

Millions of views and growing for adorable Alton viral video

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ALTON - Alton Boys and Girls Club Executive Director Al Womack said a video of children encouraging each other to tie ties has garnered "millions of views" and is being shared across the Internet.

The video shows Malik Johnson accepting a challenge issued by the club directors to tie a tie. Johnson is able to do it as a group of his peers are encouraging him. At the end of the exercise, the children are rewarded for their efforts with oatmeal cream pies. Womack said the tying of ties is part of the Alton Boys and Girls Club's Passport to Manhood Program, which is in at least its third year.

"Our motto is: you have to see a man to be a man," Womack said. "We help put them on the road to responsibility and accountability. The purpose behind the ties is showing the young men 'when you dress nice, you feel nice.' The premise of it is, you carry yourself in a different manner when dressed well."

Each year Womack said a different age group of children is taught the program. Of all the groups, Womack said the current batch of 9-12-year-olds is the most receptive. Before discussing proper attire, including the tie tying challenge, Womack said they have discussed proper hygiene, respect for self, young ladies and authority and how to properly conduct themselves.

He said the young men have also worked on essential precepts such as self-esteem and self-confidence when they meet each Monday.

"I think it helps," Womack said. "We allow the kids to have conversations maybe they have not been able to have with their dads. Some of these kids don't have father figures. Some of these kids have a lot of anger with their fathers. We help them with that as well."

While Womack said the program helps young men without father figures develop into productive members of society, he said he wants to help the young men have a relationship with that absent father if an opportunity appears, despite that residual anger.

Womack himself said he was once in the same position of many of those young men.

"This is near and dear to me," he said. "As a young man, I strived to have a relationship with my dad, and had a very difficult conversation with him as a teenager. At the end of the day, our sons are going to have to grow up and be men, and part of that is knowing how to interact with men."



Already, the program has garnered some success stories. While not as well-known as this video, Womack said many young men leave the program and are able to establish relationships with neglectful or even entirely-absent fathers. He said an 18-year-old man

left the program, discovered his father, conducted a DNA test and used what he was taught in the program to reestablish a relationship with his biological father.

Monday afternoon, Womack said he visited some of the children at school. On Mondays, young men in the program are invited to wear their ties to school. Womack beamed about how happy they were to be doing that Monday afternoon.

"This is very rewarding," he said. "Some people say what they do 'brings them life.' Well, doing this on the administrative side has given me life. Everyone was excited and wearing their ties today. It just feels good. It does something for me too."