys and men, I believe, in a really corrupting way. And these people are unelected political leaders in schools. Look at Columbine High School, for example.

We tend to think that tragedy originated with the shooters and their families. But the Kliebold and Harris boys were bullied by the empowered athletes in these schools. They belonged to this marginalized group called the “trench coat mafia,” or whatever they called themselves, but the point is that school permitted, even enabled, the bullying that stimulated such rage in these kids. And I'm going to get to this issue of children's, and boys' especially, exposure to violence and what it does to their character development shortly. That's why I wanted to give emphasis to this particular point.

Anyway, I then learned from the father – from the stepfather, rather – notice how I confuse the words stepfather and father because in this family, the father is present but he's a rather ominous presence for this particular boy. It's the stepfather, if you will, who is the real parental figure in this boy's life. The stepfather spoke up and mentioned that the wrestling team captain dropped out of the high school in his senior year. Now, I knew this particular high school very well because I had consulted there previously, and this is a school which has fine athletics but also an excellent academic program.

For a kid to drop out in the middle of the senior year is a serious thing indeed. Pascal said, “I still respect his parents a lot. His mom was always nice to me and his dad would show me how to improve some of my wrestling moves. You know, constructive criticism. He helped me a lot.” So I said, “It must have been difficult for them when their son dropped out of school.” And Pascal said, “Yeah, but his parents kind of let him do what he wants. They're sort of afraid of him.” And how many of you have heard or seen that kind of thing with parents and kids?

Virtually all of us have – of parents who don't know how to engage with their children and just stand back and often let their children drift away even when the parents are in their lives. The stepfather spoke up, he said: “I know what he's talking about. The wrestling captain's confused about things. The way his parents treat him is not the way we would treat our son. We would expect more of our son. His parents are in some ways too nice.”

He got it wrong there. The wrestling captain's parents weren't too nice. By letting that boy do what he wants and expressing, as Pascal put it, a disengagement from him, perhaps because they were afraid of him, they weren't being parents at all, and this is a big problem, both for mothers and for fathers. I also want to hasten to say that I'm not blaming parents in this. Such are the rigors of the workplace, so onerous often are the demands of productivity, that for very many families, it's everything they can do to keep up with their own lives and there is not much time, not much place.

Certainly our social policies and employment policies do not favor – do not encourage – nearly to the extent that they should, I believe, sustaining and strengthening relationships with one's children. So one needs in the present day, as we think about father involvement – and I'll get to this shortly – as well to be respectful of parents now and all of the burdens on parents in the present day. Now, at the end of this interview, I asked Pascal the question, and I put it this way, I said, “You know, I'm really impressed with your fine character as it's emerging.

You have an impressive ability to make decisions. Where does this come from?” Now, a lot of you work with kids and with parents all the time, and you may know, but it's always well to emphasize, that when you want to talk to a kid seriously – or a parent, for that matter, seriously – about any issue where the issue is sensitive or possibly stigmatized, having, say, to do with violence or alcohol and drugs or sexuality, it's always important to sit down with that person – not as many pediatricians do, have the kid sit on the examining table there and they're standing there halfway out the door.

You want to be on the same level as the child or the person and express in your attitude, as well as in the words that you say, your interest in and your ability to hear what they have to say themselves. So I always, with kids, say something positive about them, and in Pascal's case, that's what I did, and here's what Pascal said to me in response. He said, "My parents have taught me how to make my own decisions about what's right and what's wrong. They haven't tried to tell me exactly what to do and what not to do in every situation. I'm actually lucky", Pascal said, "because my parents are there for me.

Some of my friends' parents aren't there for them, so they actually tell me their stuff, and I feel really bad. Their parents aren't there because they're working or because there isn't a relationship or connection between them and their kids. They let things go. It's tough. I feel bad for them. Most of my friends are in that predicament. Some of the parents that are around just don't care. The kids will smoke dope in the house and stuff like that. One kid says his parents don't even know when he does it. If he does get caught, he gets grounded for a week and that's it."

And this is a very painful story to hear but I have to tell you I heard this time and again from high-functioning boys in the course of my interviews searching for the roots of male character. Many parents are only physically present in children's lives, and a lot of kids – boys especially because we males have much less ability than females to form and sustain relationships – many boys are adrift and in need of people who can be there for them. So I want to close this lecture with the five most important things that we can do to strengthen the characters of boys and men and to improve their functioning as fathers.

The first and most important for a child is to have at least one adult in their lives who is crazy about them, who will always be there for them, who will assure them of their worth and of their love, who will place priority on communicating with them, who will advocate for them when necessary. And if you think about it, all of us have at least one such person in our lives, thinking back. But for many of us – think about it – it's not your biological mother or father. For a variety of reasons, they're not always available to us. It can be a grandparent, a foster parent, a teacher.

And here, I'd like to just tell you a little bit about myself. When my sister, who is seven years younger than me, was born, my mother had a very serious postpartum depression, and I remember this vividly – her weeping, her detachment, her disengagement. And when I was sixteen, she had the first of a series of psychiatric hospitalizations. My father always worked two jobs, both to keep the wolf from the door and to distance himself from the pain of his relationship with my mother. I remember this time vividly. I was really quite bereft.

I had to give a great deal of the care for my younger brother and sister, and I often wondered who was there for me. But there was one consistent person in my life at that time. It was my tuba teacher, William Bell, who played with the

New York Philharmonic, who I started to study with when I was fourteen, and Hugh's heard me play. He speaks well of my being a jazz musician. I learned the tuba, in no small part, to reciprocate this guy's interest in me. And he was there for me. I only saw him once a week, but I knew that he admired me and wanted me to be the person that I could become. He was warm and gracious.

He lent me one of his own instruments for three years because my family couldn't afford a good instrument. He was a wonderful and generous man, and he meant tremendously to me. Everyday I see this guy because his picture is right over my computer so, when I go to check my email, there's Bill Bell smiling down at me. It's a wonderful memory. All kids should have such a person but, in many families, neither mothers nor fathers nor stepfathers can provide that.

Often it is us, we professionals, who can step out of the professional role and sustain relationships with kids, and many of you know exactly what I'm talking about. Furthermore, many of us who have kids ourselves – and I suspect most of us do here – know the experience of bringing our children's friends into our families. We need more of that, too. Every child should have an adult in their lives who's crazy about them. Second: boys and men – but it's got to begin, if it can begin, in childhood – need words, words with which to characterize and express emotion.

Too frequently, boys feel that certain emotional expressions are unacceptable. We tease boys, beginning in early infancy, if they cry. You've heard that I've done a lot of work on child abuse. I've seen hundreds of cases of shaken baby syndrome. You may not know that shaken baby syndrome is much more frequent in boy babies than girl babies. Why should that be? Why do people shake babies? Well, actually, we get a fair number of disclosures from parents who do shake babies, and they shake the babies to stop the kids from crying, but it appears that, to adults, boys' crying is more enraging than girls' crying.

And, interestingly, the studies of children's cries don't show any differences in terms of the actual cries themselves between boys and girls. Why am I telling you this? Because we suppress boys' emotional development, and there are certain emotions which we allow men to express and boys to express. And what are those? Well, they have a lot to do with anger and aggression. The softer side of males is very often put down, and this is a problem. So I recommend – and I suspect that most of you have had contact with these books for kids – the Books of Babies – Happy, Sad, Hungry, Sleepy. You know those books.

They're absolutely great. I have a six-year-old grandson – he's a wonderful kid, but he's a little alpha male – and he needs to use his words. And one of the things he loves still is to look at those baby books, and now that he's got a two-year-old sister, it's very interesting because he likes some of the books that are read to her, the books that typically are read to girls which focus on relationships and emotional expressions. Very interesting, indeed.

Anyway, point number three: kids and adults, but children especially – and for the purposes of this discussion, prefiguring where they're going to become as fathers – need protection from exposures to violence. The average American child between the ages of five and fifteen witnesses the killing of over 13,000 persons on television when you figure how much time children spend in front of the tube and what it is that they watch.

Now, if that weren't bad enough, studies of television exposure do indicate a higher propensity toward aggressive behavior and, importantly as well, a higher toleration of aggressive and violent behavior by other children among TV watchers. But the story with video games is, unfortunately, even worse. To the extent that they've been studied – and there's small literature so far – it appears that boys who are exposed to a lot of video games – and this extends, as you know, through adolescence – are very, very much more likely to be aggressive and violent toward others than boys who are not exposed extensively.

The take-home message here is television has got to be limited. I agree with the American Academy of Pediatrics that has recommended no – zero – television for children under the age of two. No television at all. (Applause) And we have to worry about these other media exposures, but as important as the media exposures, there are a couple of things that need to be borne in mind. There are now studies that suggest that once a propensity to aggression begins, it is about as stable a developmental attribute as is intelligence. These are studies done by the Swedish psychologist, Daniel Olweus (O-L-W-E-U-S).

They're quite impressive, and what they suggest is that it's some boys more than others who are vulnerable to, who become almost addicted to, violence on television, violence in the media. So we don't have to worry about every boy, but when you see kids, for example, in a Head Start program, beginning to be aggressive, you have to worry about that media exposure. But what else do you have to worry about? What's the far more corrosive exposure that children have that really militates for the development of aggression and violence toward others, especially in boys.

That is when a boy witnesses violence against his mother. In fact, people in my field feel that the word "witness" is too passive, too insufficiently descriptive. It is better to talk about boys and girls experiencing violence against their mothers. And how do boys feel about this?

I suspect that not a few of you males in this audience have had this exposure and may have a sense of what it signifies for you. I only know this as a clinician and as a student of these phenomena, and I know from my experience that boys have a mix of emotions, of sadness, of anxiety that the person whom they love the most is being assaulted, that the person on whom they depend for their most essential nurturing may be harmed. Rage is an important factor here.

But perhaps the dynamic that really drives these problems is what behavioral scientists call powerlessness. The inability to stop the unacceptable from happening is a dynamic both for boys and for girls, but it operates especially problematically, and in different ways, for boys. When they feel out of control, when they feel unable to protect the person whom they depend on so for their nurturance and care, they recover from that with a need to be masterful, to be powerful, and what do they do?

They very frequently play rough or abusively with others, and very frequently they carry in themselves a need to be dominant, superordinate in relationships. The exposure to domestic violence by boys prefigures dating violence by them in the teen years and abusive behavior when they become adults and importantly, in my view, all of the studies of battering men that focus on histories converge on a virtually universal historical finding and that is battering men have been exposed to their mothers being beaten when they were children.

And I believe this has importantly to do with this powerlessness dynamic. Now, I want to just reflect back to where I began – guys walking in this room this morning, seeing other males, they feel portents of threat in seeing other males – not all the time – for some of us it hardly ever happens at all – but for most of us guys it happens at one or another time. This speaks to our need to be in control. But for men who batter, control is what it's all about. And, of course, that's an important part of Pascal's story. His step - his father's abduction behavior was all not because he loved Pascal.

It was to demonstrate to Lani, Pascal's mother, that he was the guy with the power even after he was no longer part of the intimate family. I think you're getting where I'm going. I want to briefly mention that for females the response to powerlessness is different. Girls who witness – who experience – assaults against their mothers and girls who have been sexually victimized respond differently from boys. For girls, this experience often prefigures future experiences of victimization.

For example, girls who are sexually abused are much more likely to become pregnant in adolescence by boys and men who are much older than they are. In other words, the coercive sex that leads to adolescent pregnancy, particularly among younger teens, may be associated with earlier sexual victimizations. And similarly, with regard to battering relationships, a girl's witnessing her mother's – a girl's experiencing her mother's – abuse may often become a victim herself in her teen years and later.

Two more things. Number four: inductive discipline. I just want to point out here about how Erle Armstrong, on the video, dealt with his kids. It was absolutely great, and it was a wonderful example of what I call inductive discipline. I use the term to distinguish from deductive discipline, which is the more widely sort of disciplinary philosophy, more widely-employed disciplinary philosophy in this country. These words are a little arcane, but soon you'll get what I mean.

In deductive discipline, the idea is that there are rules for kids and rules for parents. When kids, as they always do, stray from the rules, break the rules, the idea is that adults have to intervene with a punishment in order that kids can deduce the rule structure. That's deductive discipline, and punishment figures very importantly for very many parents

in enforcing and showing kids what the rules are. Inductive discipline begins with a completely different premise.

The idea is that there's a relationship between you and the child that you care for, the child you love, and you don't want to disrupt that relationship. And when, as kids do, disobey the rules, break the rules, hit their sister, do things that they shouldn't be doing, you do as Erle did in the video. You point out that this isn't right. You tell them, "That hurt your brother or your sister. You shouldn't antagonize them in that way.

You've got a relationship to sustain," and you work toward restoring the relationship, toward reciprocity, as you did so beautifully in a couple of examples in the video there, Erle. The idea is you don't want to disrupt the relationship. You want children to develop a sense of responsibility toward others. You tell them how you feel, how what they've done has hurt others, how it also violates the family standards or the daycare center standards or the institutional standards in whatever setting when they do things that are hurtful.

And this has now been evaluated in a variety of settings and, lo and behold, it's more efficient than punishment-oriented strategies. Number five, the last one is giving back. The great Catholic social activist, Dorothy Day, who conducted a variety of missions to the poor around the country, took in volunteers, and she noted that, very frequently, the young high school and college students who came to work with her in these missions resented the poor people that they served because they weren't thanked enough.

But Dorothy Day spoke of and wrote about that in virtually every case, these young people experienced what she called a transformational experience, when they realized that the helpless help the helpers more than the helpers help the helpless. All of us here have made tremendous contributions to the well-being of others.

We know how we are enriched by being of service, being of use to others, and so too can children – should children, I believe – be involved in service because of how it establishes bonds of reciprocity, where you come to know as a child and, of course, as an adult that you're here because of what others have done for us and we have an obligation to give back.

A woman in New Canaan, Connecticut, took her kids to clean a home of an elderly, disabled person and brought some of their friends along. The kids returned to school after the Saturday when this occurred and told their friends and teachers about it, and she started to get calls from other mothers. "Next time you go out, could you take my kid too?" And lo and behold, she did, she started a kid's care club because it was really fun, and now there's a network of these around the country.

We need more of this. Anyway, you've been very gracious in listening to me this morning, I wish you a great conference and I've been honored to be here with you today. Thank you.

-- End of Video --