

Dear Parents

There is no information in this email that you need to know. It is simply more thoughts about being a parent of a son from the Deputy Head Pastoral....

My daughter gets TIME magazine each week. The one she got this week has a very disturbing picture of a young woman on the front who has had her nose and ears cut off. It has been lying around the house for a couple of days and whenever I see it I find the image terribly disturbing. I have seen my fair share of violence in life but there is something particularly awful about domestic violence and, of course, this violence is usually inflicted on women and children by men. It is therefore very important as parents bringing up sons that we instil in them from an early age both a respect for women and an ability to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

Violence in homes may well be more of an issue in poorer communities in South Africa but I think most of us have met or heard of about families (usually after they have broken) where violence has occurred on a regular basis. None of us want our sons to be those men one day who cause such distress. Perhaps we cannot imagine it would be possible. However, the truth is that for men the use of violence can appear as a viable option – especially if it is accompanied by emotional or financial blackmail. We can only protect our sons from choosing this option by our example, our response to disrespectful words or behaviour on their part and engaging with them on the issues of the day – which should include domestic violence on this continent.

Women's Day is the reason for the long weekend. I always feel a bit irritated when I hear people treating it as if it is a second Mother's Day. It is a far more solemn day than that. The technological improvements of the last 100 years have given humans a unique opportunity to change the culture of thousands of years where women were second class citizens and so vulnerable to both exploitation and physical abuse. Women's day is calendarised to remind us of the importance of this battle and how far we still have to go as a country and a continent. If we have a chance to engage with our sons about it then I think we should – especially us fathers.

Boys sometimes ask why there is not a Men's Day. Usually they do this tongue-in-cheek but sometime it is a genuine question. It is a good opportunity to talk about the subjugation of women past and present and its legacy. Personally, I think there should be a Men's Day. Partly because I enjoy a break from your sons now and then but mainly because men get quite a lot of bad press and this can be discouraging for our sons. We need to celebrate (and so encourage) the important and positive role many men play in families and communities and so hold up for our sons a model of the men they should aim to become.

I do hope that the long weekend refreshes us all. The matrics are rapidly running out of class time now and I suspect their next three weeks are going to be rather hectic ahead of their mock exams.

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood

(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)