



# My Journey to Self-Discovery

*A Teen Boys' Edition*

2023

2022

# My Journey to Self-Discovery

A Teen Boys' Edition

**2022-2023**



**Foundation for Innovative Social Development**

95/10, Bhodiya Road, Mirihana



# Personal Information

This book belongs to:

Date of birth:

 /  / 

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Address:

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Name of emergency contact:

Relationship:

Telephone:

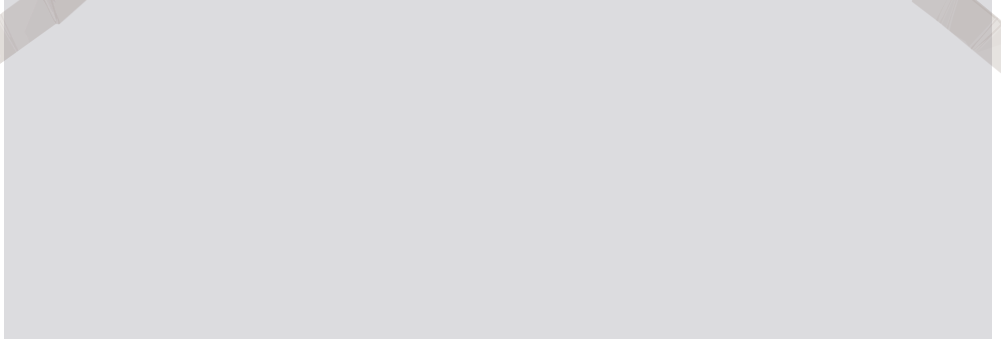
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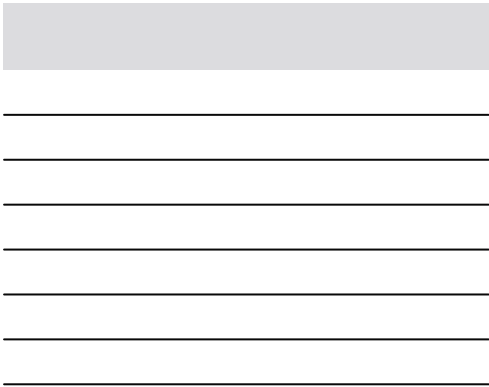
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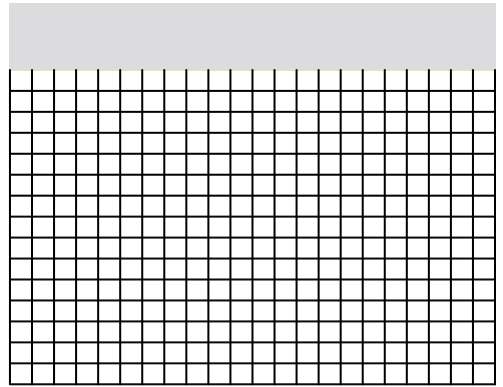
# My goals and plans for 2022



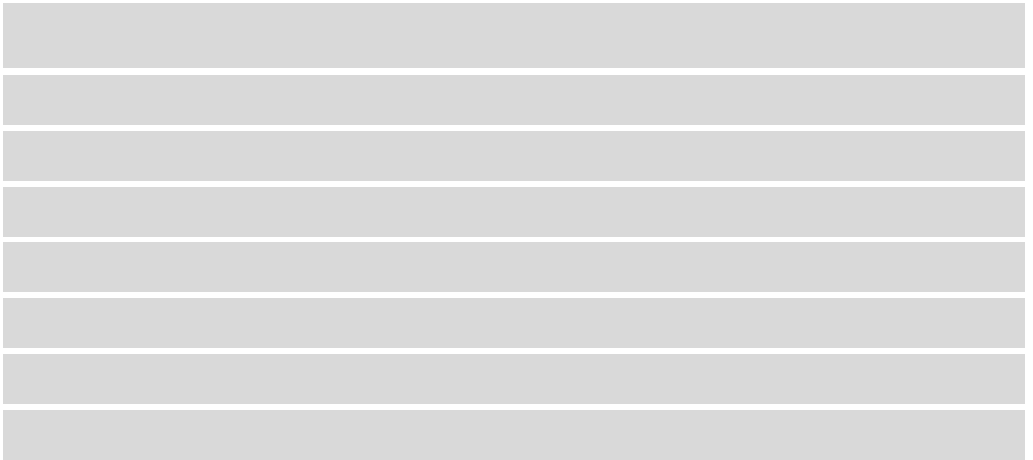
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A gray header bar followed by seven horizontal lines for writing.



A gray header bar followed by a grid of 20 columns and 15 rows for writing.



A series of eight horizontal gray bars for writing.

This is your year!

# Calendar 2022

## January

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# Our Youth Focus at FISD



At the Foundation for Innovative Social Development, we believe in the transformational power of youth. Every generation that is born into this world has a renewed opportunity to look back at the actions of previous generations, reflect on lessons learned and unlearn as well as add new values. Together, we can shape the future to one that is inclusive and respectful for all. During our ten years in existence, our organization has worked extensively with youth from across the country and their aspirations and hopes for a better future have constantly pushed us to center and amplify young voices within the work we do. FISD understands that a core part of social development is empowering youth by equipping them with the tools they need to have control over their own lives as they navigate teen years filled with both triumphs and challenges. Self-discovery for both young girls and boys must come with equal opportunities and independence. This requires collective efforts to ensure that their freedoms and choices are not hindered due to harmful gender norms that make girls feel unworthy or less important while boys feel dominant and privileged. We believe in the need to transform masculinities so that men and boys “unlearn” patriarchal values and embrace more caring and violent-free ways of acting, thinking and knowing. Through this self-discovery journal, it is our hope that the young boys reading this would find the tools they need to transform attitudes regarding gender and absorb some wisdom needed to take charge of their own lives in a manner that is responsible and accountable to their own selves and to society.

FISD launched the national campaign for men and boys called “Be the Change” in 2012 to mobilize Sri Lankan men and boys for prevention of violence against women and girls and to engage men and boys as allies in creating a gender just society. Since then there had been many milestones in the campaign where men and boys were actively engaged in reflective process where they could question their own power and privilege in individual, family, community and societal levels. We hope that this journal will also help young boys to reflect , unlearn and transform power structures that leads to injustice and for their own personal growth as individuals.

Hello!

Welcome to an awesome two-year self-discovery plan made exclusively for young boys like you! My name is Chethan – yes, just like the word chethanawa, meaning thought and will. My mom says my name in Sanskrit means sentience. I think that's awesome because I can't think of a more wonderful way to describe my life journey, which is filled with both vigour and intelligence! Even when I experience bumps along the way, these qualities have always reminded me that life can be hard sometimes. But those hard times also remind us to embrace happy moments, simply by being in control of our thoughts and actions. This is why this journal is here to help young boys like you navigate the unique challenges we face as we journey through our adventurous teen years.

This journal spans across two years (2022-2023). Every month, you and I will explore two vital lessons that all young boys need to know – from building healthy self-esteem to dealing with peer pressure. If you flip towards the end of each year, you will also find reflections to start embodying in your daily life. Remember, this journal is supposed to be a fun experience for you to reflect and learn as we grow together to become your totally happy self. Whenever you find some free time, this journal will be waiting for you to jot down your thoughts and learnings.

A brand-new year, a brand new you! Are you ready to grow and explore? Let me be your buddy in this adventurous journey!







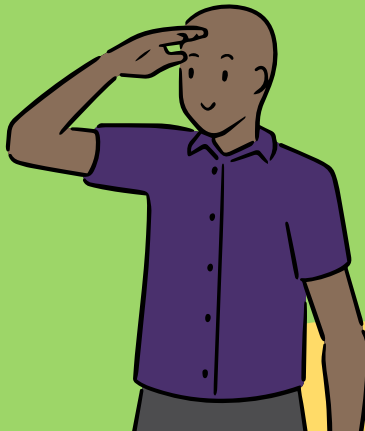


## All young boys need... **SELF-ESTEEM**

Hi buddy, let's begin the year by exploring one little known secret behind truly happy and successful people – self-esteem! Now, self-esteem is this wonderful thing that all teens wish they had but have a hard time achieving. It's that ability to meet challenges with courage and be content with our selves.

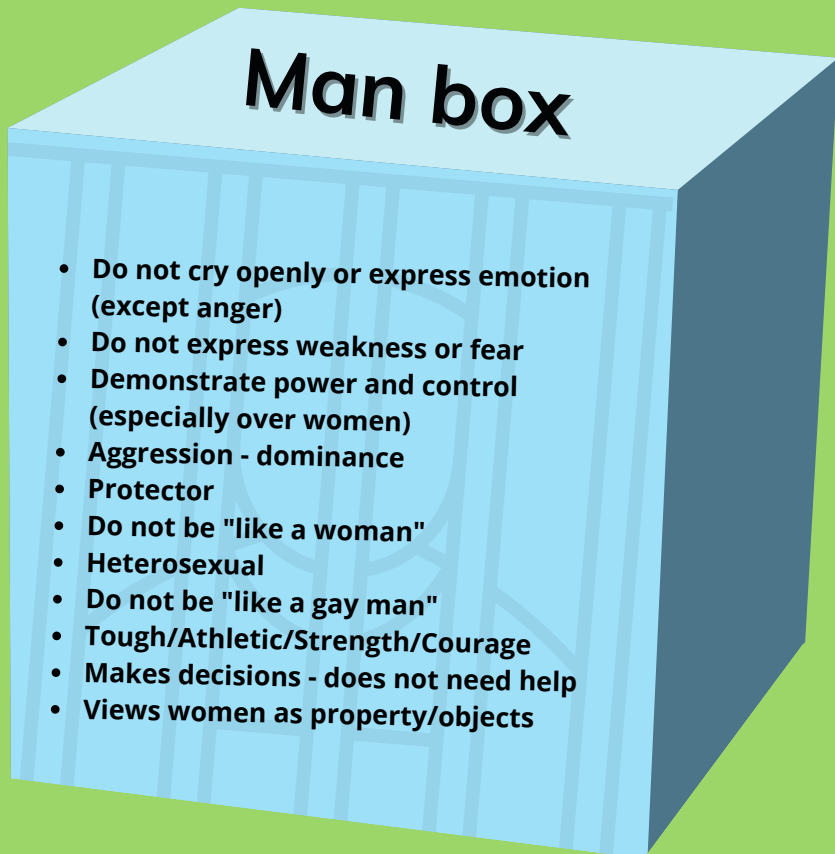
As a teen boy, I used to think that self-esteem is all about having an ego or trying to dominate everyone and everything. But turns out that it isn't true self-esteem after all! Have you had similar realizations as well? If not, that's okay. In fact, it normal to take time to realize what true contentment, courage and self-fulfillment really means. You wanna know why? Because as teen boys, we often grow up with so many conflicting messages from family, school, teledramas and even our friends- so much so that we have a tough time figuring out many of these things. For example, growing up I used to believe that all boys need to be athletic, be able to always win a fight, have lots of friends and engage in risky behaviour as -a "real" man. - But did you know that true confidence and self-esteem is never about domination or control? What I mean to say is, society often teaches young boys like us that we need to strictly stay inside an unhealthy imaginary, socially constructed prison called the "man box."

Understanding the harmful effects of the man box and learning how to step out of it over the next two years is vital for your self-esteem and overall development.



The man box is simply a rigid set of expectations, perceptions, and behaviours of what is considered “manly” behaviour. If most of us boys try to step out of the traditional traits seen above, we fear that might be ridiculed and rejected. It indirectly teaches young boys like us to act tough, not show emotion, and to always look strong.

These rules are unfair and harmful to our wellbeing, relationships, and identity. Do you know why? It’s because this man box traps boys and disconnects us from our emotions, discourages us from seeking help and even leads to harmful relationships with others and our inner self. Just like many other dimensions, it can seriously damage our self-esteem. So, over the next three months, let’s explore some of the key areas that all young boys need to know and do in order to be that super cool person you’ve always wanted to be!



-January-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**FINDING MY TRUE  
IDENTITY**

Time for a funny story. Recently, someone asked me "Chethan, who are you?" and guess what - although this sounded like a simple question, I struggled to answer! That's because someone's identity is so complicated and layered. We have different identities as a son, student, and friend, for example. All these identities combined makes each of us unique. Think about it, if all of us thought, behaved, dressed, and looked the same - this world would be so boring, wouldn't it?

Our identity is easily influenced by how others, like our family, teachers and friends, see us. Because of very old myths about masculinity passed down from generation, others see and compare us according to man box standards. Sometimes, you may also feel pressure to limit your identity to certain stereotypes or expectations placed by society on your background, gender, religion ethnicity, location or even disability. These stereotypes can be harmful because it places people in boxes. As a result, it stops us from embracing our unique identities. Do you agree that the social pressure that others, directly and indirectly, place on us is a constant burden? To satisfy everyone, we try to exchange our true interests, values, hobbies, and emotions with ones that only fit inside the man box. It's okay if you feel that you do not completely know yourself yet. We are all getting answers to some very complex questions as we grow. But here's my piece of advice - don't let the man box dictate who you are. It will only harm your relationships and inner self as it does not respect the freedom to have our unique identities. So, next time you find some free time, I invite you to reflect on these two key questions: What parts of your identity do you choose for yourself? What parts of your identity are determined for you by other people or by society?

Your identity is entirely up to you. It's okay to take all the time you need to find your true self based on what is close to your heart and mind. This year, I hope you take the time to explore and reflect on yourself so that someday, you can be happy to say, "this is who I am!"



-January-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**FINDING MY  
TALENTS AND SKILLS**

Did you know that one of the secrets to building your self-esteem is by recognizing your unique talents and skills? Our talents and skills make us unique and help us achieve more. If we only see ourselves in the "man box" with limited socially expected traditional skills for a boy such as doing sports and building and mending, for example, we will not see ourselves beyond that. We may not even try to broaden our limits and explore new skills.

Growing up in an all-boys school, I felt so much pressure to do sports and always win a place at sports meets. If I didn't do well, I was ridiculed and called names. My best friend Shehan was sometimes even ridiculed by our senior prefects when he couldn't run as fast as some of the others. They used to say, "he runs like a girl" and burst into laughter. It was only after many years that I realized how strongly these unfair gender stereotypes are placed on us boys. How senseless could a term like "running like a girl" be. Because, like us, girls are also placed inside rigid "girl boxes." The girl box teaches girls false ideas like being passive and submissive is feminine. I wish I had learned how ridiculous gender stereotypes were earlier. But you're lucky to learn all this now so that hopefully you can begin to question them for your own sake. To go back to my story earlier, my friend Shehan, myself and most of my classmates used to feel that if we did not have the typical man box skills, we are useless. But guess what... Shehan grew up to be one of the most successful music artists in his town. His success grew the more he embraced his true passion and pushed past the man box rules that had limited him before. If my friend Shehan had continued to blame himself for not being good at sports because society falsely pressured him that all men need to be athletic, for example, his life would have ended up differently.

Our strengths and talents can be so diverse and unique! It does not have to be limited by silly social rules such as 'girly' or 'boyish' or "good/bad" skills.

Also, don't worry if you feel you have not discovered yours yet. Some of the most successful people I know discovered their talents much later after experimenting with many different things. So let's start by figuring out what makes you happy and what activities are you able to do easily or with a little bit of effort. The key is to keep practicing and using your talent regularly.

You shouldn't give up on them when you pass through different stages of your life. I have seen how some boys give up on their true passions because society tells them it's not manly. But the truth is, some people will judge you no matter how successful you are, so it does not make sense to waste time trying to satisfy everyone and their man box expectations of you. So let your talents and skills make you an independent boy. No one knows you best, other than you alone. So make choices that are good for you and not to please others. I know that some boys take things for granted solely because of their gender. We cannot deny that men have a social privilege offered to us because of the patriarchal culture that perceives men as more powerful. This can make us blind to the harmful effects of the man box and how our actions can sometimes hurt others. We may not take the extra effort to cultivate our skills because sometimes, we indirectly expect society to treat us in a special way. Let me give an example. Let's take a very simple skill such as making your own tea or washing your own plate.

You may never have tried learning how to do them properly since it was always done for you either by your mother or sister or by an adult female. (Why female – because housework is traditionally considered women's work). By not questioning our privilege and traditional gender roles as men or women, we get trapped in our own boxes. So much so that we end up not knowing basic survival skills – like cooking and making tea! This thinking and dependency on others will definitely make you an incomplete person. In fact, there are many skills and talents that we ignore since they are considered women's work. So, this year, I invite you to reflect on expanding our skills without thinking of them as masculine or feminine. Otherwise, buddy, you'll be missing out a lot in life.



**Have you come across boys who have not yet explored their real talents? Know anyone who had given up on their talents? Use this space to create a few uplifting messages to share with them.**

**What are the talents that you have neglected because they are - feminine-? And what would be some of your own talents that you have recognized? Write some messages you have for yourself.**



**-February-**  
Self-discovery looks like...

# KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EGOISM AND CONFIDENCE

Now, I am going to let you in on a secret that only truly admirable boys know. True self-esteem can only be achieved by understanding the difference between confidence and egoism. Egoism is often used as a clever disguise by boys who want to appear confident but have low self-esteem. For example, someone who is egoistic may judge others harshly and act as if he is the most talented person in the classroom while others need to learn from him. They wouldn't want to listen to anyone. Someone confident, on the other hand, would be proud of his own talent but not judge others because of it. In fact, a confident person will be genuinely happy in his own skin and would try to share his skills with others while acknowledging that he can learn from others too.

So, why is it important to understand the difference between confidence and egoism? It is because egoism is often a result of the pressure boys like us feel while being inside the man box. We are taught that to "be a man" we must be dominant, selfish, stoic, and self-serving. But these man box rules and the resulting egoism that boys end up showing, can make us lose important friendships, get a bad reputation, lose our purpose in life. It can even lead to conflicts with those who love us and even make us feel lonely. Now, while reading this, you may even be reminded of some people you know who may act this way. Like... those who boast about their success in every single conversation or make others feel useless by always stealing the spotlight. Someone with an ego will do anything to maintain himself at the top even if it means losing relationships and putting others down. While such behaviour can appear like confidence on the surface, it's not. In fact, big egos usually have a lot more to do with insecurity than confidence.

Since most of us grow up inside the man box, let's make a resolution this year that you and I will be smart enough to know the difference between egoism and confidence. Confidence is attractive and charismatic, while ego is not. Remember that confidence is not always about being the loudest person in the room. It is possible to have insecurities and bad days while still maintaining your confidence. The goal is to keep moving forward despite these setbacks.

Having confidence is also not about taking unnecessary risks. As boys, we have been taught that we need to take unnecessary risks to display confidence. I have many friends who have damaged themselves and even lost their lives trying to show how confident (or rather, overconfidence!) they are. My friend's brother lost his life while trying to show his friends that he can row a homemade boat in the flooding waters when he actually didn't have rowing skills. His life was lost in vain. I didn't mean to discourage you, but examples like these help us understand what egoism versus true confidence can look like.

Always whining, needing to win everything, over-pleasing others, displaying perfectionism, withdrawing, and blaming others for every problem are only signs of egoism and not true confidence. This year let's make a conscious effort to move away from such unhealthy behaviours. Instead, let's recognize that true confidence comes with taking responsibility for your actions, engaging in self-care and self-growth, making small and gradual steps to move out of the man box by ignoring negative social pressure, learning from mistakes, and being kind, respectful and treat girls as equals.



**-February-**  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**DOING GOOD TO  
FEEL GOOD**

Remember the importance of being confident we spoke of earlier... and how that's different from egoism? This time, we are going to explore another related dimension of your self-esteem. It will help you make a distinction between what confidence truly means versus the egoism that is promoted from inside the man box. This self-esteem dimension is all about boosting your sense of self-worth by giving back to society. Doing good can help you realize your potential and sense of importance as a good citizen, son and friend. Can you guess why doing good to society has a strong link with feeling good inside? Try to visualize this: teen boys who do not like their own selves much (being insecure) are likelier to be influenced by negative peer pressure as a way to fit in and go out of their way to be accepted and liked by others.

However, if you are truly making an effort to love yourself more, doing good out of a sincere heart will prevent you from seeking unwanted acceptance from the wrong groups of people. That's because your self-worth will be rooted and controlled in your own smart choices, rather than man box rules. Remember that doing good are not always about grand gestures of goodwill but rather small acts of love and care that you and I can pass on to others we meet daily. The awesome thing about doing so is that you have the power to create a ripple effect inspiring others your age to do so too!



Just by actively listening to your parents or caregiver when they speak to you about their day, helping a new student at school, standing up to bullying or even giving some food to a beggar on the street are simple but impactful ways to integrate a “do good” philosophy in your life.

Personally, I also like to look up to a few role models in my life who have guided and inspired me through their exemplary actions. So, how can you do some good this year? What small steps will you take to protect your values and give back to society? This is also part of "being the change" you want to see in the world around you. And being accountable for your own actions. Always be mindful of the consequences that your actions can bring, both to yourself and for others around you. Many boys think that they are doing good when they try to limit and control others (specially girl's and women's ) lives, because you need to be the "protector" in max box terms. I know a female friend of mine who undergoes severe abuse from her boyfriend because he is over protective and does not even allow her to talk to other male friends or even hang around and have fun with her girlfriends. So remember –doing good – should not come with power and control, it might give you a good feeling for a short while but will affect your relationships in the long run. It will also make other's lives miserable.



# -March- Self-discovery looks like... LOVING MY OWN BODY

Now, we turn to "body image" - which refers to how we look at our own bodies and how attractive we feel in them. I know that I and a many classmates had low self-esteem growing up because we did not feel happy with the way we looked. This unhappiness arose because our bodies didn't fit with the "man box" standards of being athletic, muscular, hairy, tall and handsome. Again, just like some of the other topics we discussed, this dissatisfaction with our bodies has a lot to do with the unfair social rules that impose what 'manly' bodies are supposed to look like. But guess what? There is no such thing as an ideal manly body. You're probably thinking, "but machan Chethan, how about having abs, being tall and having strong biceps?" That's because, often, what we see on magazines, television, Instagram or Facebook are just one body type among a whole other range of bodies. It's unfair to compare our different shapes and sizes to the supermodels or photoshopped figures that we see on media. Our bodies are made differently and there's no such thing as a "manly" or "unmanly" body. I am going to let you on another self-esteem secret: your weight and physical appearance, for example, is only way to measure health. There's also our intelligence, our nutrition levels, exercise and how much sleep you get, which all equally count to feeling and being attractive and having a positive self-image.

Increasing your body positivity has to do with maintaining a healthy lifestyle but also dismissing harmful messages society tells us to satisfy unfair 'man box' rules. For example, I used to think that girls will like me more if I was more muscular, but as I grew up I found that those who valued who I was as a whole person instead of judging me by my appearance only. So it was more about finding the people and community rather than punishing my body in order to be liked by others.

That being said, young boys like you must have the freedom to exercise, eat healthily and get adequate sleep to look and feel handsome - which is awesome! But let's not go to drastic measures to satisfy society's unrealistic and unfair man box rules. So ask yourself: if my body could talk right now, what would it say? This year, let's start giving permission to love and take care of our own bodies.

We each have our own unique and handsome features and it's impossible to please everyone. If you ever feel like you need to take a step and try out something new for you- like trying a new haircut during school holidays or finding a new unique fashion style that makes you happy – it could be worth convincing your parents!

I follow some of these self-care routines to look after my body and my looks, not only from the outside but also from the inside. Maybe it may help you too!

- 1.Exercise
- 2.A walk a day
- 3.Early to bed and early to rise
- 4.Drink enough water
- 5.Reduce instant food
- 6.Listening to music that you love

Would you like to add more and maybe share some self-care tips with your friends too?



**-March-**  
Self-discovery looks like...

# PERSONAL GROOMING AND HAVING MANNERS

An important part about being a teen boy is learning some very vital skills and basic etiquette to successfully navigate our entry into the adult world! All this advice can be daunting, but don't worry, together, we can peel back the societal layers of expectation that rest quietly on every boy's shoulders. I can totally understand how challenging it can be to follow unfair man box rules like being expected to always act strong, tough and unbreakable even when we're not. This is why this week; we are going to focus on helping you with a few valuable skills that can make you far more content and better equipped to manage life in school and beyond.

Therefore, an important part of your self-esteem is to develop good manners so that it would help you feel good about yourself and make a good impression on others in your daily life. It helps win hearts and build a good reputation in society. More importantly, having manners is another great way to step out of the man box without shame or fear – because it helps others realize that man box standards like being a troublemaker, or bully isn't cool at all – and that manners are what truly matters. Some of the manners that I think all cool boys must follow are simple things like:

- Saying 'please' and 'thank you'
- Saying 'sorry' if you do something wrong
- Not interrupting others during a conversation, using the right amount of eye contact and the appropriate tone of voice



- Respecting everyone regardless of gender both in public places like streets and private spaces like at home (this includes respecting all girls, not just your girlfriend, sisters or female relatives)
- Not littering on the road
- Not making fun of others even though others do it
- Being mindful of your behaviour especially when in someone else's home or out in public
- Always asking for consent and respecting the response when you want to ask a girl out, using her personal information or personal belongings, or even when making a small move like holding hands or asking to share a picture

An essential part of feeling good about yourself and maintaining a good identity is to also practise personal grooming. It's an essential practice that all teens must follow. Some of them are:

- Being hygienic and showering frequently to avoid body odour (let's explore this more in detail later!)
  - Have healthy skincare, haircare, and facial routine
  - Dressing well and appropriately depending on the context
  - Having clean nails and even washing your mouth few times a day
- And most importantly using clean cloths - I had a friend who wears dirty underwears for many days and I know that he had infections in his genital areas

Having said this, keep in mind that things like body odour, acne for example are a normal part of your hormone-filled teenage years. The trick is to keep them at bay by using anti-acne medication, and deodorants, among other things. The bottom line is to look presentable and maintain basic grooming and proper manners to earn respect from others while feeling good about yourself!







Young boys like us need...

# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Hey machan, we're already four months into 2022! It's great to see how far you have come, the lessons you've learned and how much you've grown. Over the next three months, let's explore the importance of our emotional well-being as young boys. All young boys need emotional wellbeing to succeed, considering the emotional and physical changes you experience during these crucial years. Personally, my emotional well-being was challenged as I tried to fit in at school and excel at sports all while balancing tuition classes and exams. When I realized that my peers experience the same challenges, suddenly I did not feel so alone. In Sri Lanka, we know that maintaining our emotional wellbeing inside the "man box" that we are placed in, can be challenging.

Some people think that men's mental health is not so important as physical health or rather strength, but the truth is they are both more connected than we realize. Ever had a strange stomach-ache the day before an exam or that headache you get whenever you worry about something? Exactly. Sometimes, people think that our mental health needs to be really bad to go to a counsellor to speak with a loved one - but that is wrong. Our emotional wellbeing depends on our ability to be open, seek help when needed and not feel ashamed to be honest with our feelings. One of the major man box rules that all brave young boys need to start challenging is a false notion that "real men" must not show their emotions. This myth is tied to ideas that men should always act tough and strong. This is false because emotional expression is a marker of strength too.

By being vulnerable enough to seek support or express our emotions in healthy ways, we contribute to a healthy culture where relationships flourish and feelings aren't bottled up and released as violent actions.

Like our physical wellbeing, our emotional health has many parts, so let's learn about some of them as we continue on this journey of growth.



-April-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
"UNBOXING" MY  
EMOTIONS (PT. 1)

Being a teenager can sometimes feel like a rollercoaster ride, right? Sometimes, we feel excited, and next, it's sadness, anger or irritation. Sometimes, people try to define us as moody, fussy teenagers with attitudes. But I don't think that's fair to say. What do you think? The truth is, teenagers have to go through so many big changes in their lives, from hormonal changes in your body to the ways people see and position you in society as a boy. In most cases, most people tend to see us from the man box lens which is a very rigid and unfairly portrayed frame with messages like "real men don't cry". All these factors can lead to a *cocktail* of emotions. But the sad part is... us boys are generally not socialized to be as emotionally expressive as girls. The man box rules we grow up learning teaches us that -real men- don't cry and must not become emotional. But there is no such thing as -real men who cannot be sensitive to the things happening within and round them - We are all as real as the next person and it is the invisible social rules that teach us boys to hide our emotions that in turn damage our mental health.

You must take all the time you need to recognize, validate and manage your emotions. For example, whenever I feel angry, I try to understand what's making me feel this way. Because anger is sometimes a defence mechanism, we use to cover up other emotions and stressors like sadness, rejection or criticism. It's important to remind yourself that we all need to give permission to -feel- things and that all our emotions are valid, even the ones that make us uncomfortable.



I know that you and I have some similar experiences when it comes to getting advise or support from our friend when we feel angry or sad. We have been advised to let out anger through violence, fight and shout or engage in risky behaviour. Have you known any friends who get in to drinking alcohol or ride a bike very fast until your anger passes away? But has it really passed your feeling of anger? No, it does not. It only put your life at risk and deviate you from your life goals. It's mostly the same when we are sad.

Here's a helpful activity: Try listing some feelings that make you uncomfortable. As an extra step, try discussing with close friends the different ways we could use to manage them – a perfect way to create a sense of proper collective care I know that even boys do care for their "set "of friends. But if we boys do not walk out of the man box rules we get trapped in it while supporting each other and only sees solutions within the man box, not beyond.



-April-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
"UNBOXING" MY  
EMOTIONS (PT. 2)

Want to know something else that society includes inside our "man box"? That all teen boys are always moody, irritable, and emotionally unavailable. Having strong emotions and feeling down as a young boy is common and normal – considering the pressures we have to face while being inside this "man box." While emotions like anger help us identify our triggers, others like sadness help us identify what matters most to us and which factors get in the way of our happiness. These strong emotions can even happen all at once. For example, having an argument with a parent, breaking up with a person you really liked or even grieving the death of a loved one, for instance, may make you feel angry, sad, and confused at the same time. That's because intense emotions that make us feel down can often come out as a result of love, or even as results of power and control we have over someone. When some of these circumstances occur, it may happen because of a loved one doing something unexpected, or that interferes with the love and sense of protection you share with them.

This can make us feel betrayed, lonely, or invalidated. Often, these intense emotions even disrupt our daily routines. So whenever you feel overwhelmed, and unable to do your daily tasks, as usual, it's a sign that you need a mental health break. This does not mean that you ignore or dismiss your feelings. Instead, take time to validate how you feel and identify triggers that contribute to intense emotions. Most of us tend to respond impulsively when we feel such emotions, which can even lead to self-harm. I am sure you have already come across news of boys harming their own life as a way to end strong feelings. Remember emotions are mostly short-lived. You just need to work it out with some support. Life can be so meaningful once you take control of it. Together, let's continue on this growth journey learning to take that control and make responsible life choices.

At the same time it may also lead to harming the ones you love. Have you heard of boys who have thrown acid to girls who said "no" to them or men who actually have killed their wives, girlfriends or even their children because they didn't know how to control their anger or how to tolerate equal reactions from others or their power been directly challenged or when they lose out on a 'man privilege'. These are some serious consequences of been unable to identify or manage our emotions as men and boys.

This week, I invite you to reflect more on how your intense emotions are valid (and normal!). They can be managed by understanding the connections between how you think, feel and act. It's high time we challenge unhealthy assumptions that by ignoring it, our feelings or problems will go away – it doesn't. On normal days, taking simple steps like sharing about your day with family during dinner can help us be more in touch with our emotions and be expressive about how we feel – whether it be good or bad! These small steps can help you manage your emotional wellbeing and grow out of the man box culture by being comfortable with our normal human range of emotion. Doing so will not make you any less of a man.

Next time you feel these intense emotions, let's try to figure out what makes you feel this way. For example, I feel angry or impatient whenever I am tired after school, when others don't take my word for something or when there is a sudden change to my usual routine. Sometimes, I have reacted by being rude to my parents, and yelling. But now, I try to manage it by making sure I get some rest when I am tired or being alone and reading a book. Your reasons and reactions for anger might not be the same, but they are valid too.



-May-  
Self-discovery looks like...

# FEELING LESS ANXIOUS AND FATIGUE

Most of my friends think that anxiety is not a big deal. But for me, my anxious thoughts always interfered with my daily life and in figuring out who I really am. Because I knew most of my friends felt the same way, I thought it wasn't necessary to make a big deal of it or seek help when needed, especially when you are a boy. But I was wrong. If you have feelings of impending doom, trouble concentrating at school, less interest in your own life and in being with your friends or even repeated stomach aches or headaches, it is very likely that you feel anxious. Just because anxiety could be common among young boys like you, it does not mean that we can dismiss it. In the long run, expressing how you feel and connecting with others and with nature as well as focusing on the good things can really help lessen anxiety. Another trick that I use whenever I feel anxious is the 3-3-3 rule; I name three things I can see, then listen, and then touch. This rule has helped me return to the present moment and detangle my anxious thoughts.

Another mental state that can make us feel uncomfortable is extreme tiredness, which we sometimes call fatigue. I am sure most of us, including you, have felt this now more than even in the middle of this COVID-19 pandemic. It's normal for us to feel low on energy and even hopeless. These lockdowns and restrictions are also getting in the way of hanging out with friends and having fun. Even before Covid, it's fair to say that teen boys have had to deal with so many pressures that arise due to the "man box" expectations.



Fatigue has unfortunately can become a normal part of our lives. Although feeling tired is normal and happens to everybody, teen boys especially need to take care of their bodies, identify patterns of tiredness, and find ways to practice good physical and emotional wellbeing. Sometimes, we might feel tired even when we haven't been physically active. This is because of mental strains caused due to several reasons, but especially due to the unique pressures that society places on boys like you to not show emotions and "to act like a man." This can leave us feeling confused, low and rejected. You're not alone in feeling that way. Identify what causes your fatigue and let's begin to question whether this "man box" is really worth risking your mental wellbeing for.

If you feel that you need to talk to someone, find someone you trust or contact a mental health professional to help understand your feelings and address them. Remember that it's perfectly okay to seek help or talk to someone even on your good days. It's much better than waiting till your anxiety becomes uncontrollable. With fatigue, I find that having a regular sleeping pattern, taking breaks, and eating healthy can help a lot – something you can try too! So this week, I encourage you to reflect on the following questions:





**What are some things that you need to get off your chest? How can you release them in a healthy way?**

**Name three areas of your life that are the most stressful. Can anyone help you with these tasks?**

**What is bothering you right now? Is it beyond your control?**

# -May- Self-discovery looks like... BEING SELF-AWARE

Hi buddy. This week, we're going to build on this quote by Socrates, who famously said: "to know yourself is the beginning of wisdom." Self-awareness is a word you may have heard before, but what does this actually mean? A person who is self-aware is able to accurately recognize their emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence their behaviour. Some of the most successful people I know are very self-aware. You should definitely work on this skill as part of your journey to being a brave, confident, cool and yes a caring young boy.

Basically, self-awareness helps us understand our mistakes, learn from them and regularly evaluate our thoughts and actions. I know, sometimes society does not like it when we take time for ourselves because doing so is seen as selfish or even girlish. Sometimes, we can have personal biases too. For example, we may assume that getting to know ourselves is boring and a feminine thing to do as per the messages we have received since our childhood. So instead, we put more time into adjusting ourselves to the frames that society gives us. I urge you my friend, do not lose out what life offers us trying to fit in to these frames.

Being able to recognize your own strengths, limitations, emotions, and behaviours is one of the first steps to being confident and happy in your own skin. And self-awareness can really help you be fair to your unique needs, find out what truly makes "you" happy and what you need to avoid triggers that make you feel bad. For example, try listing down a few things you like about yourself and a few others that you need to work on - and you're already on your way to being self-aware! Self-awareness is especially important for teen boys like you and I because it encourages us to be smart enough to recognize our privileges as men and boys in society and evaluating our actions so that we constantly learn and evolve. For example, a smart boy who is self-aware would not engage in catcalling on the streets even though most of his friends do it. A smart boy would also understand that the typical image of a 'real man' portrayed on TV as someone with huge muscles and is a wealthy businessman isn't what all men are or should strive to be. These important observations of stepping outside the man box will show you that we are all diverse and unique.

Self-awareness can help us be in control of our actions, choices, interests and relationships because we know ourselves best, including our own strengths and weakness as well as goals and plans.

Don't be afraid to get to know yourself well. It will definitely be an adventurous journey to understand how much you have grown this year compared to last year. Growth is not a straight line. It can have hurdles along the way. What matter is that we never stop learning.

Would you like to note down new findings of your own self? What about the things that you left behind because they affect your growth?



# -June- Self-discovery looks like... MANAGING MY STRESS LEVELS

Feeling stress can be very common whenever we face uncertain, or difficult situations. Have you ever had days where that headache does not seem to go away, you find that you are either eating too much or too little and overall feel less energetic? And feel like saying in bed all day or not face your family? All these signs indicate that you might be stressed. Being inside this -man box,- you may feel pressure from things you see on social media, to not fitting in at school, to living up to society's expectations of you as a good son, citizen, and student. Even the bravest of boys have to deal with so many things at the same time. I am sure you feel that way sometimes too – from getting good grades to excelling at sports and even helping out in physically tiring activities. Because society teaches us that it is -unmanly- to show our emotions, we often try to hide it until it feels like a pressure cooker inside us. This is so unhealthy and can have harmful effects on your health and relationships. Not showing our emotions is a very heavy and unrealistic expectation that society places on young boys like us, isn't it? It's also not very fair.

Whenever I feel stressed, I sometimes convince myself that stress happens because I am growing and changing. Sometimes, I find that a little bit of stress isn't always bad. For example, whenever I have exams and I talk about my stress with Thaththa, he tells me that this feeling of discomfort to perform well is a sign that I am taking my education seriously. I was lucky that my father was so open minded. My friends have complained that their parents don't understand them. When they express these feelings they used to say "arent you ashamed to talk in such way being a young boy"or "boys should be like stones", "what are you behaving like a girl" - for me , Thaththa's words really helped me understand more about stress; that it can be good sometimes, but it is also (often) bad for you if it means that you have no opportunity to actually stop, rest, take care of yourself and then resume. So, I think it's better to learn to manage our stress levels rather than avoid it completely. Because no human can be completely stress-free. So let's all remember to be mindful of unfair man box rules that may increase our stress, also taking the time to practise self-care.

Let's reflect: What is your self-care routine? How much time do you spend each day on it?



# -June- self-discovery looks like... BEING POSITIVE

Wow, look at the time pass by. We've already reached the middle of the year and I am so happy to see you grow and face challenges with a cool face on. Over the past months, you've begun slowly climbing out of the "man box" placed by society. Now, let's end June with a promise to ourselves: to be more positive whenever we can. I know- it sounds so cliché right? The reason you hear this from our teachers, parents and mentors so often is because the benefit of a positive outlook is a secret behind many successful people out there. So it's no surprise that you've heard it so many times! Positive thinkers are often resilient, and optimistic. But they also know that positive thinking does not always mean that anything negative is bad. Did I confuse you? Let me explain!

Last couple of weeks, we explored why young boys like you have to deal with stress and anxiety because of the unfair social rules that expect teen boys like you and me to act, dress, talk and behave a certain way. Having learned this, young boys can relax and refocus certain information that they consume by changing the way they understand it. Positivity can look a lot like, enjoying new unexpected plans even though it was changed suddenly or laughing at a ridiculous commercial that spreads harmful messages like "all boys need to be muscular. It can also look a lot like responding to an angry tone by smiling instead of responding back in anger or going into a fight or arguments. Personally, I try to be positive by looking forward instead of looking backwards at my mistakes and failures, because no one benefits from crying over our regrets.

I have also turned my negative self-talk into positive ones like changing "Chethan, you're fat and no girl will like you" to "By being myself, I will attract the right people who do not judge me by my weight." Having said this, remember that as humans we can't be positive all the time. So, while you try to reframe and see things in a positive light, remember that it's ok and normal to feel negative sometimes as far as you don't turn your negativity in to aggressive ness or violence.

Some people around you may say you are so negative when you don't act the way they expect you to act- such as rejecting to go into a fight over a girl you are interested in. I am sure , by now you know how to handle or respond to such people

Can you think of such experience you faced? What kind of responses have you given earlier? What kind of responses would you give now?





## Young boys like us need... **SOCIAL WELLBEING**

It's already July! Look at how far you've come, friend! I am really proud of you for pulling through seven months by handling both the good and the bad. I'm excited to know more about your journey of self-exploration, and your attempts to step outside the "man box." So, over the next three months, I want to help you understand the social needs of young boys like you! Social wellbeing refers to our need for healthy relationships and social connections. Social wellbeing can look a lot like being able to be independent and free, enjoy interactions and feel a sense of belonging.

My social needs might be completely different from yours. For example, I feel more comfortable when I am in a smaller group of friends or family because that's what helps me open up and have fun. I also interact with others better in closed social settings such as dinner or quiet gatherings. But I know some friends who prefer to be part of larger groups instead. They prefer parties and loud music and has no problem making new friends. It doesn't mean that either of us is 'cooler' than the other. Instead, it shows that we all have different ways of ensuring our social wellbeing by feeling connected rather than suffering in isolation. The important thing is to always find ways to interact in society because human beings by nature do not do well when we are completely isolated all the time. Don't forget, it's the same for young girls. They too need this social interaction and connections. I know some young boys who really enjoy going out and hanging around with friends but do not allow their sisters and girlfriends have the same opportunity we as young boys also try to frame girls in to "girl box" where girls are not given freedom of mobility with limited choices about their social life.

One of the most important parts of social wellbeing for all teen boys is the need to resist negative peer pressure – a challenge that I am sure you and others face as we grow up.



Compared to girls, teen boys like you and I are much more vulnerable to learning bad habits or harmful behaviours if we interact with the wrong groups. So resisting peer pressure and finding the right friends is an essential part of stepping out of the unfair man box we have been placed in. Let's learn more!



# -July- Self-discovery looks like... SURVIVING PEER PRESSURE (PT.1)

I remember in grade 08, I was sitting with my clique at a tuition class when a group of girls, walked into the class. My friend Lasith liked one of the girls, but for some reason, he always teased and bullied her to a point where she would get so irritated and shy. "Ah Sachini, you look so fat in that dress ah – maybe if you smiled more you will look bit prettier!" He snorted laughing while nudging the rest of us to laugh back at his supposedly funny banter. I knew that by saying such comments, he was actually hurting her feelings. But, if I did not laugh with the others – they would probably start teasing me too. Besides, it felt good to laugh and make fun of someone as a group. After all, I don't want to be labelled as the "boring one who cannot take a joke" right? This feeling of doing something you wouldn't normally do just so you can fit in a friend group – is called peer pressure; something that all young boys have to deal with as we grow. It's another part of society's obsession to put boys like you into this silly "man box" that we spoke of earlier. Inside this man box, you may have felt that you are "supposed" to act, talk, behave and act out to be seen as a "real man."

This feeling of pressure to stick to nonsensical boyish stereotypes first comes from our family (i.e. getting blue toys and cars to play, pushing us to be brave and strong and play the role of a hero ) and then eventually from our peers (i.e. being called a girl for taking a dance class instead of doing sports or even respecting a girls feelings ). This kind of pressure to limit our interests, choices and behaviour to our stereotypical gender expectations is bad. The truth is, there is no wrong way to be a man or boy. Boys can be anything they want to be, and it's unfair to limit our vast horizons of opportunities because of social pressure.

Now I know... as a young boy, it's tough to resist peer pressure because it feels good to be part of a closed group and to be seen as 'cool.' But if it goes against your personal values, maybe it's time to be brave enough to let go of negative peers.

This might be easy once you realize that peer pressure can sometimes be a good thing. For example, if your friends constantly push you to get good marks at the exam or talk about joining the chess club together, or not to eve-tease girls, this is called positive peer pressure. Positive peer pressure is where you and your friends grow together in a way that is respectful to all.

Your friends may try to challenge a social myth that you have been pushed to believe all your life, such as your misconceptions of girls where we look at girls and women from a “girl box” lens and judge all their actions within that limited lens. That’s an example of positive peer pressure. So the trick is to know the difference and be self-aware of who is pressuring you to do what. Ask yourself: is this pressure going to help or harm me in the long run? Remember , you can also be a peer who make positive pressure on your friends.



-July-  
self-discovery looks like...  
**SURVIVING PEER  
PRESSURE (PT. 2)**

Now, since peer pressure is one of the most common problems affecting boys' social wellbeing, let's explore this topic a bit more in-depth! In fact, let's delve into why resisting negative peer pressure is so important for our overall growth as teen boys. Having our own clique of best friends can be so awesome. We have someone to share our stress, problems and even our happy moments with! But sometimes, if we are a part of a group that promotes negative peer pressure as we discussed earlier (bullying others together, teasing someone because of their looks, etc), it can lower our self-esteem and affect our emotional wellbeing. Engaging in acts that go against your gut feeling and moral compass just to fit in and -belong- to a mischievous friend group can make you end up in a bad place, even earning you a bad reputation. Some examples include engaging in unnecessarily risky behaviour, drinking alcohol, disrespecting girls on the street and at class, etc. There are so many ways to have fun while also maintaining healthy social well-being by finding good friends who truly care for each other and others. Good friends know how to have fun without making trouble.

Another reminder – our friends don't always have to be made up of boys. Girls can be good friends too if we understand each other, respect each other and know what we want from friendship. In fact, most of us are much less likely to discriminate or disrespect girls and women if we interact with them frequently and understand that they are just like us in many ways.

If you are someone who is really impacted by negative peer pressure to the point where it really disrupts your personal values and mental health, I encourage you to speak to a trusted adult about it. The great thing about talking to someone older and reliable is that they may have been in the same boat as you when they were your age. So it's helpful to seek their valuable advice to navigate and eventually resist unhealthy forms of peer pressure as you grow up.



**-August-**  
self-discovery looks like...

# FINDING THE RIGHT FRIENDS

I am sure you will agree when I say that one of the most awesome things about being a young boy is the memorable and close friendships that we form during our teenage years. The friends that we select can influence each other and even determine our health, happiness and own confidence levels. But I know that being a teen boy can be tough, especially when looking to find a group of friends that share the same interests and who are at the same stage of your life. Sometimes, you may even remain friends, just because you have known someone for a long time even both or all of you are different people now. However, as we learn, develop and start becoming more intuitive and more selective about friendships... it's important to regularly remind yourself that a true friend will never make you do something that you don't want to do. If your friends start to pick on you or tease you, then they were not the right friends to start with.

Finding the right friends is so important at the life stage you are in right now. Wanna know why? Because the company you keep can really determine where you will be five or ten years from now. This includes what kind of values and goals you have. Yes - that's how impactful friendships are! Last year, I made a resolution to choose friends that hold similar values to mine. My values were things like honesty, integrity and boldness. By doing so, I was able to find an awesome set of friends. You might not see them as fancy and as cool from outside but when we get together, we do lot of fun and crazy things. It helped me avoid compromising my values just to fit in or to be negatively influenced by bad behaviour. My friends have always motivated and encouraged me to always broaden my horizons, learn more, and try new things. I too have helped them in the same way. Friendships can be that sweet fountain in life when you are overwhelmed by the pressures brought on due to man box rules if you have the support from your friends to challenge these masculinities.

So, here's a question to reflect on. Ask yourself: what kind of qualities am I looking for in a friend? This can range from honesty (I expect a good friend to tell me the truth), shared interests, attentive (they know when I am sad, need support, or are happy), and even forgiving (they are ready to learn from mistakes and accept us despite our weaknesses) and most importantly respect for each other.

# -August- self-discovery looks like... BEING EMPATHETIC

Empathy - the ability to understand and be sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others. From all the skills out there, empathy is one of the most important social skills that any young boy must strive to build. It makes you look 'cool', helps you get more friends and even boosts your self-esteem. As young boys, society does not expect us to be nurturing and empathetic because "boys are tough and rough" – probably this is one of the worst things that society expects us to be, apart from most of other negative ones we explored earlier. Sometimes, due to the socially rigid gender roles we are expected to perform, it can appear that society only expects girls to be all nurturing, caring and empathetic, but imagine how peaceful society would be, if boys were held up to this same expectation too. Because truth is, empathy is a skill that teens need to build as human beings regardless of our gender. You may have noticed that boys are often taught to be tough, strong and unbreakable. But showing empathy, kindness, understanding and sensitivity will hold far more power in your life than being emotionless or tough.

Let me tell you a great way to understand empathy. Imagine a transparent bottle of water filled with glitter in it. Now, suppose you shake the bottle violently. What happened? Now, imagine that you stopped shaking the bottle and kept it on a flat surface to rest. What happens to the glitter? It very slowly and steadily starts to sink to the bottom and eventually displays a calm appearance, doesn't it. Your thoughts and emotions are a lot like this glitter filled bottle. Due to the pressures of staying inside the "man box" we often have to deal with many conflicting emotions. So, empathy has a lot to do with understanding that others' emotions and experiences are similarly contextual and imperfect. It's also about realizing that those emotions may look and feel differently in other people.





Empathy can look a lot like supporting your team members even when they fail to do something, being there for your friend when he is going through a tough time and being friendly and welcoming to the new student in your class or supporting a friend with study notes who couldn't attend to studies continuously because he was doing a job to support his family. It could also be understanding the feelings and social pressure another student in your class is undergoing in dealing with his own gender identity. So this week, I want you to try and walk in someone else's shoes and seek our ways to be empathetic to others. It truly is a superpower and recipe for growth. This should also be the same for young girls that you get to know. They to undergo lots of pressure from society trying to fit in to the girl box. For example, think about a situation of a girl who face sexual harassment in public transport and blamed for not wearing a proper dress or going out an inappropriate time. Can you emphasize with her if you join in the same blaming, or should you look at the experience from get own eyes from her own shoes? Tell me what you think?

Can you recall situations where you offered support and stood on your friend's side?

Don't forget that empathizing also means being non-judgmental. Us boys sometimes criticize other boys based on our own biases from inside the 'man box' specially when other boys do not adhere to the unfair roles of what it means to 'be a man.' We do this despite knowing exactly how we ourselves are negatively impacted by the same culture. Can you recall times where you were judgmental and didn't offer support? How can you replace such biases with empathy instead?



**-September-**  
self-discovery looks like...

# EMBRACING DIVERSITY

You know what, machan... we are so lucky to be living in a country like Sri Lanka. Our diversity makes our culture so rich and vibrant. But sometimes, when bad things happen, like when we hear about some riots, or unfair arrests... it can be very confusing and distressing. These terrible events that you hear about are the result of people being treated unfairly because of their ethnicity, religion, background or even who they choose to love. It is a kind of discrimination, and it is harmful to people. Our beautiful island has so many different ethnicities, languages, religions and even persons with different gender identities and sexual orientations. They all have the same human rights as we do, to live a dignified life.

You may have heard people defining our culture as one big pickle. For example, for an pickle to be tasty, you need a variety of vegetables, date fruit, chillies, mustard seeds, ginger, and even sugar. These are tossed around and mixed – but each ingredient retains its own distinct identity! No better way to describe the beauty of our motherland – all diverse people can mingle together while everyone recognizes and celebrates each other's' cultures and identities. Personally, I was able to embrace diversity by making friends from other cultures and backgrounds. For example, I had no idea that my friend Mohammed and I had so many similarities until we started tuition together. Now, we really enjoy volunteering for community service projects and his friendship has been such a strength to me. You too can learn to embrace diversity by making friends outside your background, taking the time to learn about different cultures, religions and genders, for example.

Ask yourself: "have I put place unfair labels on someone I know without taking the time to truly know them? / Have I taken time to appreciate someone I know who doesn't confirm to stereotypes?"

Do you know that sometimes the nationalistic feelings are very much patriarchal and reacted from many harsh masculine ways – such as violence and vandalism or hatred? Boys can easily get attracted to these reactions when "man box" is so much worshiped in a society and in their lives of both men and women.

This doesn't mean that nationalism is a bad thing or that we shouldn't have nationalistic feelings – but it means that it's a feeling that belongs to all nationals – not just one or two and should be used to challenge treats coming from outside a nation –not within



# -September- self-discovery looks like... RESISTING BULLYING

Unfortunately, no matter what kind of background we have or the types of lives we lead, bullying is something every young boy has experienced in one or more of three forms. We've either been the bully, have been bullied, or stood by as a bystander while bullying took place around us. Our journey to true self-discovery would not be completed if we do not make conscious efforts to challenge bullying. Bullying is usually understood as any form of unwanted, aggressive behaviour that occurs because of a real or assumed imbalance in power between two people or groups.

It's easy to dismiss small incidents of bullying because society tells that bullying among teenagers is "not so serious", as far as it doesn't cause any harm to the other person. This is even more justified when its done by boys since its considered a very manly thing to do. But if these incidents keep happening without anyone taking action against it, we indirectly support an entire "culture" of bullying. This harmful culture creates low self-esteem and poor mental and physical health and even loss of life to victims. It also creates environments with no respect for one another. Due to the man box we grow up in, by being pressured to hide our emotions, many young boys try to release all that intensity by trying to assert their power over others or harass friends in order to feel better about themselves. But these actions of bullying are not healthy ways of coping with our intense emotions and insecurities.



Remember the topic of “peer pressure” we learned and explored earlier? Bullies often come in cliques of friends who support each other’s harmful behaviour due to jealousy, or in a search to gain more power in a relationship. Do any of these sound familiar... backbiting, ostracizing, rumour spreading and name-calling? They are all different forms of bullying that most of us are unfortunately all too familiar with. In the age we live in, young boys like you must also remember that bullying isn’t limited to the classroom, it can prop up in social media and other online spaces too.

Bullies are often discouraged by people who seem confident, are assertive. And more importantly, as smart young boys, we should never tolerate bullying. When you see it, speak up and always try to be there on behalf of anyone being bullied... because that’s going to be a milestone of your incredible self-discovery journey!



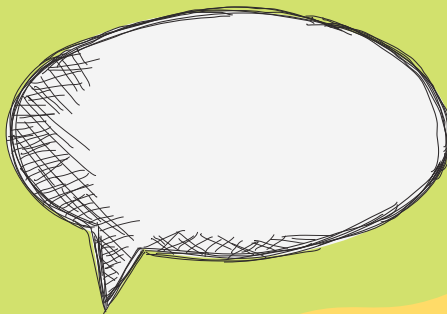


Young boys like us need...

# EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Our journey to self-discovery has been an incredible one so far – what do you think? We’ve reached the final three months for 2022 and I am so happy to see how much you’ve bloomed! I am sure the past year has been far from easy but give yourself a pat on the back for bracing through these months despite the many things that held you back – yes, even the small ones! Over the next three months, I am going to help you learn more about how young boys can communicate and express themselves more effectively. Because society places us all into this very oppressive “man box” you and I can sometimes be pressured to think that it’s ‘cool’ to be emotionally unavailable, have neutral expressions, and hide our emotions and avoid seeking support when we want to share our feelings.

In order to break past these nonsensical gender boxes, you need to learn how communication and expression is a main part of being unafraid and unashamed about your needs, interests, and views. With the right tools for communication, young boys can build better relationships with their friends, family, and community as well as solve problems intelligently. Are you ready?





## -October- self-discovery looks like...

# EXPRESSING HOW I FEEL

An important part of growing up into a confident boy is improving your ability to share your feelings, thoughts, and perspectives when and where necessary. If you ask me, I've tried to hide my feelings and thoughts most of the time because society tells us that it's "unmanly" for a boy to share feelings openly with others. As I grew up, I realized that this social expectation makes no sense at all. Everyone deserves to have the freedom to be able to express ourselves, as long as it's done in the right way. In fact, it has really helped me approach my inner thoughts in a more mature and self-assured way and help me cope better when I am upset.

Now, you might ask, "but Chethan, sometimes I can't express myself because I don't know how I feel in the first place." Or "I don't want others to think I am weak" and "people might also think I am being dramatic if I express my feelings" – these concerns are all valid. To express yourself, you need to first understand what you're feeling. So, try to take some time for yourself and identify your true emotions (i.e., I feel angry, rejected, lonely, happy, elated, unbothered, etc – it could be more than of these things!) Eventually, let's take the first step by expressing them to others as relevant. Some ways that you can start is by saying (I feel \_\_\_\_ when/about \_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_).

I remember expressing my feelings to a classmate recently who was always commenting about the fact that I am not athletic enough. Although I knew he was saying it out of concern, I felt irritated by it. So one day, I decided to share what I feel at a time when we both in a good mood by saying "Thanks for your concern about my routine. But I feel irritated when you comment about my lack of athletic skills all the time, because unlike others it's not a main passion of mine even though I take time to do some simple exercises. Just because others are all doing athletics, doesn't mean we have to follow every crowd." Immediately after, I felt so much better – almost as if a heavy weight had been lifted from me. See how that works? In fact, my best friend Sachin, has another awesome method he used for expression – since he is relatively shy, Sachin also draws, writes and even sings whenever he has to communicate a heavier topic. Trust me, consider giving it a try!



Here's a question to reflect on:

How do you think gender stereotypes or the context you were brought up in has impacted your ability to express yourself?



## -October Self-discovery looks like... BEING HONEST

It can be challenging for young boys like yourself to be open and honest because it's natural to be worried about the consequences. Sometimes, it's easy to get away with a tricky situation by lying or twisting the truth. But one moment can become a habit and if lying and dishonesty becomes a daily characteristic, it reflects badly on our character and the levels of trust between yourself and others. By making honesty an important part of your personality, people are bound to see you in a positive light as a loyal, trustworthy, and mature young man. In fact, when I think of the word "honesty," I remember my brother Kasun whenever I think of the word "honesty" because he is the perfect example for it! Kasun is so authentic that he is never afraid to admit it when he is wrong or makes a mistake.

He can be proud of his grades because he has never cheated at exams, and I can always depend on him to tell me if I am upsetting him because he has always been open about his feelings with me. Probably the best thing I love about my brother's honesty is that he always challenges sexist remarks that his friends say, like challenging his friends when they mock feminism, by explaining that feminism is actually about equality among all genders, rather than anti-men ideology. He has always been honest about sharing the truth.

Sometimes, it's also understandable that you are not ready to be truly honest, because let's face it – it's not the easier thing to do. But remind yourself of the benefits that honesty can bring and let's end this year on a note by being true to our own selves and others. Practice makes perfect – you can do it! Don't forget, this includes being true to your own self as well.





# -November- self-discovery looks like... ACTIVE LISTENING

So far, we've explored a few areas of communication that involves having a say. But did you know that another important marker of effective communication is to be a good listener? How does it relate to us as young boys and society's expectations of us? Rigid male gender roles do not give importance to listening. When men see themselves as powerful, we tend to give less importance to those who have less power than us, for example, our wives, sisters or female friends. So, instead of listening, they jump in and start giving advice or comments, without giving the speaker the space to express their feelings. Sometimes, this can be done to hide expressions of sadness or concern because of man box rules that tell us that feelings like sadness is seen as unmanly, or weak.

This thing we call "active listening" is a habit of sincerely listening and responding to someone else in a way that promotes mutual understanding. This can look a lot like giving them your full attention, signaling that you understand what the other person is saying, using non-verbal signs like nodding, smiling and maintaining eye contact as well as showing that you care by saying things like "I understand," "please continue", "can you tell me more about..." and so forth.

I am sure you will agree that listening to someone else, especially when they are expressing their feelings, can be challenging because as a listener you may feel that you need to provide solutions to their problems or give the right answers. But you'll be relieved to know that just by listening alone, you are showing your respect and concern to the speaker, because all of us need a listening ear to share how we feel and think about certain things. Even though you may not have all the answers, active listening is all about avoiding judgement, showing concern and being there for someone when they need it. It's one of the best ways to be a good friend, son, and a teammate! You will also understand that it gives us boys a sense of much-needed collective care.





# -November- self-discovery looks like... USING SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSIBLY (PART 1)

That's right! Being a smart teen boy in our digital age also means that our choices and actions can be influenced by social media. Social media is a space, if used the right way, can be a great tool of learning, and healthy connections for young boys like you. I mean let's face it, some of us have already scrolled through our Facebook or Instagram at least once before we even brush our teeth or get ready for school. It's become a central part of our lives and the ways we communicate.

Now, don't get upset if you don't have a phone or that your parents have limited your access to internet. Let's not forget that social media at very young age can be very distracting to your educational goals and there could be a huge iceberg of knowledge and information that is not visible to you to make the correct decision or do the proper response in social media. So, avoiding social media as much as possible at our age could be very wise.

But if you do have access, remember those "man box" rules that we spoke to earlier, where social rules expect boys to behave a certain way that's considered "the real man"? This applies to online spaces as much as real-life. I know, it's silly, isn't it? Us boys are so diverse in our interests, our looks, fashion, opinions and even styles of expression – but it's strange that society expects us all to behave a certain way so that we can conveniently be fit into their "man box." Unfortunately, the moment a boy steps outside this man box of society's expectations, he is called 'girlish,' or other names meant to degrade his masculine identity. Sometimes, we may even feel so much negative pressure from our classmates and peers to have many girlfriends, make girls feel uncomfortable and even send degrading or harmful messages to others online just to make them feel bad.



It's another dimension of peer pressure that many young boys can be exposed to – this may have happened to you too. But remember that behind every person you see on the internet, there is a living breathing person with thoughts and feelings just like you.

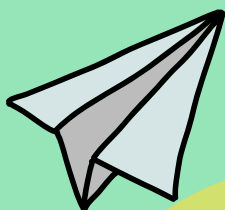
So, it's very important to respect others' privacy and be inclusive and respectful of everyone – even online. But things like cyber bullying and illegal hacking can all sound like the internet is a scary place. But truth is, it's a very vast space of people just like you and me but also has bad people who use their anonymity to prey on others. This also means that the internet can be a good place too, depending on how we use it. It's a great space to connect meaningfully with others, express our views and thoughts, seek support online, and even help with your schoolwork. But sometimes, no matter how responsible you and I are, we can still come across disturbing or harmful content that can make us feel uncomfortable. As a responsible internet user, let's try to always confide in a trusted adult when you have a bad online experience, ensure that your safety comes first before and to always oppose harmful online behaviour.



**-December-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**USING SOCIAL MEDIA  
RESPONSIBLY (PART 2)**

Now I know that teenagers and the internet go together like bread and butter – at times, inseparable! That’s why we need to continue our reflection on responsible social media use this week too! It’s important to be smart about how we use social media, no matter how old you are. Here’s how! Always check your privacy settings to ensure that your personal information (like your address, telephone number, etc) and private photos are not visible to every stranger who may come across your profile online. We must also be responsible when sending and accepting friend requests. While it’s great for us to connect with new people online, but it can be suspicious when strangers on the internet try to send you friend requests when you do not know them in real life. For young boys like you, advice from Chethan is to refrain from accepting friend requests from strangers. If you do chat with someone online, remember that no one has the right to make others feel uncomfortable, force them to do things they do not want to do or ruin someone else’s reputation by spreading misinformation. And my biggest advice to you, my friend? Do not succumb to the peer pressure of disrespecting girls online by putting them in trouble – not only can you get in trouble for doing so but it can also earn you a bad reputation as a troublemaker.

For me, the biggest lesson I have learned as a young boy using social media is to always think twice before we post something. The internet is a massive space with complicated technology that you and I need more time to understand. But bottom line is, anything you post online can remain forever even though it can be deleted, through screenshots or other complicated ways. Although it may feel like a quick release to spill our unfiltered feelings when we are upset on social media, it’s wise to think twice before pressing ‘enter.’





You may also get the pressure from friends and people around you to find fun and entertainment via online. So you maybe pushed to go in to unwanted sites which will link you and your personal details with blackmailers and people who are waiting to use you as a bait for their business – it could be adult porn sites or even online trafficking of young girls and boys for sex trades. They may offer you money or other benefits. I am sure we have heard enough stories of young boys who got trapped and had to payback a ultimately had to drop out of school and even lose life. It could also come as gaming sites.

Your friend may connect you to these gaming sites by asking you to take part as a team player. Without your knowledge you may be asked to pay money online. Did you hear the story on media of the young boy who stole his father's credit card to pay online payments and ultimately bankrupted his father? He ultimately was taken into custody and his whole future was put at risk. So be very mindful not to get into these traps which can ruin your and your families future.

Another top tip for you before we wrap up, your phone and the internet can be very addictive for both teens and adults alike. When used the wrong way, it can negatively affect our mental and even physical health. As tempting as it is to pick up the phone every time it blinks with a notification, remember that your health is more important in the long run. So instead of letting your phone control your every move, remember that you have the power to control your own habits. This includes having regular times away from the screen.

**-December-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**BUILDING AND KEEPING  
MY HONOUR CODE**

You may have heard of adults tell you that all boys have to be “gentleman” and have some chivalry as they grow into adults. Most of these ideas come from the idea that if strayed down the wrong path boys can easily be drawn into illegal and harmful behaviours than girls, due to man box rules associated with masculinities and violence. But to truly live an honourable life you and I must be less concerned about gaining social acceptance. Instead, let’s focus more on building and maintaining a set of core values to live our life in a wholesome and respectful way.

My thaththa always tells me that values like integrity, morality, loyalty, reliability and responsibility never go out of style. He also tells me that some of the most successful people he knows have such qualities. So, as the perfect end to 2022 – let’s make a promise to ourselves by pledging to determine our life path and our values based on our very honour code instead of falling victim to the unfair man box we are in. Instead of seeking for social validation of a “real man” let’s look deep into our own minds to find what truly makes us human, and if needed, how we can correct ourselves to be that ideal version we envision for ourselves, inside. Personally, my honour code has been to always have positive role models I can look up to, respect everyone including girls and women, and to not be ashamed of being my authentic self. What are your personal values and ethics that you align with? How do you practice these in your everyday actions and behaviours? Take these final weeks of December to reflect on what it truly means to be you and what values will you defend and protect for the rest of your life..

And while we work on this, let’s also end this year with gratitude. What accomplishments are you proud of this year? It doesn’t matter if they are big or small, from winning a school prize to even keeping up with your study routine – it all counts! On behalf of everyone rooting for you, I am so proud of your self discovery journey so far. So remember to take rest, care for yourself and have a great ending to this incredible year!



# Unpacking power and redefining masculinities

Unpacking how we understand power is vital for the transformative journey that boys need to experience in their way towards becoming responsible and mature young men. Unpacking is also part of self-discovery since it includes unlearning and relearning. As boys we have been recognized as the power-holders of our society. It is very important that we reflect on the what that power does to our own selves and to others who are in relationship with us.

Male power reflected in the harmful masculinities assigned to us in the man box can be very harmful if we don't carefully identify and challenge them so how does self-discovery get connected to unpacking power? Self-discovery is simply about harnessing that inner power we all have within us for our good and the good of those around us. You might be thinking... "but Chethan, as a boy, I thought I already have everything it takes to be a man" I promise you, no matter how old you are where you come from, what gender you belong to, you and I will never stop learning and growing. An important part of this learning journey is to learn the connections between true self-discovery and the different types of power and its related privileges that comes with it, and get ready to unlearn where necessary. If a person is able to influence others to do what they want them to do, it means that he/she has power. But historically, men have been holding more power than women in society. Let's explore that later.

What's important is that we need to challenge this unfair dynamic and realize that the power is in fact, something we can give and share with others. In fact, the "man box" that we explored are made up and by society and passed down through generations. It is learned by you and I through people and institutions around us. Unless we look deeper, we don't recognize the different types of power and its undeniable effects on our growth and relationships.

This stereotyped -man box- that society tries to push us into can sometimes make you unaware of the power we hold just because of our gender. It can also make us blind to how other groups may get less of it due to power imbalances between men and women.

The power that we are going to discuss is all a part of patriarchal social system we are living in. It automatically gives more power to men and creates an unbalanced power relationship between men and women.

Can you think of any incidents that have made you feel powerful solely because you are a boy? A bit more reflection on this question will make you question some of the choices, actions and opportunities that you and I make from inside the “man box.” When I was your age, I had grownups tell me that men are natural leaders and have the right to control women. My sister, on the other hand was told that she must always obey her husband and that her main duties were doing housework and caring for children. I was so confused by this – why can't girls have similar dreams? As I grew older, I realized how discriminative society's “man box” can be. I realized that every girl and boy must have the freedom to pursue dreams and goals which are not limited by gender or background.

I am sure that as a young boy, you may have started having questions like I did, but afraid to do so due to fear of getting labelled or laughed at. If you've started questioning the things around you, such as wanting to understand more about people, systems and structures... then congratulations! This is the first step in your journey towards true self-discovery. Let's learn more about how we can start defining masculinities – it all starts with unpacking this thing we called 'power' so we can better understand what a big role it plays in society.



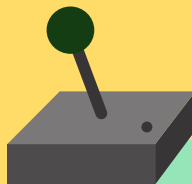
# Understanding my power and privilege

Now you might be wondering... "do we really have that much power and privilege just for being men?" ... the answer is yes you absolutely do. The power given to us solely because of our gender might not appear in obvious ways, which is why we often forget or dismiss it. So let me give you a few examples of how we have power and privileges as boys and men, more than other groups. How many of the following scenarios have you noticed?

- 1) I can walk down the street without fear that strangers will comment on what I am wearing, try to touch me, whistle or make rude noises at me
- 2) I can go out even after 6pm in the night
- 3) I am not expected to clean the dishes and sweep the floor at home, because my mother or sister will do it
- 4) I do not feel strong social pressure to get married or have children.
- 5) In the future, if I have children, it will not strongly affect my career or goals
- 6) As a boy, I will probably earn more money than my wife or sisters
- 7) My male friends or older male relatives decide on life choices of women in their lives.
- 8) My 'virginity' is not checked at marriage

How many of the above scenarios were you able to relate to, simply because you are a boy? I am sure you understand the meaning of male power and privilege now. It's basically a benefit, favour or advantage given to boys and men, simply because they are male.

Now, the reason I want is an equal set of rigid rules that we are supposed to obey to keep receiving such unequal benefits and in order to be seen as a "man." So, let's take some time to reflect on this topic of power and privilege a bit more.



Now, the reason I wanted to discuss this important topic with a cool young boy like you is because I truly believe that you can help make a difference in our society. You may wonder..."But why do we need a difference... we already have privileges."

We need a difference because whenever men and boys receive such power and privileges, it means that other groups like women , girls and LGBTQ+ persons get less of it. Now, that's not very fair, is it? That's not all! Even though some of these benefits you receive as boys can feel good, it is also indirectly a part of the man box we are trapped in. For every advantage we have as boys, there is an equal set of rigid rules that we are supposed to obey to keep receiving such unequal benefits and in order to be seen as a "man." So, let's take some time to reflect on this topic of power and privilege a bit more.

I have been able to learn and grow so much more simply by reflecting and being honest with some of the answers to the following questions. I encourage you to take some time to reflect and answer them too. Feel free to use the blank pages that follow to write down your observations.



**Have you noticed the above-mentioned privileges before? List some examples of such privileges in your daily life that women and girls do not have.**

**What do you think is the effect on girls and on boys, over time, when they experience male privilege in society? What would be the outcomes of shared power and privileges to women, girls and other genders?**

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# Is being a man all about having "power over"?

Every day, you and I move through different systems of power that other people have made for us. In order to truly understand society, we need to understand what power operates in our daily lives. It's simple – power means the ability to influence someone else to do something you want them to do. We cannot classify it as 'good' or 'bad'... power is just another concept that helps us understand people and situations more clearly. Understanding the 4 dimensions of power is very important for boys to grasp. Trust me, I promise you that with this new understanding, you're bound to understand the world more clearly and get a lot of answers to some of the burning questions you have – including the nature of interactions we have with those around us.

#1? Let's explore "Power Over" – To have power "over" something means being able to exert force or authority over someone else. Think about the government vs. individual citizens, or men vs. women and even parent vs. child. The thing about having power over someone is that this type of power can be seen in direct and obvious ways. For example, some boyfriends force their girlfriends to select friends that are only approved by them. Some even force girlfriends to share intimate photos against their will. This type of power could even be invisible and enforced upon us by large media companies to promote harmful messages that encourage men to be violent.

Power over could be even worse for boys like us when its used to justify use of violence by men over women. This type of power can make it seem okay to physically, emotionally or sexually abuse girls and ultimately put the blame on girls. The blame can either be on the way they were dressed, the time they were attacked or even the place. Or it could even be a situation where a girl is asked to leave her job after marriage or limiting the people a girl could have connections with.

Activity: Think of the people who have power "over" you. Write down their names, positions, and your reflections about this dynamic. Need help? Here's my reflection.

Who has power 'over me'?	Their position	Chethan's reflection
Amma and Thaththa	My parents	Amma and Thaththa can limit my phone time and not give permission to hang out with friends. Even though they have this power, they don't exercise it all the time - only when I misbehave. So I know Amma and Thaththa limits my freedom only because they want me to learn a lesson so I won't repeat the same mistake next time.
Shantha sir	Rugger coach	Shantha sir tells Thatha that I "run like a girl" that I need to man-up whenever I am upset, whenever we lose a game. He teases me that I have no girlfriends because I am not athletic enough. I don't like the power he has over me because people like Shantha sir thinks that athletics is the only way to be a real man and that having many girlfriends is a sign of masculinity. But his remarks go against my values of integrity and my honour code.

**See how that works? Although power is not inherently good or bad - the way it shows up in peoples' lives can either lead to justice or injustice. Especially based on the position that society has placed us as men and boys, there is a tendency for men to use this power to dominate relationships with women and girls. But when can power be seen in more positive ways? That's where we explore that in the next pages!**

**Who has power  
'over me'?**

**Their  
position**

**My reflection**

**Have I used power over anyone else because I am a boy? To whom?  
How do I feel about it now?**

# Cool boys are good allies. Here's how you can be one too!

Remember that topic of male power and privilege we discussed earlier? Now, did you know that we can still be successful and happy while also letting go of these rigid man box rules and promoting shared power with women and LGBTQ+ people? That's right – we absolutely can! Personally, I was able to step out of the man box and be a better ally by understanding that male privilege actually negatively affects everyone. By being aware of my privilege as a young boy and the man box rules that comes with it, I realized that...

- I do not have the freedom to have close and emotional relationships with both my male and female friends
- I did not feel comfortable engaging with girls and women more closely to learn new things together and openly discuss diverse perspectives
- I did not have much self-awareness
- I have been risking my mental health just to satisfy imaginary man box rules

But the moment I made a promise to step out of the man box, I was able to experience all these wonderful things. My life feels so much freer the minute I stopped letting gender stereotypes control me. That's why I want you to experience this wonderful other side to life too! So, how can you and I learn to be an ally to women, girls and lgbtq+ people? How can we share our power and privilege so that no one is marginalized and everyone gets equitable benefits? Here are some awesome and easy ways to begin!

1. Learn more about the topics that trap us inside the man box. This can include educating yourself about the patriarchy, gender inequality, gender roles, and even the links between gender and violence. Living in the modern age, we have access to the internet, libraries, and even good role models – make use of these wonderful resources so we can be more self-aware through our learnings.

2. Remember that topic of active listening we explored a few weeks ago? By truly listening to the perspectives and experiences of women, girls and LGBTQ+ people, we signal our allyship. This gesture of support is a great way to make them feel heard while giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts. It's important to especially promote this action in male-dominated environments.

3. Be conscious of gender stereotypes (eg: girls must cook, boys must not cry, etc.). Do not promote gender stereotypes in jokes or conversations.

4. Make space for girls in your class or extra-curricular activities, for example, to take the lead. Educate your friends about how some seemingly innocent comments could be harmful.

5. Step up at home and take on your share of household work- wash your own plate, clean your room, wash your own clothes, help your siblings, do some grocery shopping

6. Join women's marches and support the fight on women's human rights

# Cool boys are also great campaigners!

As young boys, we still have a unique opportunity to change the things we've learned about the man box and even about women and girls. A great way for us to make a true difference starting from our generation is to be a campaigner! Personally, I became a campaigner as a result of the inspiring friends I surrounded myself with. In fact, something that my friend Sachin told me recently really inspired me to step up and stop ignoring the injustice around me. One day, we were talking about this man box, and he said "you know Chethan, it's scary to think that a man can completely get away with making a woman feel uncomfortable or unsafe on the road or bus. I actually can't believe that we used to think it was okay to engage in such rude behaviour. I am so happy we are not like that anymore." Sachin's comment helped me unpack the unequal power that surrounds us. It also made me realize that as young boys who will one day be men... we are at the top of society's hierarchy.

You know that famous line from Spiderman? That "with great power comes great responsibility?" I realized that all of us boys have a responsibility and an ability to be part of social change and share power with everyone. By becoming a campaigner for gender equality, we are helping "everyone," not just women and girls!

In fact, I am reminded of this very special quote by Birth Anarchy whenever I feel demotivated - "if we inherit injustice, we should never feel guilty. We are not responsible for that past. However, if we choose to do nothing about it going forward, then we have plenty to feel guilty about." Think about it, what a special legacy we would be leaving behind both for our generation and those to come - if we do our part to promote gender equality. Being a campaigner can be very easy - here are some things to try out:

- 1) Listen to women and girls and learn more about how male power negatively affects them
- 2) Don't be a bystander. Hold your friends and acquaintances accountable, especially when you hear sexist remarks like "man up" or "don't be a sissy." Refrain from using or promoting excuses like "boys will be boys."

- 3) Help with housework and daily chores. Stop seeing such tasks as a woman's job.
- 4) Help women feel safer, and be aware of the amount of space you take up (physically and in a conversation)
- 5) When a girl tells you something is sexist or that a certain action makes her uncomfortable, believe her.
- 6) Do not promote or partake in catcalling or verbal, physical, emotional or financial harassment or abuse
- 7) Learn about how sexist terms like "slut", "bitch", etc., is rooted in patriarchal ideas. Refrain from using them in conversations, no matter how innocent the subject may be.
- 8) Become a peer influencer and always try to motivate and inspire their actions to address injustice. This can include speaking against violence against women, early and forced marriages and child abuse. Try to raise awareness on harmful masculinities, man box and unpacking power, young boys mental health. Put your creativity to good use and even make some cool promotional posters on how to be a cool guy who care about himself, society and social issues!

Also, remember that a true campaigner of gender equality will not see himself as a man or boy who must take over and "save" women from the patriarchy. Doing things from such a mindset promotes the false idea that men must protect women. Truth is, women and girls do not need to be saved by men. Rather, we (boys and girls) must work together to collectively disrupt harmful norms and practises that we learn from inside our gender boxes.

Being a campaigner is also much more than simply challenging sexism and partaking in the action points mentioned above. We can also begin to hold leaders and other stakeholders accountable. By doing so, we can start pushing for bigger impacts at the institutional and systemic levels! In fact, did you know that Sri Lanka has a long history of youth-led movements that brought about significant social change. Young people have advocated for so many things from legal reform, climate change and even animal rights! Here's your chance to be a part of history. Some things that young boys can engage in as campaigners are:

- 1) Advocate for better laws in Sri Lanka. This can be done by writing letters to your local council and government leaders.

- 2) Seek leadership opportunities at school or youth societies. By running to become a head boy or prefect, for example, you can promote the concept of compassionate leadership among your peers and juniors. By doing so, you are also at a more influential place to teach others about stepping out of the man box!
- 3) Create a social awareness campaign offline or on social media! Wouldn't that be a fun way to help others learn more about gender equality while also having fun!
- 4) Write letters to companies or stakeholders or to media. If you witness injustice or sexist practises, consider writing a letter calling for more gender-equal practises.

For example, my friend recently wrote a letter to a toy company asking why girl's toys were always kitchen sets and babysitting while boys' toys were about white-collar jobs. His letter included learnings on the harmful messages that it can send and suggestions for more gender-neutral toys.

Write essays, poems or songs about the silly man box rules and we should all stop being trapped inside it. Submit them to your local newspaper or teen's magazine for wider reach!



This is your year!

# Calendar 2023

## January

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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## All young boys need...

# KINDNESS AND COMPASSION

Hello buddy! I wish a VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR to the young boy reading this! I hope you had a very close connection with this journal and noted down all your thoughts, feelings and experiences. Now, I invite you to do the same this year as well. Let's be connected and expressive and continue this self discovery –dialogue. A brand-new year is the perfect time to reflect on our goals and learn from the past – surely a key ingredient to ensure that we continue this journey of unpacking power. In fact, I have a very special wish for you, my friend... My 2023 resolution for you stop looking backward and start looking forward at the amazing possibilities in front of you! The past year may have had many bumps along the way mixed with several triumphs – there may have been moments where you made mistakes, lost someone you love, experienced an embarrassing situation and even experienced loneliness. These moments are very common and an expected sign of your continued progress. As teen boys, we can experience added -bumps- along our self-discovery journey due to the “man box” we talked about. Remember the “man box?” It's the rigid set of expectations and perceptions of masculine behaviour which limits the true identities and interests of boys and men everywhere. It's a concept that all young boys must challenge as we go grow into more mature human beings.

Now – with this new year you've probably heard a lot of talk about New Year's Resolutions – a set of promises, goals, new habits that people establish for themselves as a way to improve their selves. But do you make New Year's resolutions each year and find it hard to follow them through? Do you beat yourself up when you fail? Trust me, this is more common than you imagine. The reason most of us fail to stick to our resolutions is because they are either not specific or realistic enough. The trick is to set realistic, measurable, and action-oriented goals so we can strive gradually to complete them. And I have just the right start for you! I invite you to begin 2023 with a plan to practise kindness and self-compassion. By making “kindness” your motto for 2023, it can positively affect yourself, your friends, your community, and believe it or not, the world! This is because kindness and compassion has a powerful ripple effect, since when one person experiences kindness they will most likely pass it on to others. Let's welcome the New Year with the courage to be kind – are you ready? Let's begin!

# -January- Self-discovery looks like... BEING KIND TO MYSELF

I truly believe that kindness isn't just something we should want—kindness is something we absolutely need in our lives. It gives our actions, choices and behaviour more meaning and fulfilment, simply by treating ourselves and others with care, respect and compassion. That's right! – Your resolution to be kind would not be complete if you do not practice self-compassion first; that is, kindness directed at your own self. The social world young boys like you have to navigate can include pressures from school, peers, family, religion and the wider community. Our teen years are a crucial period of growth and learning. But sometimes, our placement within the confines of the “man box” can get in the way of practising self-compassion because of stereotypes that compare nurture and compassion with femininity. Being inside the man box can feel like a struggle between displaying our true authentic selves and the made-up self we think society wants us to be. This made-up self we all try to be to please society may include neglecting your wellbeing since society says it's unmanly to care about ourselves or others too much, being judged by our peers, to be macho, and to engage in risky behaviours because it is expected of boys.

In fact, it's fair to say that many men and boys do not make the necessary adjustments to live healthier lives, often for fear of being perceived as feminine or weak. Because of this pressure to reject compassion and kindness, you may experience low self-esteem, harmful relationships with peers and caregivers, low mental health due to bottling up emotions, lesser achievements, and even lesser self-satisfaction. You may unknowingly put your life at risk if you are not compassionate to your own self.

This is when self-compassion can be so important to bridge the gap between your true self and this culturally scripted identity that young boys tend to build to feel accepted. But with the right tools, self-compassion can help you boost your self-worth while also finding a steady footing in society. But remember, do not punish yourself for trying to be someone you're not – as teens, it's normal to take time to explore your unique identity. So let's begin by taking small steps each day to be kind to yourself!

1. Don't compare yourself to others. (Simply because it makes no sense to do so. We all have our unique background and circumstances and its' your distinctive traits, looks, actions, and thoughts that make you – YOU!

2. Be kind to your body. Take rest, exercise, stop negative self-talk and maintain personal grooming. Avoid thoughts of self-harming, even as a response to others or in trying to punish others by harming yourself.

3. Spend time for yourself – read a book, sing, try a new hobby, explore nature. This helps you appreciate what you have and helps you realize that true happiness comes from within.

Be grateful for the things you have – this includes your loved ones, your unique strengths and accomplishments as well as how you have moved past troubled times bravely.



**Write down 10 things you like about yourself. (As an extra step, copy these 10 things onto a sheet of paper and stick them to your mirror or desk!)**

-January-  
Self-discovery looks like...

# KNOWING THAT AGGRESSION IS NOT COOL

I know that by now, you've learned something about the man box most of us boys are trapped in. This man box actually promotes so many myths about masculinities that have been passed from our grandparents' grandparents and even beyond... as absolute truths. However, the truth is that it's just society's rigid messages about how men should behave that have historically been upheld in order to keep women and girls under patriarchal control. Why am I telling you this?... because as long as there are rigid and stereotypical beliefs around manhood that go unquestioned, men and boys become trapped. They become incapable of embodying a type of masculinity that is framed outside of the traditional status quo. One of the biggest connections that have been made in order to define a man is aggression and violence... meaning the more aggressive a man is, the more manly he is – this is a concept our generation needs to challenge, don't you think?

You may have heard of things like “a man can hit his wife if she disobeys,” “it's natural for men to assault others because they have needs,” etc. Because society excuses most men for being aggressive, young boys like you and I may sometimes be convinced that such behaviour is not a big deal.

Sometimes, aggression can even be used as the final outlet to release bottled up emotions that men and boys try to hide from society. I have male friends who say they have not cried in years, or they did not cry at all during a tragic moment; when a loved one passed, for example. But when I see men and boys being angry or lashing out, society often dismisses it men being men or you may have heard your mother saying “don't make your father angry “as if anger is the only emotion that can come from your father.

Have you had similar observations? We cannot ignore that we live in a patriarchal society where being angry or aggressive is considered macho and normal. This idea is so deeply rooted in our society that often it's easy for us boys to think that in order to get anything done, there has to be some level of aggression.

Sometimes, some of us might even think that bullying others is cool, that all rules are meant to be broken and that real men who we call heroes are those who use violence and are unafraid to do dangerous things. But let's remind ourselves that aggression can lead to strained relationships with those we love. It can even lead to physical injury and mental health problems – not to mention a complete violation of our true honour code.

Here are few reflective questions to consider as we explore this topic further:

Is your anger causing issues within your relationships with family and friends? How can I manage intense emotions in a healthy way? What can I do to help my friends step out of the man box?

-February-  
self-discovery looks like...

# RESPECTING DIVERSE VIEWS

A big change that happens in our teen years is the need to assert ourselves more actively instead of conforming to certain views that we used to blindly follow as kids. As much as young boys like you begin to explore your identity and this newfound independence, we may also clash with others who may not necessarily think and act like you and your friends do. In fact, being able to exchange views and ideas while listening to and acknowledging the views of others is a milestone of true self-discovery for young boys. This can be easier said than done when we live inside the man box. That's because society always expects boys to act, think and behave the same way instead of being our own unique selves. So, acknowledging the views of someone else instead of instantly dismissing them can be challenging since this may make you feel like uncomfortable in some ways.

However, if we are to truly step out of the bounds of the man box to an environment that accepts young boys in all our diversity... it's important to understand that we can disagree with someone else while also staying respectful. It also means that sometimes, we must be open to changing our current opinions when we receive new information and not be ashamed of shifting opinions, if the previous stance is something you no longer believe in. For example, I remember being so against this concept of "feminism" when I was a young boy. My friends used to laugh at the word because we were told that feminists are "man-haters" who have nothing better to do with their lives.





But a few years later at a workshop I was attending, I got the opportunity to engage with a few activists from a non-profit organization who was helping our village set up shelters for victims of domestic violence. The uncles there explained to us that feminism in fact isn't "anti-men" at all but actually a social movement that calls for equality between all genders.

I learned that feminism even acknowledges that boys like us and men are sometimes hurt by this system called the patriarchy. See how that worked? In my journey of self-discovery, I was able to change my opinion because I received new information and I no longer believed in my previous stance. Likewise, we must always be open to diverse views and have the courage to disagree with others in a respectful manner. After all, it's a practice that has resulted in a lot of healthy and fruitful relationships!



-February-  
Self-discovery looks like...

# PRACTICING NON- JUDGMENT

I'm sure you and I can both agree that nobody likes being negatively judged. However, it's a very common occurrence that from our early years to adulthood; one could even say it's human nature. Remember that man box we keep coming back to? Society's rules about how boys must behave can often leave us feeling judged by others while also encourage us to be judgmental of others. A judgmental person is basically someone who forms opinions or perceptions about another person or group too quickly instead of waiting to know more about them. Sound familiar? That's because our teenage years are often the first time we come across and realize that judgement is a common everyday occurrence that both you and I as well as society have done at some point. In fact, my friend Sachin shared with me recently that whenever he visits school, thoughts like "is something wrong with my appearance?" "Why are they staring at me?" comes to mind instantly.

I am sure you or someone you know may have felt the same way at certain times, and trust me, it's more common than you realize. That's because our teen years are often a time when we would do anything to feel like accepted by the wider community. But just because being surrounded by people who are judgmental and even being judgmental ourselves is so common... it doesn't mean that we need to accept it and let it affect our self-esteem and mental wellbeing. Boys who are truly mature would make conscious efforts to avoid judging people too quickly and even challenge others who are judgmental.



As you mature, you will learn that people deserve to be valued by their character and personality traits, instead of appearance and background. In fact, the more I started choosing friends based on these traits instead of considering their "coolness" ranking or appearance for example, the more genuine and lasting those friendships tend to be. Wanna know my surprising observation? After I left school and attended a reunion, I noticed that most of the "cool" kids were now just like the rest of us, while others who were cornered or bullied are now super successful in their own fields. My point is, it's character that really matters in the end!

Have you judged anyone based on their sexual orientation or gender identity?

Have you judged anyone of your friends based on the number of girlfriends they have, based on their height, weight or even growth of hair in their bodies?

remember, for example, how my brother was so upset that his friends had laughed at him for not having a proper growth of his beard.



# -March- self-discovery looks like... BEING KIND TO OTHERS

I wanna let you in on a little secret to true empowerment... being kind has changed my life and it can change yours too. Remember how we talked about self-compassion earlier? I am sure you are still practicing that. Let's look on kindness towards the rest of the world including our own surroundings and environment. Kindness with care is crucial to our survival.

On a personal level, kindness has helped me perform better at school, helped me find true friendship and even boosted my reputation as a reliable and good friend, son, and student. Now – considering that boys and men are often pressured to limit our ability to be vulnerable and empathize with others, being kind might always be something that grownups teach us as much as girls. So we may be hesitant to engage with others around us in nurturing and kind ways. However, being kind requires you and I to bravely step out of the man box.

By doing so... we create spaces for other men and boys to step outside it as well! But trust me, kindness is the key to being happy and successful, no matter who we are. Practicing kindness can be particularly important for teens as we navigate these challenging times of COVID-19, pressures from school and the silly rules imposed from within the man box. Once you come to the realization that almost all boys your age faces these pressures in one way or another, the more you may understand why it's so important to me kind. For example, I remember just recently, I was going to the market on Sunday, and I saw Sachin at the nearby shop. Sachin was in a was looking at the road hopelessly. Because of the lockdown, mudalali uncle was so busy that day and to make matters worse there was even a queue. I joined Sachin at the end of the line and began a conversation to check how he was and pass time. I was able to find out that he had been having trouble completing his homework because of challenges faced due to being on a wheelchair. Having listened to his concerns, I then offered help in little ways I can.

Later that week, he shared how I had been a strength to him during that difficult time. Because of the help I offered, he managed to find time to complete the homework on time! Notice how simple kindness can be? It could be as easy as talking to someone, sharing their workload and even being sensitive to their unique circumstances.

If you're still not convinced, know that even research shows that kindness is linked to increased peer acceptance, improved academic performance, and positive mental health! At any age where most of us teen boys are vulnerable to bullying, anxiety and discrimination – it's a crucial time to understand the value of being kind to others. So next time you interact with others, make sure to smile, ask how they are and be less critical in our engagements!



# -March- self-discovery looks like... UNDERSTANDING OUR SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Would you agree that sometimes, it feels like we live in a very complicated world? Whenever we watch news or scroll through the internet, we are likely to see at least one event of racial discrimination, sexual harassment, or even corruption – isn't it. This can leave us feeling very confused and hopeless about our future. But did you know that as a young boy, you and your peers are at a unique position to challenge this status quo as future leaders of this very same society? That's right! Even though our environment is riddled with so many injustices, we have the change to rebuild and truly works towards a changed society. But to do that, the first step to understanding these issues is to dig deeper into our social identity and the unearned benefits that may come with it. This has a lot to do with the topic of "privilege" we explored earlier. Reflecting on our social identities in comparison to others helps us understand that we live in an unfair system that benefits some people at the expense of others.

Let me give a simple explanation to help you grasp this concept. Now, imagine that your parent gives you an egg or the biggest position of meat with your lunch and your younger sister only gets a smaller position every day when we return home from school. Imagine that they continue this practice just because you are the male child and thinking that you need to be stronger. f Would that be fair? It's not. This simple example is not too different from incidents of racism and sexism that we see daily. For example, sexism refers to giving someone extra benefits or privileges just because he is a man. Or racism can be when majority of the population in Sri Lanka are given more privileges or social acceptance, while other minorities get lesser social respect. It means some groups do not have equal access to information, services, resources and social respect because of their background or identity, such as being female, disabled or belonging to a specific geographic area or social class. That can be very unfair, isn't it? This type of discrimination arises due to senseless norms and stereotypes that people make up against other groups, such as between men and women. These aspects of receiving benefits and advantages more than another group are a part of being "privileged."

A big part of growing into a mature and responsible man is to reflect on how although it's not an inherently bad thing to be privileged, we must take steps to ensure that privilege is used to stand up for the rights and freedoms of those without it. So, let's begin by first identifying some ways by which we might be privileged (e.g.: being male, being a part of majority ethnic group, having a home, not having a disability, etc) and then challenging injustices that occur to those without privilege. Can you think of ways where your race, age, gender, religion or other social identity brought you unearned advantages?

Let's also think of few actions that we can take. Actions can range from holding our peers accountable when they say something against another community, ensuring that marginalized peers have a chance to express their views and providing a safe space for someone who is experiencing injustice due to unfair systems. What else can we do to use our social identity for good?





## All young boys need to know about...

# PUBERTY AND SEXUALITY

Perhaps the biggest change that we need to deal with as teen boys are changes to our body and onset of sexuality. Starting from around age ten, boys reach an important stage of development where your body begins to take on an adult form. We see changes to our physical body and experience new feelings that can change the previous dynamics we had with our parents and peers. Experiencing puberty and onset of sexuality is a time for all young boys to be brave enough to deal with all these major changes. Now, I know that change can be scary. Suddenly, people expect you to be independent, you may not feel like 'you' inside your own body for a while. You may even be confused by some new feelings of attraction that seems to be arising lately. These are all major changes that happen to all young boys as we prepare to cross that exciting bridge from childhood to adulthood. And I think you are already so for facing these changes with courage!

A great way to cope with these changes is to always feel free learn more about puberty and onset of sexuality. This is because sometimes the fear or confusion we feel arises because we don't have enough information to make sense of things we do not know. Puberty is such a broad topic and it's natural to have so many questions that we need answers to. Which is why, over the next three months, you and I are going to explore some key topics of puberty and sexuality. Apart from the information here, you may want to discuss or explore many other topics related to this subject. So make sure you speak to a trusted adult or seek information through other reliable ways in order to learn more.

Sometimes, living inside the man box, you may hear that us teens do not need to learn so much details about our puberty and sexuality because it's against our culture. But truth is, the more accurate information we receive during these crucial years – the more prepared we can be to face the big changes in our body and lives without fear or confusion. Or too much curiosity.



Besides, how can a natural part of growing up be such a bad thing? Both boys and girls have the right to learn about this crucial period of our lives and the changes it brings.

It's important to do so in order to navigate our journey into adulthood responsibly. So, remember that learning about our bodies and sexuality is an important part of a boy's self-discovery journey and there is nothing wrong with wanting to know about it. Always be mindful of from where you learn the correct details about this, our friends may also have false information and some websites and magazines that you read may also have false or exaggerated information. Sometimes we are so curious, and we reach out to people who are much older than us. And they might not give you age-appropriate information and sometimes may exploit your lack of understanding on sexuality.

This is your own journal. That allows you to read through with trust and also create space for you to have self-dialogue, share your thoughts and feelings. So, let's dig in!



-April-  
Self-discovery looks like...

# DEALING WITH CHANGES IN MY BODY

Fun fact - during puberty, your body will grow faster than at any other time in your life, except for when you were a baby! So it's no wonder we feel overwhelmed during our teen years with so much happening to and around us. You may notice that while some of your male and female friends may begin looking like adults, others would still look like kids... that's because there is no set age for when puberty begins because it's different for each of us. Puberty starts when the body is ready and so keep in mind that each of us grow at our own pace. For those born as boys, a special chemical called hormones are released inside your body to help you grow into an adult. Due to a main hormone called testosterone, boys begin to develop deeper voices, bigger muscles, taller height, and develop body and facial hair. Both teen girls and boys may also get acne as glands on our body start becoming more active and produces more oil. They may also gain weight and have different sleep patterns than earlier. These are only a few out of many changes that all boys experience in their journey to becoming adults.

A key point to keep in mind is the importance of healthy lifestyle choices during this exciting life stage. Consider following some of these steps to adjust to these changes and make the best of your teenage years amid those big changes.

- Have healthy meals. As we grow, our bodies have an increased appetite and need more food. But as tempting as it may be to eat junk food or sweets all the time, remember to have a nutritious balanced diet. Bright fruits and vegetables for example have been a secret behind healthy skin and overall health, as well as drinking lots of water to flush out toxins out of our bodies! Now don't be silly to think that boys are naturally fit enough or boys don't need healthy skin etc. I know that as much as I have learned you too have learned that boys are tough and rough. And we neglect most of our body needs at this age of our lives. The man box we gave talked about through out this journey can make your live as a boy very tough as you get pushed to adjust to man box traits.

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes every day even with at least a 20 minutes' walk. This helps our mental AND physical health. But be cautious not to over-exert yourself by putting too much strain on your muscles
- Get good quality sleep – it's important to respect your body by having enough rest
- Shower or bathe regularly, especially after playing sports or sweating a lot, like on a hot day. You can also use deodorant under your arms.



-April-  
self-discovery looks like...

# DISCOVERING OUR GENDER IDENTITY

A big part of being a teen is gradually figuring out who you are in terms of your gender identity and sexual orientation. Gender identity is all about how you feel inside and how you show your gender through your appearance and behaviour. Now the man box that most of us trapped inside can sometimes tell us that the world is separated into 'masculine' and 'feminine' – and that everything about men and women is decided on these two binaries like girls should wear pink, have long hair, wear skirts while boys must avoid doing these same things. But living up to these nonsensical rules can prevent us from living our best lives.

When we speak of gender identity, some teens may feel like their body was formed in a way that doesn't fit who they are. Teens who feel this way can still be in the process of deciding if they are male, female or somewhere between the gender spectrum. Those who identify as the opposite sex from the one they were given at birth, are called transgender. If someone identifies as the same sex they were given at birth, then they are called cisgender. There is nothing abnormal or "bad" about either of these terms. Besides, it's okay to not have everything figured out at your age. In fact, it's normal to not be 100% sure about your gender identity until later in life. But it's important to keep in mind that not everyone who has a penis is a boy or man, and not everyone who has a vulva is a girl or woman. We are all complex beings figuring our layered identities as we journey through life.



But when some people have trouble understanding this concept. They may think that transgender people are against the order of nature, has a mental illness, or are trying to trick others. These harmful ideas are not true. In fact, our multiple gender identities are one of the things that make us unique and human. As empowered youth, it's important to respect and defend transgender and gender nonconforming people from violence and hate.

A part of stepping out of the man box is also knowing that it's never okay to bully someone because of how they express their gender. So let's end this week's learning by reflecting on this insightful quote by Audre Lorde: "It's not the differences that divide us, it's our incapacity to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences."



# -May- Self-discovery looks like... MAINTAINING SEXUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE

There are a bunch of important information that all boys need to know to maintain our sexual health and hygiene. Some of the physical developments in your body that may leave you feeling confused is sudden growth spurts (e.g., getting tall and muscular suddenly), growth of penis and testicles (which can feel itchy and uncomfortable sometimes), unexpected erections, wet dreams and mood swings. Remember that things like having a wet dream, where fluid containing sperm is released out of your penis, while you're asleep, can seem confusing and embarrassing – it's completely normal and happens to almost all boys. All these strange happenings are a normal and healthy part of your growth process.

You will also notice growth of hair in new places because hormones are telling your body that it is ready to change. Some of the hormones that trigger this new hair growth come from your adrenal glands. As you become older, hair gets thick enough on your face, you may want to talk with your parents or caregiver about shaving. Sweating a lot during teen years is also very common because your hormones are working all the time. Keep in mind that sweat by itself is not really smelly. But when it comes in contact with the bacteria on skin (which everyone has) it becomes smelly. Therefore it's important to shower regularly and keep yourself clean, especially on hot days.

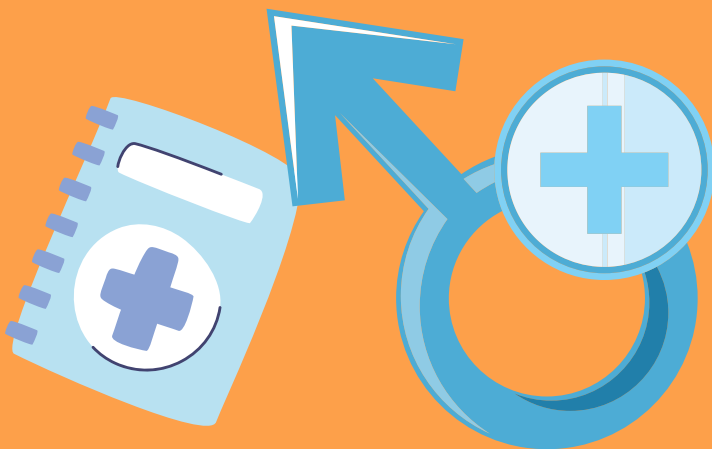
Similarly, it's important to know that girls in your same age go through their own set of changes such as menstruation, wider hips, growth of pubic hair and development of breasts. Remember that truly mature young boys will not make fun of others for early or late puberty or sudden changes that happen during these crucial years. In fact, let's make a promise to always respect our peers as we are all going through an equally exciting and confusing time. It's important to be as supportive and respectful of each other as much as possible.



Since you may hear a lot of myths and strange misconceptions about puberty and bodily changes growing up, it's advisable to speak to a medical doctor or trusted adult to clarify anything you're not sure of and get the right information.

I know that as young boys you may not be very mindful of cleanliness or personal hygiene as much as young girls. This is because boys are not taught to take responsibility for themselves. Remember this is also part of self care for young boys. Trust me, this will make you feel good and stay healthy. I have sometimes been ridiculed by my own friends when I talk about my personal hygiene routines with them. They think it's too girlish to have such a routine. They think "real men" don't care and it's fine to wear the same underwear for days. But they don't reveal the skin irritations they suffer from in secret.

So, my advice to you is to take responsibility for your own personal hygiene rather than suffering in secret. Don't get caught in the "man box" at the cost of your own health.



-May-  
self-discovery looks like...

# UNDERSTANDING HEALTHY PEER RELATIONSHIPS

As young boys, we may also find an increase in sexual feelings along with changes to our body. It's normal to feel both excited and worried about these new feelings you may have to confront because it can change the dynamics you have with friends and peers.

So, understanding our own sexual feelings is important to correctly navigate our relationship with peers and those we may be attracted to. You may have heard of the term sexual orientation before. What this means is the emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that a person feels toward another person. If someone is attracted to a person of the opposite sex, they are heterosexual or 'straight.' Those attracted to the same sex are 'homosexual' or gay/lesbian. Bisexual people on the other hand are attracted to both male and female persons, while asexual persons do not have an interest in sexual activity but may be emotionally attracted to others. All these different sexual orientations are usually the result of both biological and psychological factors and not necessarily something a person voluntarily chooses.

Learning about relationships and our sexuality in an open manner can be difficult, especially in our culture where it is not openly talked about. So it's okay to take the time you need to learn about navigating relationships and love in the right way and right time. It's not advisable to start relationships when you do not have much clarity of your feelings and relationships at an early age. It can also distract your education and life goals. Having a relationship during teen years is not a must and not having relationship is nothing to feel bad about. It's not a trend that you should force yourself in to.





Often, because of the man box we live in, you may also be quick to disregard to not even notice power imbalances in our relationships. But being mindful of how power operates even in our relationships with friends and peers is very important to make sure that each of us are not treated unfairly. Let's look at how power might be misused in teen relationships. Boyfriends, for example, may try to exert their dominance and control over their girlfriends, such as forcing them to engage in sexual activities when the girl does not want to, or even limiting their engagements with other friends or even forcing girls to share private information and photos. Sometimes, some boys may exploit a girl's insecurities or low self-esteem to flatter them; by saying things like "you're not like other girls" etc.

As young boys, it's easy to be misled by man box rules that may make it seem okay to exploit or control girls to prove your manhood. But a truly mature and respectful boy will know the importance of being mindful of promoting unfair man box standards into our relationships, no matter how subtle they may be. No matter who we are, boy or girl, young or old, straight or gay, it's important to ensure that the person you are in a relationship with is treated with respect and vice versa. In a healthy relationship, both people would be comfortable enough to be their authentic self, are able to communicate openly about their feelings, and does not feel pressured to do something they don't want to do.



-June-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**ALWAYS ASKING FOR  
CONSENT**

Healthy relationships are all about consent. You might have heard this word before or this may be the first time – either way, understanding this concept is a vital tool in your journey in stepping out of the man box. From inside the man box, you may hear ridiculous things like the fact that it isn't “manly” or romantic to ask before kissing a girl or making a move sexually, or that women and girls should always obey men. These myths have been passed down because of patriarchal ideas that help men dominate society at the expense of the freedoms and rights of women and girls.

To give consent simply means to agree to something or give permission for something. You and I can express consent in several different scenarios, from agreeing to drink a cup of tea, to being hugged, giving out personal information, among others. But this week, I thought we can explore a bit more about sexual consent – a very important thing that all cool teen boys must know about. Basically, consent must be given without feeling forced and in a clear state of mind. To easily remember this, just think of the following formula:

**ASK → LISTEN → RESPECT**

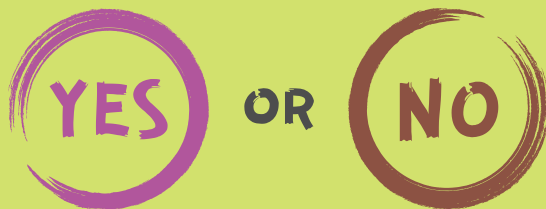


Consent is all about figuring out yours and others' personal boundaries. For example, you might be comfortable hugging and holding hands during the first phase of a relationship. But if you pressure your girlfriend, for example, to engage in any sexual activity, and if it's something they are not ready for, it means that you do not have her consent. Remember that these personal boundaries can change depending on the nature and stage of a relationship, but they can also be withdrawn. If, at any point, you or they feel uncomfortable, know that either person can always redefine those boundaries again. Consent is all about understanding and protecting your own physical body while also acknowledging that each of us have the right to personal space.

Since our bodies belongs to us, we can decide who hugs, kisses, or touches us – this is usually referred to as a special name we call "bodily autonomy." You can say no if you feel uncomfortable or scared and must respect others when they express similar things too. Bodily autonomy of both girls and boys must be respected at all times, not just when we are in a relationship. When some boys disrespect girls by passing inappropriate comments on their bodies or looks or physically harassing them, it's a serious violation of consent and bodily autonomy.

Similarly, keep in mind that consent does not exist if pressure or forceful remarks or actions are used to gain it. So, this week, let's reflect on possible scenarios where consent should be given to make everyone feel safe and respected.

### **How can you respect the bodily autonomy of others around you?**





-June-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**KNOWING SAFE AND  
UNSAFE TOUCH**

Over the past months, we've explored several important topics together. As we keep moving forward with more topics, I encourage you to keep in mind that you are very brave for being open to learn more about all these diverse and complex topics in your incredible effort to becoming your awesome self! Our journey to becoming smart young boys would not be complete if we did not talk a bit more about some of the dangers and vulnerabilities most girls and boys need to be careful of. One of these must-know topics is that of sexual harassment.

To navigate the bigger world more intelligently, young boys like you deserve to know more about what kind of world we live in. Because you are still young and have a lot more to learn as we grow, sometimes people with bad intentions may assume that teens can be easily exploited. Because of these assumptions about young people, some people, mostly men, who appear to be in a position of power over others do things in order to feel more powerful. One way they try to have power over others is through harmful acts like sexual harassment – which is a lot like bullying. It's when someone makes comments to someone in a sexual nature or even touches them when they do not agree to be touched.

It's important to understand that our bodies have boundaries and it's wrong for anyone to violate our right to personal space. An easy way to understand sexual harassment is by asking ourselves if a touch makes you feel safe or unsafe. For example, when Amma or malli hugs me, it makes me feel safe and happy. But sometimes when some boys or older men or women I do not know try to hug or get close to me, I feel uncomfortable and even angry. Remember that unsafe touches can come from anyone, even people you may know.



So, trust your gut and always share any bad experience with a trusted adult when you don't feel safe around someone or a group of people. young boys and girls also have every right to express themselves whenever their personal space is violated. Remember that you have control over your body and that people who truly respect you will understand that. It's also important to know that these acts are punishable under the law. And that you can report an incident to national hotlines 1938 or 1929.





## All young boys need... **LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Have you ever had moments when you are in class or in a group project when you feel like raising a hand and speaking up about your views on something – but end up not doing it? Or what about that time stand up to negative peer pressure by refusing to engage in bullying but felt discouraged? Your experience may not be the same, but I am sure that every young boy has had a point in time where they felt they could take the lead but ended up backing away for many reasons. Yes... it's more common than you think. Fact is nobody is born with the natural skill to lead... it's something that is learned through practise. Leadership is also commonly understood as a man's role in society – this false perception also comes from the man box idea that men are better at being in charge and taking control than women. Have you observed that for example, whenever a girl shows leadership qualities, society tends to label her as “bossy”, or even call names such as “mara kella” or “baduwa” which could be very demeaning. If a girl steps outside the boundaries of their very own girl box, they face more harsher consequences than boys and are told that “she should know her place” or “learn to act like a lady.” But it's important to understand that leadership cannot be defined by gender but rather by strength of character and our capacity to lead with empathy. In order to understand what true leadership looks like, all boys need to step outside this man box and realize that leadership skills can be learned and developed in different ways, from learning how to solve problems and handle conflict effectively to motivating and inspiring others to take a step in the right direction.

In fact, leadership in young boys can also look a lot like bravely challenging some of the assumptions society may have about traditional leadership styles. We can show everyone that leadership is about character and cannot be defined by gender. Keep in mind that leadership is never about dominating, controlling or giving orders to others but rather an important set of skills that will help young boys like you promote a culture where each of us are able to stand up for ourselves, take charge of our lives, inspire others... all while lifting each other up as we learn and grow together. Anyone can become a leader if we put our mind to it – that includes you!

-July-  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**BEING STRONG "AND"  
SENSITIVE**

Now that we've learned quite a bit about how the man box operates, it's crucial that young boys like you realize that patriarchal ideas and unfair man box rules not only hurt women but also comes at a great cost to men and boys as well. Can you guess why? Remember how we discussed the limits of vulnerability and emotional expression that boys are taught to uphold in order to appear more masculine?.... well, such false ideas can obviously limit how we express ourselves and how comfortable we are in being vulnerable during difficult times. Such unrealistic man box standards can severely harm the mental and social wellbeing of men and boys, and because we are generally expected to be able to endure everything without seeking help...you and I can also end up suffering from isolation and loneliness. But because of man box rules, the suffering is often disguised as independence and strength, to the point where men and boys can feel as if they are in an emotional prison. It's time to questions some of these old-fashioned ideas about masculinities and instead unite to create a culture where you and I as well as our male friends feel that our manhood must not be rooted in unhealthy values. Instead, boys like us must realize that it's human and normal to be able to cry without shame and to experience deep love and affection.

So... friend this is why I wanted to begin the next three months exploring leadership with this important topic... that true self-discovery means that men and boys can be strong -and- sensitive at the same time. Being strong and sensitive comes with the understanding that us boys are capable of being true leaders while also being comfortable showing our vulnerable side. It makes us more human and helps us relate to others more genuinely. It helps boys like you treat girls with the same thoughtfulness with which you like to be treated and even accept that anger and aggression is not an excuse for violence and abuse. What's more... by being a leader that's strong and sensitive, we can even use our privilege as men to advocate for women by making sure they get as much opportunities and are not held to lower standards in society, at class, at religious places or even when out and about.



Being sensitive also means that are honest with our feelings, being kind to oneself and others and not using power to dominate others.

I invite you to engage in this activity to better understand this week's topic.

When you were a child, what did you hear about what a real man is supposed to be like?

What was the experience like when you tried and step out of the man box that society has placed you in?

What were the emotions that you had tried to control? How did you feel when you had to do that?



-July-  
self-discovery looks like...  
**STANDING UP FOR  
MY FRIENDS**

I am sure you already know that good friendships can certainly help you celebrate good times and provide you with support during bad time, not to mention the fact that it can also help you feel a sense of belonging and purpose. A true friendship between a pair or group of people depends on how willing we are to stand up for each other when someone is treated unfairly or needs support. In fact, one of the most common issues that teen boys face is peer pressure. Amid such tough times, it's important to be there for each other and remind you that you are not the opinions of people who do not like you. Making others feel valued, be it at school, at home and even when hanging out is such a rewarding experience. If you notice someone being bullied, don't look away. Challenge harmful actions by showing up for your friends and peers who may be vulnerable in certain situations.

Try saying things like "that's not cool," or asking them if they'd like it someone treated them in such a way. Sometimes, it can take only one person to stand up to bullying and harassment for others to gain inspiration from it and do the same. Standing up for your friends and peers does not always have to be done directly. Even simply refusing to partake in unfair or harmful situations, you send a strong message to others that bullying, mistreatment and harassment should never be tolerated or supported. Let's think of some simple but impactful ways we can show up and truly stand up on behalf of others...when we stand in solidarity it's more easier to challenge the man box. This has a lot to do with our collective power discussed earlier.

So this week, let's reflect on this important question: what do you think it takes to be a good friend? Have you tried to frame your friends in to 'man box' and reject those friends who didn't fit in?



**-August-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**DREAMING BIG AND  
HAVING GOALS**

Have you had really big dreams of achieving some day? This could be something you'd like to experience in life or achieve when you're older. Truth is, we all have big dreams and goals that as we grow, it helps keep us motivated and hopeful and truly gives our life journey more meaning. Being a teen can be such an exciting time in your life because it feels like the opportunities and future plans seem endless. But often, you may find that boys like you and me may try to limit our interests and ambitions to fit perfectly inside the man box. By limiting our ambitions and plans out of fear that our true interests may be seen as too girly or weak... we are not able to live a full life or be truly content. These voices in your head that convince you to stay inside the man box and only do -manly- things, can really mess with your self-esteem and affect so many of the big plans and goals you've always had as a bright young kid.

Remember how we spoke of gender stereotypes earlier? Gender stereotypes can affect what kind of choices or opportunities we take because most of us feel limited by the ways boys are supposed to act. For example, I remember how I wanted to be a designer when I was younger but whenever someone asked me "Putha, what do you want to be when you grow up?" at family gatherings, they'd laugh because it's not supposed to be a job that boys supposedly do. These stereotypes make no sense especially when you realize that the skills needed for any job depend on our will, hard work and character – and nothing to do with our gender.

So, I hope you dream big and have goals because there's nothing that boys cannot do if they put their mind to it. It's also important to keep in mind that it's normal for us change who we want to become as we grow older.



You may have plans to be a teacher when you were younger, but now your new ambition would be to become a scientist, for example. Changing your dreams and goals are completely normal and if you no longer want to strive for something, it's ok to stop doing it. Remember, you should not take things for granted. Just because you are boy, things don't come as you wish. You have to earn it in good way. We shouldn't grab dreams and goals of others just because we are on the privileged party in a patriarchal society where men are automatically granted more public space.

I hope you remember what we discussed earlier on power and privilege. Something my teacher always told me when I was younger, was that we simply cannot wish to become someone by sitting there... it's important for all young boys to work hard and start making small goals and plans to help us get to that dream destination some day!

Don't forget 'girls too have their big dreams and goals in life . Most boys think that they are the decision makers of girls' dreams that they are in relationship with. And use their power to limit or put barriers into those life goals of girls. That is definitely affects your relationship and you also contribute to social injustice. Let's be mindful of that and support others to achieve their dreams as well.

Over the next few days, some of these guiding questions may help you reflect deeper on this topic:

- What do you feel holds you back from envisioning your best future self?
- What have you always wished you could do?
- How can I make my dreams a reality? What steps can I take?
- Have I ever used my privileges to limit the dreams of others – especially of women and girls in my life?



**-August-**  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**PROMOTING  
TEAMWORK**

Have you had times when you hated working in a group or just couldn't seem to achieve a common task easily? We've all had similar experiences. The challenges that come with working as a team can include clashes in opinion, less engagement from some members, different personalities, lack of clarity the assigned task, and even competition arising from within a group of people or even lack of trust or respect for each other. Although teamwork can sometimes be challenging, it's one of those experiences that can turn out to be enjoyable if approached the right way! In fact, engaging in teamwork is the perfect opportunity for teens like you to get a sense of the real world of work and community engagements beyond our classrooms.

When we're older, we need to have the skills to be able to work with people from diverse backgrounds and different personalities even if we like to or not. In fact, learning to share, take turns, identify strengths of each group member. Appreciating each other and draw in other people to fill the gaps in teamwork is an essential social skill that any young person can benefit from.

In fact, wouldn't it be so much easier if a bunch of people with diverse strengths work on one big task together instead of doing it alone? Not only does it make it easier for everyone since big tasks can be broken down into smaller ones, but it can also bring on a huge sense of accomplishment that we can share with other members of the team as opposed to celebrating alone! Some of the teamwork I have been a part of have also helped me find long-lasting friendships and taught me that we can never judge a person too soon because no matter who you are, everyone has a unique strength they can bring to the table.

Tell me about a time when teamwork felt like a challenge. How did you end up resolving it? What's something surprising that you found out about a teammate as a result of working with them?



# -September- Self-discovery looks like... GETTING BETTER AT PROBLEM-SOLVING

Wanna know something... one of the biggest dilemmas I had as teen boy is not knowing who to turn to whenever I had a problem that needed solving. I could ask Thaththa, but there were days when I felt too proud to ask him for help. Sometimes, I'd go to my best friend, but often had difficulty expressing myself and was afraid of appearing vulnerable. But the more I grew up, the better I got at learning to face problems in mature and intelligent way. Problems are a normal part of our lives, and they can occur at the most unexpected times in the most unexpected ways. To solve any problem, the first step is to identify and acknowledge that there is one in the first place. Ever had those moments where you felt tension between you and your sibling, for example, where you would go days without talking, hoping that it the problem will go away eventually. Once a problem is identified, it's important to focus on what can be resolved. Here, we need to keep in mind that smart people will always see the issue instead of targeting the person or emotion. The aim is to avoid attacking the other person and instead suggest ways to identify and solve the real problem.

A huge part of getting better at problem-solving is being empathetic. An empathetic person will not only suggest possible solutions to a problem but will also actively listen to solutions put forward by others. Sometimes, there may be problems that involve only you. For example, I've had moments when I thought that my life is so terrible that I will end up never getting into university and end up disappointing my parents.





It is only later that I realize that the stress caused by school and peer pressure had led me to exaggerate my situation when in fact, it was a concern I could work on gradually to solve in small steps. So whenever you feel overwhelmed and anxious, it's important to be still, take a breath, get some rest or engage in an activity that you enjoy and revisit the problem when you are ready to reflect on it or solve together with the help of a friend, parent or loved one.

We can also try reframing our problems whenever they arise simply by changing our perceptions. For example, I remember always thinking "I had no friends" or that "nobody likes me." But when I took a step back and tried to rephrase it, I felt much better when I tried to see it in another way, such as for example how "My buddies are always there for me in class," or "I'm so glad I belong to the athletics team, they are a group I can always rely on."

So, let's reflect on these questions today: what are some problems I eventually ended up solving? What would I do differently if I were to approach the same problem again?



# -September- self-discovery looks like... BEING RESILIENT

Here's a random mid-year reminder that you're doing great so far, and I am so proud of how far you've come! Being a teen in this day and age can be tough and exciting at the same time. Earlier, we learnt that boys of our age can feel overwhelmed by the thousands of things expected from within the man box, from performing well at school, fitting in, expressing ourselves as well as talking and acting in ways that prove our manhood.

All these pressures from the man box can worsen the more we try to interact with the outside world...such as holding our friends accountable when they do something wrong or suppressing our emotions to act strong. Sometimes, even when we want to change and bravely step out of the man box, people may laugh or call us names because it makes them feel powerful. But it's impossible to depend on being happy simply by pleasing others. So, how can we bounce back and return to our happy selves when life tries to pull us down? The truth is that resilience is not something we can gain over night, but rather a series of small gradual steps and habits that you and I can include in our daily routines – and that includes exploring and revisiting some of the topics covered in this two-year journal.

Even though we tackle few topics every month, it's okay to go back through these pages and re-read and reflect on them as many times as you need. You're in control! Think of these tips as individual steps in your mountain. In order to see the beauty from the top, it's essential to climb higher and higher as we go.

After all, true resilience comes from adopting an attitude that is eager to grow, learn from our mistakes and practice compassion both to ourselves and others. I believe in you and so does those around you and building up your ability to adopt but also resist where required!





All young boys need...

# TO CROSS THE BRIDGE FROM BOYHOOD TO MANHOOD

We've almost come to the end of our two-year<sup>1</sup> journey together! Take a moment to pause and see how far you've come – I am very proud of how you carry yourself and learned from both your successes and failures. All these topics we've explored together are a sure way to help you cross that exciting bridge from childhood to adulthood the smart way. Over the next three months, we will go over a few other topics that are essential for all young boys as we navigate this equally challenging and exciting time. From resisting peer pressure to finding our identity – you've got time to learn it all while also unlearning some of the harmful things we have so far consumed through the man box.

I am sure you must have realized that there had been many things that we gathered and added into our lives while there had been many things that we had to leave behind. So remember that you are in control of how you hope to translate these lessons and tips into actions as part of your daily life. With a little help from me and those who love and care for you, you're already on your way in stepping out of the man box and facing the real world with courage and intelligence! A content life demands more maturity now both in our thinking and responses. So, let's dig in.





**-October-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**UNDERSTANDING  
TRUSTED ADULT  
AUTHORITY**

The older we grow, the more independent we get. Along with this new independence, also comes questioning authority and an unwillingness to obey every single command given by those older to us. This subject of obeying order and being compliant may get rather confusing or even annoying as time goes by. For example, we may wonder why our parents keep nagging for us to do small things or push us to avoid staying out late. Most of these orders are done because they worry about your safety and wants what's best for you. In fact, having positive connections with trusted adults in your life such as your parents, teachers and mentors can be very helpful for your growth. You can always depend on them for advice and guidance during good times and bad.

However, there is a special skill that all boys need to learn in order to navigate our teen and early adult years intelligently – and this is understanding when to obey and negotiate on adult authority. Yes, you heard that right! In case you're wondering... "but Chethan, aren't we always supposed to obey our elders and respect adults?" Turns out that while this common instruction you've learned as a young boy can be very true, there may be some adults who may not have your best interests at heart. It's important to respect and obey most adults when they tell you something because they have once been a young person like you, gone through so many triumphs and challenges and can share their experience and wisdom with you. But as we grow and learn to think critically, it's important to understand the importance of questioning adult authority, to avoid wrongly respecting the authority of those who abuse or should not hold it in the first place. This is especially important to be mindful of, when you are forced to do things that you don't like or harm you in any way.

A great way to figure out if an adult giving you orders or exercising their authority over you is worth listening to and respecting... is to identify if he/she is using their authority for the good of others. And if the adult is trusted. Even if trusted does the way that person approaches looks unusual.

You may also wonder: Why must I accept other people's authority in the first place? What if I want to be free to make decisions on my own? Understanding adult authority is also acknowledging that teenagers are not all-knowing. We are still at a very early stage in life and need guidance and help to succeed later in life.

But I get it... teens require a lot of humility and maturity to accept someone else's authority and advice, especially if what is being advised is difficult or unpleasant. But if the adult giving out this advice is trustworthy and does it because they care for you and genuinely wants you to succeed... it's worth listening to them!

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**-October-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**REFLECTING ON OUR  
PERCEPTION ON  
ALCOHOL AND DRUGS**

Remember the man box we keep coming back to? A huge part of this man box we are in, is the constant pressure to impress others, try to fit in and make new friends to belong instead of feeling like an outsider. As we grow older, we may even begin to get invited to social gathering or casual hangouts after school and class. During some of these hangouts, you may be offered certain things like beer, a cigarette or some funny looking pills if you happen to be hanging out with a questionable friend group. Parties where teens drink or take drugs can make our parents or caregivers feel very nervous because things can easily spin out of control.

This is where it's important to reflect on social learnings and expectations on alcohol and drugs. We have been taught that it's normal for all boys and men to take alcohol and other substances because it proves our manhood or makes us appear more manly. What's more... remember how we discussed that the man box also restricts boys from expressing their emotions? As a result, they may to things like alcohol as a quick way to release intense emotions or forget about their problems.

We are also used to excusing such behaviour relating to alcohol and drugs thinking that the behaviour is caused by alcohol and the person is not to be blamed. But I am telling you my friend that all these learnings are socially constructed mostly prove to be myths socialized by alcohol industry for their own profits. We should not get trapped in these myths. These constructed expectations push us in joining others who are also trapped. Let me also show another side. When girls and boys of our age use substances, we often don't have anyone looking out for our safety. So, if something goes wrong, there is a big chance for us to fall in a lot of trouble and even face dangerous situations.



If you've seen some adult drink alcohol at a family event, for example, they live in a created surrounding, and no one actually express their true feelings of lowness and discomfort that alcohol create since they are scared to be labelled. Mostly men and boys who go in to alcohol are showing as if they enjoy when they don't. They are scared to get insulted or get kicked out from the gang or if their masculinity would be challenged. Which is yet again a created myth. So remember that it makes no sense to measure a real man or a boy based on their alcohol intake since men and boys with low self-confidence and low self-esteem depend on alcohol to prove their manliness.

At the same time many teens tend to misuse alcohol and drugs due to peer pressure and wanting to fit in. When this pressure to fit in kicks in, it can be hard to say no or refuse to partake in such activities, because you might be labelled as 'lame' or 'boring.' But there are easy tactics out there to refuse substances while still maintaining your cool, such as "No thanks, I don't need it" or "sorry, I don't drink." Someone who truly respects you will understand and back away. If they don't and proceed to teasing or bullying, that's a sign that you are in a space that does not respect your right to refuse. It's important to leave such situations as soon as you can. I am sure you already know how to manage peer pressure. Your friends may pressure you in to taking these substances and put you in an uncomfortable situation when you refuse. Believe me my friend, here we must trust our inner power, the ability we have, to choose what is right for us. So don't give up.

Now, you may be wondering, why is there so much talk about the dangers of alcohol and drugs... On the one hand, they can be very harmful for your health. Smoking for example has been associated with lung disease, cancers, and cardiovascular disease while other drugs can harm your organs, interrupt your blood flow and even result in strokes and the side and aftereffects they carry can affect you for the rest of your life... now who'd want to risk that? These harmful substances can even get in the way of those big dreams and goals we spoke of earlier. It negatively affects our lifestyles and lead us to wrong paths. And even take away the brightness and liveliness from our face. Remember, resisting alcohol and drugs does not mean you aren't cool, it just means you are smart enough to know better and that you cannot be fooled by industry tactics. Besides – there are so many ways to have fun and feel good like chilling out with friends at a park, going on trips, visiting new places, and playing sports!

**-November-**  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**SMART DECISION-  
MAKING**

Teens have to make so many decisions every day; from our plan for the next school term, to choosing friends and even dating and also on deciding what kind of life we wish to create for ourselves... A core part of your self-discovery journey is all about making responsible choices that may affect your life in the long run. I know how you may feel sometimes... that overwhelming feeling coupled with confusion over the task of having to select between two or more options and most importantly to take that responsibility of the decision you made. Sometimes, we may end up making the wrong decisions but drawing a lesson from those moments are what truly matters. In fact, even adults end up taking the wrong, or less ideal decisions most of the time!

But sometimes, teen boys and even older men can have a hard time with some of the man box stereotypes we grow up internalizing. For example, we see how harmful stereotypes about masculinity and femininity can push us to feel that as men or boys we have the upper hand in making important decisions. Think about it, in most families in Sri Lanka, husbands are expected to make financial decisions and other important choices for the family with little to less input taken from the wife.

Here's an interesting observation... Did you know that several studies have shown that women have a unique tendency to make empathetic decisions and are more likely to include everyone in the decision-making process? But society's double standards about men and women continue to exist. So, my advice to you this week is to reflect on how as boys we can use our privilege to dismiss society's assumptions. We can also spend our time productively by learning some very useful decision-making and negotiation skills to navigate our exciting teen years. Apart from these gender stereotypes, when it does come to everyday decision-making in your life, how we do go about it?

Whenever you are faced with a decision, be it big or small, it's important to consider all possible outcomes. Personally, I love putting ideas on paper because it helps me organize my thoughts and ideas to come up with the most responsible decision. Once you have your options in front of you, it's important to take time to evaluate them carefully. Remember that difficult decisions do not have to be made alone... it's always great to have a trusted adult for guidance, and encouragement to help you make a good decision.

Consider asking some of these questions when you evaluate: Is it unfair? Is it dishonest? Is it in line with the goal I am trying to achieve? When it comes to finally choosing a responsible option, it's important to keep in mind that the choice you pick does not cause harm or problems to anyone else. If you can go through these steps, you'll be able to make responsible decisions in no time.

Remember that you in control of your life, so it's always possible to come back to the table and change or modify your plans or choices based on responsible and smart thinking.



**-December-**  
self-discovery looks like...  
**DEALING WITH  
CHALLENGING  
MILESTONES IN LIFE**

As young boys we all have different milestones in life that we must be brave enough to face. It could come as exam milestones which we are scared to face. Readiness and preparing ourselves is key to dealing with such milestones. But there could be many distractions coming our way that could make us feel quite anxious. In fact, the recent crisis caused by COVID-19 hasn't made things any easier.

You and your classmates may have been forced to adjust to new routines and change traditional ways of learning. But while this new environment keeps changing daily, it's fair to say that the importance of education, and the role that exams play in your life, hasn't changed. School prepares young boys like you for the adult world you'll be stepping into and helps you learn valuable lessons that are integral to navigating everyday life. But teen boys in particular face a lot of pressure from inside the man box to perform well at school and get good grades in exams in addition to being athletic and hiding our emotions.

As much as it's important to challenge these unfair gender stereotypes, we also must organize ourselves and plan the work properly and challenge our own selves every day. It's also part of taking care of yourself and promising yourself that you will not lead your life to failures, at least that you will try your best...

I navigated my school years and exam time by taking control of my time and routine, for example. Although I helped Amma and Nanga with housework and even requested my father for more support in household work without depending on only nanga to support Amma all the time. I also make sure that I take responsibility for my own things- like washing my own clothes, cleaning my room, and even supporting my siblings with their homework.

But don't forget to take breaks by hanging out with friends, going to gym or just exercising with a few friends or even engaging in a hobby to keep myself fit and reduce the lethargy caused by daily routines. Dealing with these challenging milestones also depends on recognizing what kind of routine works best for you. Especially in your study routines.

I have friends who are able to focus more by staying up late.. but I prefer waking up early or studying during the day because that's when my mind is most active. Whatever you decide, it's never a good idea to disrupt your sleeping cycle because poor sleep can really get in the way of a good mood and healthy body. I also love staying organized with to-do lists and organizing my day in a diary that I write on whenever I get a chance.

Exams would also be a whole lot less challenging if you can find the time to go over the day's lesson every day. Doing so helps us remember the basics of every subject and prevents cramming the night before a test. Lastly, it's important to keep in mind that your grades don't define you as there is so many different elements that make you an important and whole person, but exams and good performance at school can still matter to get a good job or get accepted into university which could also be yet another milestone in your life. So with a little but more work ethic, I am sure you'll be well on your way to success!



**-December-**  
Self-discovery looks like...  
**LEARNING FROM MY  
MISTAKES**

Reframing and rethinking your ideas and ways of thinking is another vital tool of self-discovery that all mature boys simply cannot ignore. This applies especially for that little thing called “mistakes” that we learn from an early age. Now, society’s definition of a “mistake” might be very different from what us wise boys understand it to be. That’s because while many of us grow up understanding mistakes as an error caused in our actions that signifies failure. But it is actually better understood as a chance to learn from it so we do not do it again!

By learning to reframe our understanding of mistakes by seeing them as teachable moments, you can learn how to make the most of a bad or unfortunate situation by being courageous enough to adjust your goals, redefine expectations, refocus on your priorities, and feel more positive overall. In fact, as a young boy growing up, society tends to put all boys in a man box and examine our behaviour so closely to examine or even rate our masculinity. Sometimes, boys are expected to keep a straight face and not show emotion whenever they are faced with criticism or a scolding when they make a mistake.

Some boys may even make mistakes because of peer pressure and a desire to fit in. Another common result of being inside the man box is assuming that us boys don’t need to apologize if we make a mistake because it will make us look weak or submissive. This is a wrong assumption that will only lead to a poor character and weak moral compass. So, as you can see, even the most basic self-discovery dimensions such as learning from our mistakes... makes much more sense when we look at it from outside the man box – because even society’s definition of mistakes has a strong gender bias.

Anyway, it’s also important to remember that mistakes make us human; everyone makes mistakes throughout their lifetimes – no matter who we are.

Our teenage years especially might be filled with so many mistakes that you may make along the way.

However, the sooner you realize that there are essential life lessons hiding behind those bad experiences, the better your life will turn out to be, if you're willing to learn from them! Mistakes are much needed -building blocks- of growth as well as learning and development. So this week, I encourage you to accept that all of us (yes, even the most successful ones!) are imperfect and that mistakes are inevitable in our life journey. With this realization, you will be better prepared to deal with mistakes and learn important lessons, so you don't repeat it next time. So next time a mistake happens, reflecting on these questions will help:

What can I do to fix this mistake? Do I need to apologize to anyone? How will I prevent this in the future?

!



# -December- Self-discovery looks like... FINDING MYSELF

At the beginning of this year... we made an important promise... do you remember? It was to stop looking backward and start looking forward - A great attitude to have so we can stop wasting time over past mistakes and regrets and look towards the dozens of possibilities and opportunities waiting for us! The perfect way to conclude our journal reflections is to go over a very important element of our teenage lives and this is finding ourselves. But what do we mean by this exactly? To find oneself means to find a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives and reflecting on key questions like: what does it mean to be a boy? what are my values? Do I have life goals... how do I achieve them? Do I act with intent? And what matters most to me? It's normal to not have concrete answers to these questions at a young age, but we all need to start somewhere and do actively seeking answers to some of these core questions will certainly help you find more meaning in your every day actions, choices and thought patterns.

Although we've come to the end of this journal, it certainly does not mean that your self-discovery journey ends here. In fact, self-discovery can be a lifelong process of affirming and reaffirming who you are in addition to standing up for your values. Here is a final list of reminders and affirmations to help you on your exciting journey!

1. Wake up every day with purpose and intent and be committed to challenging our man box culture – both for your own benefits and those of others.
2. Everyday before you go to sleep, ask yourself if your actions today brought you closer to who you want to be tomorrow.





3. Be that person who shows up for their friends and stand up for other boys so we can all step out of the man box together and stand up and be an ally in girls' journey of stepping out of girl box.

4. People will always talk negatively about others, no matter who we are. So don't waste too much time worrying about societal perceptions.

5. As you grow and mature, it's normal to sometimes lose certain friends, spaces and relationships. Instead of dwelling on the hurt or rejection, let's move on to bigger and better things.

6. Someone else's success does not mean you have failed. It's possible to be happy for someone else while cheering each other on. Smart and cool boys don't compare themselves to others because we realize that each of us are unique.

7. You are in control of your decisions, your life and your actions. But do not try to control lives of others, especially with women and girls that you have some kind of relationship .



Finally, I know that being a teenage boy is hard work - and you've done an amazing job so far! Your self-discovery journey is just beginning, and it has been wonderful to see you grow into a mature boy with a brilliant mind and a kind heart. May you continue on this journey by drawing inspiration from your successes and lessons from your failures - that is what true self-discovery means after all!



**Is there an area in your life that you really need support or help with? Can you think of ways to ask for help from someone else?**

**Write a thank you note to yourself,  
expressing gratitude for accepting you  
as you are and allowing space to grow  
and develop and resist harmful norms  
in the man box...**

# MY PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Highlights from this year

Things I am grateful for

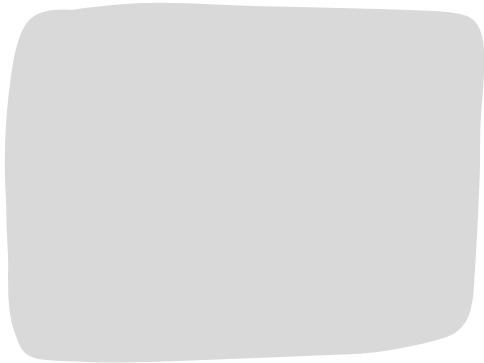
Something I learned

Something I want to forget

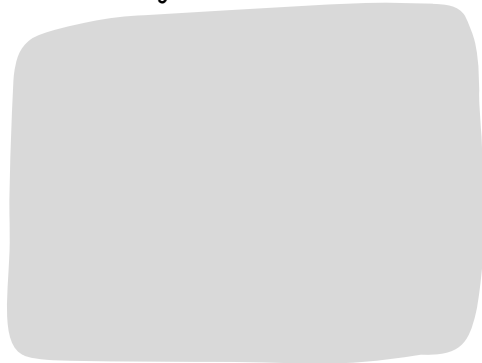
People I am thankful for

# GOALS AND PLANS

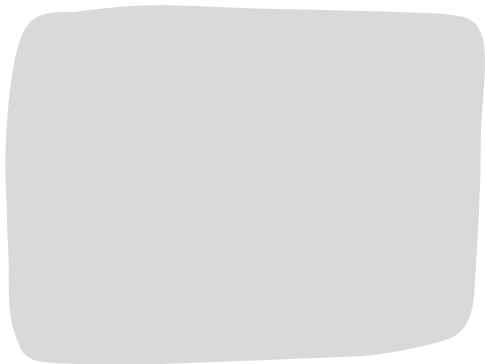
Things I want to accomplish



Things I want to learn



Places I want to go



Rewards for myself



Things I want to do more



