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White Ribbon Day 2016's focus is on manliness

Jane Doe Inc. embraces Reimagine Manhood for this year's anti-domestic violence campaign



Previous White Ribbon Day campaigns have invited men to sign a pledge to do their part in preventing domestic violence.
Metro File

Photo:

As the anti-domestic violence [White Ribbon Day](#) approaches in Massachusetts, the campaign's focus this year is on changing the conversation about manliness.

“Men’s violence against women is gender-based violence, but it’s one of many,” said Craig Norberg-Bohm, coordinator for the [Jane Doe, Inc.](#) Men’s Initiative told Metro in an interview. “It’s about how men treat each other - about masculinity, how you police or teach masculinity to one another.”

The latest initiative is called Reimagine Manhood.

To underscore the message, White Ribbon Day’s organizers have called on athletes in particular to serve as role models. At a [State House event Thursday](#) to mark the occasion, Gov. Charlie Baker and other speakers will be joined by Andre Tippett, the former Patriots linebacker.

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Norberg-Bohm said most men don't abuse their partners, and it's common for dads to teach their sons not to harm women. But "that alone doesn't end the problem," he said.

"We think of a frame called the 'man box,'" he said. "If you step out of it, you're called a derogatory name because you're not being a bully. ... There's something in manhood that's part of the problem and we want to have that conversation."

Preventing domestic violence and sexual assault isn't just about reaching abusers themselves, Norberg-Bohm said. Everyone has a role to play in intervening when a friend or family member is being abusive, or calling other men out for making demeaning statements about partners, he said.

"I'm a big strong man' no longer means 'I get to take liberties with women,'" he said. "When a man says 'We have to be respectful and equal in our relationships with women,' that challenges the social norm that we're privileged in those relationships."

Jane Doe, a coalition that aims to address domestic violence and sexual assault in the state, is among many groups working with men in schools and at community-based training sessions.

Various sports have become an essential part of reaching a wide audience, Norberg-Bohm said.

As an example, he pointed to the [Mentors in Violence Prevention program](#) – or MVP, for short - run by Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society, which leads training sessions for men and women on domestic violence issues.

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Last year, Patriots owner Bob Kraft teamed up with Attorney General Maura Healey to launch "[Game Change](#)," an education campaign for schools and coaches. Kraft pitched in \$500,000 for the cause – Healey's Office committed \$150,000.

Jane Doe is also indirectly related to the "No More" anti-domestic brand and its violence ads starring sports stars, which began airing amid high-profile cases of assault in the NFL.

"I think we're making progress – the fact that national sports teams are beginning to respond," Norberg-Bohm said. "We know we're in the process of change."

SPENCER BUELL