

Caring Men Who Say Women are Weaker

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Kidpower is an educational charitable organization that, since 1989, has brought "People Safety" education to over 1.2 million children, teenagers, and adults, including those with special needs, from many different cultures - close to home and around the world. For publications; free articles, podcasts and e-newsletter; and information about our services and locations, please visit www.kidpower.org.

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Reader's Question: As a woman, I know first-hand the confidence and awareness I carry with me everywhere I go thanks to the training I had with you. The problem is that many of my friends don't understand. One man keeps telling his girl friend that she just isn't as strong as a man and she agrees with him! I know that this isn't a safe way for her to think about herself. What can I say to help both of them?

Kidpower Answer: Deeply held beliefs are hard to change. Most caring men want to protect the important women and girls in their lives and are deeply upset about how much violence is committed by men. Too often, caring men who are worried about the safety of the women they love will try to make them be careful by making them afraid, because they don't know what else to do. Too often, women and girls are socialized to see themselves as the nurturers and as the "weaker sex" who need men to be their protectors and keep them safe.

Part of the problem is that people tend to define power in traditional ways – by size and muscle strength – where indeed many women are at a disadvantage from many men.

Instead, we can teach people to define power to include the ways that both women and men, boys and girls, of different ages and abilities can be powerful -- the power of awareness, the power of self-control, the power of taking charge, the power of asking for help, the power of speaking up, the power of strong boundaries, the power of yelling and running, the power of having a safety plan, the power of thinking things through, the power of knowing you have choices – and, if need be, the power of using the strong parts of your body against the weaker parts of an attacker's body to defend yourself.

All of these different ways of being powerful can prevent and stop most difficult or dangerous problems with people much more effectively than size and muscle strength.

We teach our students of all ages that belief in their ability to be powerful and effective is the most important People Safety tool they have. Practicing the many ways they can be powerful helps build this belief, prepares our students to protect themselves from most kinds of harm, and increases their ability to advocate for the well-being of themselves and others.