

# Who says boys don't cry? Why we must encourage men and boys to express their emotions

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The Democratic National Convention recently wrapped up in Chicago, where Vice President Kamala Harris and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz

were officially nominated as the party's ticket for the 2024 presidential election.

One event that garnered [public attention](#) was Walz's speech. As Walz spoke, his 17-year-old son, Gus, was moved to tears, standing up during his father's speech and proudly proclaiming, "[That's my dad!](#)" Gus Walz's raw emotion was both authentic and perhaps unexpected in our modern culture that portrays crying as something feminine that men just don't do.

For many men and boys, the ability to be openly emotional and vulnerable, particularly in [public spaces](#), has long been considered taboo, unmanly and a sign of weakness, not strength—not of authenticity, but rather, failure as a man.

However, the [capacity to care by fathers](#), as well as the ability to be emotionally vulnerable and expressive among boys, has shifted over recent years.

## **'Boys don't cry'**

We have all witnessed online the kinds of surveillance, backlash and abuse that men and boys experience when they transgress norms of masculinity. As clips of Gus Walz appeared online, some commentators were quick to [attack and mock him](#)—relying on tropes about traditional masculinity.

Boys and men are routinely confronted by similar forms of [harassment and ridicule](#) for not adhering to the [rules for being men](#).

However, there was also an outpouring of both [admiration and support for Gus Walz](#). For many there is a sense of genuine vulnerability and perhaps a need to protect Gus Walz because of a prevailing and false

narrative that boys don't cry.

This idea is part of the harsh perceptions [normative masculinity](#) have encouraged. And while research reflects the damning and damaging impact that [repressing our emotions](#) has, society often does not support those men and boys who are openly expressive.

[Caring masculinities](#) stand in stark contrast to expectations for being men and more importantly, proving one's masculinity. Contemporary narratives of masculinity reflect a growing tension in the standards of masculinity. We have seen cultural moments precipitate progressive shifts in emotionality, fatherhood, relationships and social justice.

However, we are also seeing how outdated ideas of masculinity are being repackaged and espoused by online figures like Andrew Tate. These are ideas that have historically limited and restricted boys and men while contributing to [suicide, loneliness](#) and [academic underachievement](#).

## **Pressure to be the right kind of man**

The political stage is just one arena where boys and men must often perform, often to convince others of their control, dominance, ability to masterfully demonstrate manliness and confirm their heterosexuality.

For example, [Donald Trump](#) has routinely questioned and tried to emasculate his political opponents. He has repeatedly done this on debate stages and through his social media posts.

Trump parades a white, privileged masculinity that often relies on bullying and sidelining those who do not conform to being "one of the boys." This display of being the right kind of man is familiar terrain for boys and men navigating male-dominated spaces.

Ideas about masculinity that bar men and boys from expressing the full spectrum of human emotions are rooted in various public and private spaces. Whether it is the workplace, politics, education or sport, the [narrative of normative masculinity](#) is well understood and rarely forgotten.

Bullying is a regular occurrence in school. Sport is no stranger to a culture of male dominance, aggression and homophobia. Many boys and men learn to be silent, or to act out with aggression and violence, or otherwise risk having their masculinity called into question.

The support and appreciation both for Tim Walz's authentic expression of love for his family, and particularly his son, is a very public and indeed, familiar way that men and boys negotiate masculinity while rarely ever talking about it. Fostering deeply authentic, emotionally rich and caring masculinity among boys and with fathers and sons is often seen as a flaw, a vulnerability and traits inherently feminine.

## **'Boys will be boys'**

We might be left wondering why these unscripted, public displays of men crying, whether in politics or in sports, often evoke such an array of reactions. The politics of masculinity are not simply what we witnessed on the convention stage. They are the rule-bound ways boys and men fall in line to gain respect and membership.

It's the ways boys maintain and enforce silence among boys who have committed sexualizing, violent and harassing behaviors. The unwritten rules we follow as boys are the ones we don't see. It's the seamless, the unwritten and the taken for granted idea that becomes evident every time an adult says "boys will be boys" in response to inappropriate or bad behaviors.

Men and boys need and deserve honest conversations about [masculinity](#) and [how it can become toxic](#). We need to address these codes among boys and in doing so, support boys to ask questions, to speak up and to change the path from just being "one of the boys."

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