

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

INAPPROPRIATE CONVERSATIONS

September 2019

The Situation:

I recently found out that during this year's reunion one of my cousins pulled several of the young male teens together, showed them inappropriate photos. My son was one of those teens. I was furious! I wanted to go to his house and beat him down but the other mother's convinced me that violence wasn't the best way to handle the situation.

All of the boys are from single parent homes, and being raised by their moms. Some of the moms think the boys need male presence and guidance and have shrugged the incident off as "that's what men do". Others disagree and believe we should bring the boys together as a group to see how they felt about the situation, what message they got out of it, and explain why it was inappropriate. And then have my cousin apologize, and make sure the boys know that when someone tries to make them take part in something they feel uncomfortable about they should feel free to walk away—especially when there are other adults around.

I think this is a teachable moment, and we need to make sure we handle it correctly. To do nothing is not the answer. I've had several conversations with my son, however I think that the situation should be addressed with all of the young men. You've been talking about how to raise good young men. What do you think should be done?

The Fix:



Doug Harris

I agree that this is a teachable moment. Perhaps the most important lesson is for the cousin who pulled the group together. Even if the information and images were appropriate, under NO circumstances should anyone speak with minors about sexuality and sexual issues without first letting parents know exactly what is going to be shown and discussed.

I also think the mom who said "that's what men do," is misinformed. All men are not cut from the same cloth. We have a variety of perspectives on sex and sexuality. Some of us are "dogs" and excuse brutish thinking with adages such as "it's just the dog in me." This thinking absolves men from responsibility concerning their sex life. On the other end of the spectrum are men who are respectful, responsible and sensitive. Boys need to know that being a man doesn't mean you are selfish and dominating by definition.

To handle this correctly, it is imperative that arguing about what has already happened be avoided. Sometimes people don't need to be told; they need to be shown. Perhaps a session can be set up at the next reunion for the boys to hear from women as well as men in the family (other than the cousin who led the first discussion) about how women view sex and sexuality. They should let them know the things men get right, the things they get wrong, and the meaning of "no." They can discuss how a woman should be approached; what makes a woman open to a sexual relationship; how to read red flags and turnoffs; what makes a woman feel safe; as well as what makes a woman feel appreciated and loved. All boys need both male and female perspectives on sex.
