

FORGING the SPIRIT of BOYS

A Series of Blog
Posts Written by
the Country's
Leading Boy/Male
Advocates

FEATURING:

Janet Allison
Jed Diamond
Janet Sasson Edgette
Mark Sherman

Dave Brown
Ed Dixon
Gregg Jantz
Rosalind Wiseman

Dennis Coates
Rick Johnson
Tim Wright

Forging the ***SPIRIT*** of Boys

In the first six months of 2014 several advocates for boys and men, from various fields including social sciences, media, behavioral health, and religion, wrote blog essays about some of the issues facing boys and men in the 21st Century. They then, together, shared each essay across their various social media platforms. This is a compilation of those essays, offered to you to inspire you to join us in forging our boys into honorable, good, noble men.



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Boy is Beautiful *by Mark Sherman*



I remember well in the 1960s when African-Americans started using the phrase “Black is beautiful.” They were primarily talking about physical appearance, because until then, so many black people did what they could to look white—including expensive and painful hair straightening. Actually, the movement went beyond physical appearance to include pride in culture. A few years later came two short sentences—the title and opening lyrics of a James Brown song—which went even further: “Say it loud! I’m black and I’m proud!”

These were major attempts to deal with self-hate. And looking back, it’s clear that they were necessary steps toward true liberation. Virtually every minority group has had to deal with self-hate, and there are remnants of it still remaining—whether in Jews, Asians, Latinos, or African-Americans.

For any of these groups, the most important members who needed to hear this message of pride were children, human beings in their formative years, who were otherwise growing up feeling that there was something wrong with them because they didn’t fit the expected mold.

Women dealt with issues of self-esteem too, perhaps most vociferously and most successfully, and they certainly transmitted this new sense of pride to their daughters (as did the fathers of daughters). Probably the phrase most often said to girls today, and it is one that has been said for years, is “You can do anything!”

But we need a scapegoat, don’t we? Whether or not life is a zero-sum game, the fact is that it is or certainly feels like one to most of us. And in some cases, like the gender of who is in the top 50% of a high school class, it is. And if girls and young women are going to get all kinds of encouragement to succeed, someone is going to fall behind, and that someone is very possibly your son.

And even if he is not going to fall behind, he is very likely to get the message—from school among other places—that there is something inherently wrong with him if he is a boy who acts like many—probably most—boys have always acted. It may not often be front page news, but every parent and grandparent of boys knows that the grade school classroom is often not boy-friendly.

I have four grandsons, who range in age from four months to eight years. My second oldest is seven, and he has already gotten in trouble in school on several occasions. My oldest has had an occasional problem in school as well. And these are fundamentally good boys. Yes, I’m biased, but I’m not blind, and what I see when I visit them are normal children, bright and caring children, who simply act like boys.

My sons, the fathers of these two boys, have both expressed major issues with the policies of “zero tolerance” that now appear to dominate schools. And how does this policy manifest itself? Take the example of my 7-year-old grandson, whose father got a call one day at work to say that he had to come and pick up his son, who had been suspended for the rest of the school day—for drawing a picture.

What was the picture? Was it a gun? A bomb? The scene of an explosion? No. It was an anatomically correct stick figure of a man. Yes, it was a man with a penis.

My son was very upset—not with my grandson, but with the school, for forcing my son to leave work in the middle of the day to pick up my grandson for what my son felt was an absurd reason. And my daughter-in-law also thought it was ridiculous, as did my wife, and my son’s in-laws, who are far more conservative than we are.

I think my son handled it beautifully. My grandson was upset to be sent home, and felt like there was something wrong with him. And that is how kids feel; you have to be pretty grown up to feel that maybe there is something wrong with “the system.” My son told him that there was nothing wrong with what he drew, and that he should feel free to draw anything he wanted and write anything he wanted, anything—at home.

“But the school has its rules,” he said to him. “And when you’re at school you have to follow those rules.”

Good point, but as many articles and books point out, those rules more often make it harder for boys than they do for girls. There wouldn’t be books like educator Kelley King’s *Writing the Playbook: A Practitioner’s Guide to Creating Boy-Friendly Schools* if there wasn’t a problem with boy-unfriendly classrooms.

And the worst of it is that boys who act like “traditional boys” are beginning to think that there is something wrong with them. Some people get upset with the expression “Boys will be boys” because they see it as excusing violent behavior. But neither I nor my sons are suggesting that violent behavior should be excused.

However, even in innocuous acts that barely touch on violence, things seem to have gone too far. Most “zero tolerance” stories that we see in the media involve boys who do anything even involving the shape of a gun, no matter how harmless. In a recent story, two second-grade boys were suspended from school for pretending their pencils were guns and that they were “shooting” at each other.

There’s a lot more that could be said here, and I will say it in a future piece. But for now, I will say that while I applaud the efforts to make sure that boys who don’t fit the “traditional” boy mold are not picked on and are truly accepted for who they are, I feel that we must extend this same tolerance to boys who do act in the more traditional ways. Otherwise we run the risk of making them feel that there is something wrong with them.

And this can lead to self-hate. Boys have to feel good about themselves. But this will be hard for them as long as so many well-meaning adults—often including teachers and school administrators, but sometimes including their own parents—make them feel that their natural behaviors are somehow wrong.

Sure, boys can be difficult. But it is imperative that they not be led to feel there is something wrong with them. And this isn't simply about my grandsons—who I adore. It's about all boys, who are someone's sons and grandsons, and who deserve a society that treasures them every bit as much as it does their sisters.

Say it loud! I'm a boy and I'm proud! Yes, boy is beautiful.

(Originally published on *The Good Men Project* (www.goodmenproject.com))

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(www.theboysinitiative.wordpress.com).*

He also writes one for Psychology Today (Real Men Don't Write Blogs).

The Heart of Masculinity

by Rick Johnson



All boys want to know how a man is supposed to act. Our model of that role is what teaches our sons what it means to be a man. But for those of us who were not blessed to be raised by a good role model, what does this look like? Below are some thoughts on authentic masculinity.

An authentically masculine man puts aside his needs, desires, wants--and sometimes even his dreams--for the benefit of others. He does this without fanfare and frequently without anyone even noticing. His life is not about his individual rights, achievements, or happiness; it's about making life better for others. His sacrifices are part of his character and give his life significance. He meets these sacrifices with the stoic nobility that God granted all men by right of their birth gender.

A real man has honor. He stands tall as the fierce winds of adversity blow around him. He cherishes and protects women and children. He knows he has an obligation to mentor those who follow in his footsteps. He recognizes his sphere of influence and uses it for good. He understands that life does have fundamental truths and lives his life according to a firm set of principles. He uses his God-given warrior spirit to fight for justice and equality. He stands for something. Too many men today stand for nothing—they are directionless.

Men who exhibit authentic masculinity live lives of significance. They lift up others to help them achieve their potential. They make sacrifices in order to make a difference in the world--for everyone, not just their own family. They have passion and vision and are genuinely interested in giving of themselves for the betterment of others. And they probably don't make a big production out of doing it either. Men like this are other-centered, not self-centered. They are other-focused instead of self-focused. Authentic men live to a higher standard in life.

In the movie, *Kingdom of Heaven*, a young widower blacksmith first meets his father as he travels to defend Jerusalem during the Crusades. His father introduces himself to his son for the first time and asks forgiveness for never having been a part of his life. With nothing to keep him in his village after the death of his wife and child, the young man follows his father and trains to become a knight. In the short period they are together before his father's death, the young man flourishes under his father's tutelage and follows in his footsteps, becoming a man of honor. Throughout the movie the young knight relies on his father's instruction and example. In one powerful scene near the end of the movie while he is preparing the city of Jerusalem against attack by overwhelming forces, he endows knighthood upon the city's commoners defending the city by quoting the same oath that his father did to him:

*Be without fear in the face of your enemies,
Be brave and upright that God may love thee,
Speak the truth even if it leads to your death,
Safeguard the helpless.
That is your oath!*

The local high priest admonishes him by saying, “Who do you think you are? Can you alter the world? Does making a man a knight make him a better fighter?”

As the knight looks him in the eye and boldly proclaims, “Yes!” you can see all the men who have been charged with the challenge to greatness swell with pride and determination. They do in fact know that the expectations and exhortations of greatness can make a man more than he would be without the knowledge of God’s vision for his and every man’s life.

Manhood as defined by the Bible requires men to put the needs and best interests of others before their own. It’s about living sacrificially. A man uses his strength and influence to help others and defend those who cannot defend themselves. Read how manly this verse sounds and how it speaks powerfully to a man’s heart:

“I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him...I made the widows heart sing...I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.” Job 29:12,13,15-17 (NIV).

Authentic men are passionate, fierce, and noble—they care. In fact, they are a little dangerous, but it’s a good dangerous. You might not see this passion on the exterior, but it’s bubbling under pressure just beneath the surface, forcing its way into every area of his life. They have a spiritual longing for adventure, for a battle to fight that’s bigger than themselves, for significance in their lives. Like modern-day gladiators they stand in the ring facing the challenges of life with courage and passion.

When you see a man with a passion for something bigger and nobler than himself, you are looking authentic masculinity in the eye.

*(Adapted from **The Power of a Man**, by Rick Johnson, published by Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2009. Used by permission.)*

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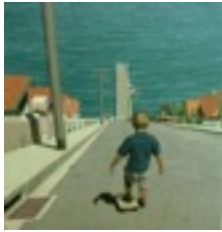


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Boy Behavior or Bad Behavior?

by Janet Sasson Edgette, Psy.D

By mistaking unchecked behavior for undeveloped or immature behavior, we allow unacceptable conduct in boys and men to be seen as just another part of "being a guy."



Years ago I knew a mother who had eight kids, the last six of whom were boys. The brothers were energetic, scrappy kids who were polite and rather likable when outside of the home. But inside? Well, let's just say they fed off each other's impish troublemaking and made watching over them a virtual nightmare.

This mom believed firmly in teaching kids to be good citizens of their home. Yet she remained unusually accepting of her sons' casual avoidance of responsibility and their indifference to how their behavior affected the family. "I don't know what it is with boys and their socks . . ." she'd say, or, "I don't know why they have to bother their sisters so much whenever it's time for bed." I always got the feeling that she spent her evenings picking up stray socks and plates and nipping at her sons' heels like a border collie, herding them through their showers and into their beds, thinking to herself something along the lines of, They sure run me ragged, these guys, but I guess that's what boys do.

In most cultures around the world, boys do seem to enjoy a reputation for doing rascally, mischievous things that amuse grown-ups and make them think, Well, there's a boy for you! It's gotten to the point where some parents believe the "masculine spirit" is actually endangered if boys are socialized at too early an age. Under the doctrine of "letting boys be boys," these parents wait too long to teach their sons the difference between being loud and rambunctious, and being loud and rambunctious at times or in places when it bothers other people. They wait too long to teach their sons that being competitive, even aggressively so, is terrific but that it should never become an excuse to make someone else feel diminished. Sometimes, they wait too long to teach their sons that circumspection, empathy, and kindness are not exclusively feminine qualities.

Years ago, author and feminist-critic Christina Hoff Sommers warned us about the dangers of failing to see the difference between boys, and boys who behave badly. She pointed out that when we don't take the time to differentiate between the two, we leave room for things like aggressive behavior or personal rights violations to be understood as a natural part of being male, rather than as a red flag. We stop short of looking for other reasons why a boy might be reckless or combative or uncharitable, such as upbringing, emotional problems, socioeconomic factors, or the particular mythology surrounding masculinity to which his parents subscribe.

I recently heard about a study showing that in the United States, girls three to six years of age have a much better ability to regulate their emotions and their behaviors than boys of the same age. Interestingly, this gender difference in self-regulation wasn't found in any of the three Asian cultures included in the study. The lead author's take-away was that here in the US, we expect girls to be more self-regulated than boys. Mine is the flip side of the coin: that in the US we don't expect and therefore don't teach boys to be as self-regulated as girls. And so—surprise—they're not. I think it's not unlike what happens with our teenagers, who don't really have to be or even want to be all that moody and defiant. It's just that somewhere along the line, adolescent "Sturm und Drang" morphed from a bio-physiological susceptibility into an assertive, self-fulfilling prophecy-disguised-as-developmental-theory lulling parents into complacency about their teen's less-than-becoming behaviors. We've come to believe they're hard-wired to act that way, but no—they go there because we let them.

Taken as a group I believe it's fair to say that boys will always demonstrate more over-the-top, risk-taking, trash-talking behavior than will girls. But respecting the differences between genders shouldn't mean we offer up exemptions to boys from behaving well. I can see how it might be physically or emotionally harder for a lot of young boys to keep their aggressive or competitive urges in check than it is for young girls, but it doesn't mean we don't ask them to do it. It means we help them do it by steadily encouraging and supporting their ability to exert control over their actions, and by getting them to see those actions as a function of the choices they're making rather than as behaviors they can't curb.

The "boy as lovable scamp" is an appealing abstraction of young masculinity, but it's also a seductive one. It dresses up a regressed edition of a male and marches it around as something to be adored. The problem is, little boys with a puckish sense of humor often are adorable; it's part of what makes the slope between boy behavior and bad behavior so darn slippery.

But with the bigger boys come bigger problems. The romantic veil that gets placed over the careless behavior of young boys can mask more serious transgressions later on, when these young boys become young men. The shrewd ones take advantage of this all the time, oscillating between charismatic confidence and a waggish charm for the audience of females they hope to disarm, and then seduce. This bad-boy-as-sexy-boy creates problems not only for the girls who end up taking these boys at face value, but for the "good" boys too, who, by comparison, come off as lacking in mystery or menace and, in the end, are desexualized.

The wish to protect children from early and unseasonable stress is a longstanding American tradition and many American parents consider it their right. However, when it ushers parents and educators away from holding children accountable for behavior that they could, in fact, control, such protection becomes a disservice. In addition, it communicates the unfortunate message that accountability is something to accept only when it can no longer be avoided. Otherwise, why such resistance

to it? I find that an interesting but sad subtext to this conversation about the socialization of young children, because I think what kids need from us is the message that being in control of one's emotions, actions, and reactions is something that truly empowers. It feels good, not restrictive or burdensome. People who live their days at the mercy of their emotions aren't happy. They don't feel free. Things happen to them and they don't understand why. When we instead help our boys—including our very young ones—gain a sense of mastery over their bodies, and develop an awareness of the impact of their behavior on those around them, we offer them a leg up on the challenges they'll face in life, and contribute to the raising of great boys who, later on, become great men.

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The Six Secrets to Your Son's Success at School

by Dr. Edmond J. Dixon

"Let's face it; I'm stupid. You know it, I know it, and my parents know it!"



These words were spoken in anguish and anger to me by Chad, a 12-year-old student in my office. He reflected a profound problem that I could no longer ignore as a school principal. I had seen too many boys who did not succeed in school. I knew he was not stupid, and his parents saw him as a smart, if unfocused, child. But our opinions no longer mattered. His experience in school had convinced him otherwise. He dropped out a few years and I was saddened, but not surprised.

Your own son may not become a drop-out, but if he is like many boys, he dislikes school, does not apply himself to the fullest and is willing to let the girls in his class achieve more highly. Statistics show that this leads to boys who are increasingly unprepared for a world in which high levels of education and social-emotional intelligence are required. Without even knowing it, many of our sons are falling behind.

If we change how we approach their learning, we can help these boys be more successful, productive, and happier—without disadvantaging girls. More importantly, I have identified 6 “secrets” parents can use to profoundly affect a boy’s learning success:

1. **He Learns Where the Action Is** - Neuroscience has confirmed that boys develop more brain-wiring for movement than girls at early ages. This is why they love to move, fidget in class, and want to be wherever the “action” is. It also explains why they can sit still for so long playing video games: Those games are saturated with movement!
2. **He Learns In the Game** - Boys have profound learning experiences within the context of games because they receive a shot of testosterone when they set goals and achieve them. They love games and competition and if they see learning as something they can compete and “win” at, they achieve higher. However, if they don’t think they can win in school because they aren’t smart enough, they will often refuse to play the game.
3. **He Learns With Humor** - Boys love “funny” things. They often can veer into inappropriate or crude topics, but humor is an important tool for boys learning. It helps them feel comfortable with new concepts, engage in teamwork, and take on new challenges. It is therefore a very effective way for adults to leverage boys’ interest and commitment to learning.
4. **He Learns Through Challenge** - In their desire to release testosterone by winning boys are drawn to challenge. It helps boys learn because through challenge they discover things about themselves and their

environment. When used by parents and teachers, it can improve the motivation and resilience of boys when faced with difficult learning tasks.

5. **He Learns By Mastery** - Success for any boy ultimately comes when he takes ownership for his own learning. When looking at anything they have to learn, boys' brains have evolved to want to know its usefulness. In other words, what is it good for? If they can find a good answer to this question, it deepens their desire to understand the way something works and learn skills so as to master and control it.
6. **He Learns For Meaning** - Because they want to understand the usefulness of what they learn, boys need to see the reason for it. "Why do we have to learn this?" is more than a way for a lazy boy to avoid doing work. It is essential for him to understand the importance and meaning of the task at hand. If a parent or teacher can help him see how his learning fits into the larger picture a boy will increase his interest and commitment in the classroom.

You may be wondering how you can apply these understanding to help your own son. Happily, there are some very simple things you can do, but it works best if you know the place to start. To find out, take the fin 3-minute quiz at helpingboyslearn.com/boys-quiz or check out our [Parent Community](#) .Together, we can help every boy reach his potential as a learner!

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*A pioneer in the field of Cognitive-Kinesthetics for learning, Dr. Dixon is a human development specialist with 30+ years of experience as a teacher, administrator, researcher, author—and parent of boys! He is the founder of the KEEN Differentiated Learning Group, an organization dedicated to helping struggling learners, and the creator of KEEN 5X, a series of strategies for classroom engagement and learning which has been used with more than 50,000 students and teachers. His latest book, **Helping Boys Learn** is published in parent and teacher editions. A dynamic and popular presenter, he has spoken throughout North America on education topics. For more info visit www.helpingboyslearn.com*

Sex and Depression: A Gender-Specific Approach to Healing *by Jed Diamond, Ph.D.*



Depression runs in my family. I became aware of that fact when my father took an overdose of sleeping pills when I was five years old. Growing up I had little understanding of what had happened or why he was hospitalized and disappeared from our lives. But I did grow up with a hunger to understand depression and a terror that I would become depressed myself and face my own suicidal demons.

When I was 40 and going through my own bouts of depression, I found a journal he had written in the year before he was hospitalized and I got a better understanding of his suffering and my own. Here are a few of the entries:

June 4th:

Your flesh crawls, your scalp wrinkles when you look around and see good writers, established writers, writers with credits a block long, unable to sell, unable to find work, Yes, it's enough to make anyone, blanch, turn pale and sicken.

August 15th:

Faster, faster, faster, I walk. I plug away looking for work, anything to support my family. I try, try, try, try, try. I always try and never stop.

November 8th:

A hundred failures, an endless number of failures, until now, my confidence, my hope, my belief in myself, has run completely out. Middle aged, I stand and gaze ahead, numb, confused, and desperately worried. All around me I see the young in spirit, the young in heart, with ten times my confidence, twice my youth, ten times my fervor, twice my education.

Yes, on a Sunday morning in early November, my hope and my life stream are both running desperately low, so low, so stagnant, that I hold my breath in fear, believing that the dark, blank curtain is about to descend.

Six days after his November 8th entry, my father tried to end his life. Though he survived physically, emotionally he was never again the same. For nearly 40 years I've treated more and more men who are facing similar stresses to those my father experienced. The economic conditions and social dislocations that contributed to his feelings of shame and hopelessness continue to weigh heavily on men today.

During that period my mother also became depressed, but it was quite different than my father's experience. Where he was often irritable and angry, she was more

often sad and weepy. While he pushed people away who wanted to help him, she drew close to her friends and neighbors. In working with men and women over the years I've found other differences in the ways males and females deal with their pain and suffering. Here's a chart that summarizes my experience.

Males are more likely to act out their inner pain and turmoil, while women are more likely to turn their feelings inward. Certainly there are depressed men who fall on the female side and vice versa, but generally I've found these differences to hold true for most depressed men and women I've worked with over the years.

FEMALE DEPRESSION	MALE DEPRESSION
Blame themselves	Feel others are to blame
Feel sad, apathetic, and worthless	Feel angry, irritable, and ego inflated
Feel anxious and scared	Feel suspicious and guarded
Avoids conflicts at all costs	Creates conflicts
Tries to be nice	Overtly or covertly hostile
Withdraws when feeling hurt	Attacks when feeling hurt
Has trouble respecting self	Demands respect from others
Feels they were born to fail	Feels the world set them up to fail
Slowed down and nervous	Restless and agitated
Chronic procrastinator	Compulsive time keeper
Sleeps too much	Sleeps too little
Trouble setting boundaries	Rigid boundaries and need for control
Feels guilty for what they do	Feels ashamed for who they are
Uncomfortable receiving praise	Frustrated if not praised enough
Finds it easy to talk about weaknesses and doubts	Terrified to talk about weaknesses and doubts
Strong fear of success	Strong fear of failure
Needs to "blend in" to feel safe	Needs to be "top dog" to feel safe
Uses food, friends, and "love" to self-medicate	Uses alcohol, TV, sports, and sex to self-medicate

FEMALE DEPRESSION	MALE DEPRESSION
Believe their problems could be solved if only they could be a better spouse (co-worker, parent, friend).	Believe their problems could be solved if only their spouse (co-worker, parent, friend) would treat them better
Constantly wonder, "Am I lovable enough?"	Constantly wonder, "Am I being loved enough?"

Chart found in my books, [Male Menopause](#), [The Irritable Male Syndrome](#), and [The Whole Man Program](#).

Gender-Specific Medicine Saves Lives

For too long, we've assumed that sex and gender differences are not important in health care. But a new field of [gender-specific medicine](#) is emerging that can save lives. We now know that there are differences in everything from [rheumatoid arthritis](#) to [Alzheimer's](#). For instance, it was once thought that symptoms of an impending heart attack were the same for women and men. Now we know that women often have [different symptoms than men](#) and millions of women are getting proper treatment as a result.

Likewise, understanding the difference ways that men experience depression can save millions of men's lives who might otherwise be lost. We know that the suicide rate for males in the U.S. is [3 to 18 times higher](#) than it is for females. Many men die and suffer from undiagnosed and untreated depression because we haven't understood the ways in which male depression manifests.

I have made it my life quest to help men, and the women who love them, to live well at all stages of their lives. At www.MenAlive.Com our team brings together people and resources from all over the world to help people realize their dreams of a fulfilling life. I hope you'll [join us](#).

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*Jed Diamond, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., is Founder and Director of **MenAlive**, a health program that helps men, and the people who love them, to live well throughout their lives. He is a pioneer in the field of male-gender medicine. Since its inception in 1992, Jed has been on the Board of Advisors of the **Men's Health Network**. He is also a member of the **Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP)**, the **International Society for the Study of the Aging Male**, and serves as a member of the International Scientific Board of the **World Congress on Gender and Men's Health**. He is the only male columnist writing for the **National Association of Baby Boomer Women**. He also blogs for the **Huffington Post**, **The Good Men Project**, **Scribd**, **Menstuff**, **ThirdAge**, and other venues. He is the author of 12 books including international best-sellers "**Surviving Male Menopause**" and "**The Irritable Male Syndrome: Understanding and Managing the 4 Causes of Depression and Aggression**." His new book, "[Stress Relief for Men: How to Use the Revolutionary Tools of Energy Healing to Live Well](#)" is now available.*



It's Never OK to Say "Gay" as a Put Down

by Rosalind Wiseman



Imagine you're driving carpool. Your child is sitting shotgun, constantly scanning the radio for everyone's perfect song. The other three kids are rehashing their day. Everything is good until you hear one of the boys say to another, "Dude, you better improve your basketball skills! Do you have any idea how gay you were in PE class today! If it gets any worse you're going to have to go play on the girls team!" You immediately tense, look in the rearview mirror to gauge the kids' reaction, and wonder if you should say something. In that instant several thoughts go through your head. You know it was bad but kids say words like that all the time. All the other kids seem to be laughing. If you say something you're going to embarrass your child. It's inappropriate to set rules for other people's kids. And then the moment passes and you feel like you've lost your opportunity.

You don't say anything. Many well-meaning parents can relate to this scenario. But the hard truth is that this is the adult behavior that supports bullying. These are the actions that come across as not wanting to be "the parent" in difficult situations because you're afraid your child will get angry with you.

If you want to do your part to stop bullying, you have to understand the dynamics at play in that car and you have to say something. You have to clearly communicate what you stand for. So here are some suggestions for how to manage the situation.

When you hear the rude comment, take a deep breath, focus on what you're about to say as you pull the car over, and put it in park. Take your seat belt off, and turn to face the kids in the back seat, while ignoring your son's silent begging or death stares. As you make eye contact with all of them say,

You: Josh, I just overheard you tell Mike that he was gay to insult the way he's playing basketball.

Josh: It's just what we say! It doesn't mean the same thing now! Mike doesn't mind do you?"

Mike: "No, they're just messing with me. I know they don't mean it."

You: Here's the deal. Using words like gay, or like a girl to put someone down is just unacceptable.

Josh: But it's not our fault if the girls are terrible at basketball that's just a fact! And gay just means stupid.

You: That's not the issue. The issue is using those words to make someone feel worthless and not as good as you are.

Josh gives you the stare that you are crazy and annoying. Your son stares out the window pretending he was born into a different family.

If any of you want to talk to your parents about what I just said, please do so. Everybody got it? Good—anyone want to drop by the park on the way home?

It's also important to end by encouraging the kids to talk to their parents about what you said. Not only because it's smart to be transparent when you have these teachable moments with other people's children but it also protects you from any of the kids coming home and accusing you of "screaming and totally freaking out" to their parents.

By the way, this strategy works any time kids say inappropriate and/or mean things around you. I had one mother use this strategy in the car after years of silently putting up with her daughter and her friends trashing other girls. It was important for her to realize how her silence had contributed to the girls' feeling that they could be so mean and cruel to others. Once she stood her ground, the girls' behavior improved at home and school.

And one last point. Yes, in the moment when we speak out, we will absolutely embarrass children. In the short term, they won't like us one bit for getting involved. But it's only in these moments that our kids see evidence of what our values look like in action, that they really get what's important to us. They understand that they have a mom or dad who is willing and able to take a public stand when you see people being cruel. That's a lesson they can take with them for a lifetime.

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Signs Your Son Is Using Too Much Tech (And What To Do About It)

by Dr. Gregg Jantz



Boys have a hard enough time concentrating, contemplating, and reflecting -- all executive functions centered in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, an area where teenage males are naturally not as fast to mature as we may like. So the last thing we need is for our sons to spend too much time with technology that inherently encourages surface-level, multi-tasked, short-term thinking.

Signs He's Using Too Much Tech

- Would he rather spend time with technology than people?
- Is he choosing technology over physical activity and time outdoors?
- Does he use tech devices during mealtimes?
- Is most of the time he spends with friends on tech devices (i.e., texting, playing video games, watching television)?
- Is tech usage distracting from time he should be spending on homework?
- Does his greatest sense of joy or accomplishment seem to come from tech usage?
- Does he seem fatigued and/or irritable, particularly after long periods of tech usage?
- Does he have a hard time concentrating, particularly after long periods of tech usage?
- Does he get anxious if he is away from his tech devices for too long?

If you answered yes to any one of these questions, your son may be using too much technology, and it's probably a good idea to consider new (or revised) rules for his tech use.

Introducing New Tech Rules

1) Talk to your family about tech pros and cons.

While he will likely be resistant to a conversation that suggests limiting his tech usage, you are best served bringing it up within the context of your tech usage as a family. Explain to him that as grateful as you are for all the ways technology helps improve your lives, you want to look closely at your tech usage to be sure there is a healthy balance of things.

As a family, brainstorm a list of pros and cons. All the ways technology helps improve your lives -- like providing information, connecting you with friends, and providing services of convenience. And all the ways it can threaten your quality of life -- like distracting from homework, making you tired, taking time away from family and friends.

Note, going forward, make it a point of performing the same tech assessments, and subsequent (applicable) limitations, on all members of your family. After all, the vast majority of us would be better off spending less time with technology. Plus, this way your son won't feel singled out.

2) Assess your son's tech usage.

Even if you already believe your son is too dependent on technology, consider the fact that he's probably using it even more than you know. Spend a week paying attention to how your son is using technology, including computers, smartphones, video games, and television. Keep a journal, making note of what he's using and for how long.

Think beyond the boundaries of your own home. Reach out to his childcare provider, teachers, and parents of his friends. Ask them what technology he is exposed to when he's with them, and for how long. And if your son currently is allowed technology in his bedroom, don't forget to include in your calculation of a guesstimate of how much time he's on tech devices in the privacy of his room.

Note, it is helpful if you can perform this tech usage assessment on all members of your family so that your son doesn't feel as though he is being singled out.

3) Limit tech time.

Once you have a good idea of just how much time your son is spending with tech devices, talk to him about limiting the amount of time he will be allowed to use technology going forward. The more control you can give him over his new tech schedule, the more he will welcome the change. For instance, if you want to cut down his overall technology use by 10 hours a week, let him choose the how much time he would like to eliminate from tech device. That said, make sure there is an even distribution of things. For instance, the last thing you want is him eliminating

time on his computer and smartphone just so he can spend all his tech time playing video games.

4) Keep tech out of the bedroom.

If you haven't already, prohibit the use of technology in his bedroom. This means no TV, no computer, and no smartphone. He won't be happy about this, but explain to him that this will give him an opportunity to use his bedroom as it's intended -- to rest and recharge.

5) Monitor his tech activity.

Play his video games. Watch his television programs. Visit the websites he frequents. Read his texts, emails, and posts to his social media pages. This need not be done in secret. Let your son know that the privilege of using the tech devices you provide him with is your right to monitor his activities. The more accustomed he already is to his tech independence, the harder he'll fight you on this. Don't give in. It is your right, as a parent, to do this. And there are plenty of computer monitoring programs and apps to help you do just that.

6) Hold off on a cell phone.

The sooner you allow your son a constant tech companion, the sooner you introduce the possibility of technology dependence. Try and protect your son from the tether of tech addiction as long as you possibly can, at least until he starts middle school.

7) Say no to new tech toys.

Parents invariably feel the pressure to give our kids the latest and greatest of everything, particularly the newest tech devices. Resist at all cost! Your son does not need a new smartphone every time a new version comes out. (None of us do.) An upgrade is perfectly fine now and then -- in a smartphone, computer, or television, for that matter -- but wait until the waning performance of the existing device actually *warrants* a new purchase. In this manner, you can teach your son how to appreciate what he has, how to wait patiently for what he wants, and how to be a responsible consumer who doesn't perpetuate society's increasingly "throw-away" mentality.

8) Set up consequences for violations of tech rules.

Your son is going to make mistakes, like sneaking extra tech time or using inappropriate language in texts, emails, or social media posts. So before you initiate tech limitations, set up a clear set of consequences should these rules be violated.

The most effective consequences are those in which you confiscate the device for a specified period of time.

9) Revisit the rules now and then.

Finding just the right amount of tech usage requires a learning curve. You may find your initial rules don't do enough, or maybe they do too much. Plus, as your son grows and changes, so do his habits, interests, and needs. For this reason, it's a good idea to revisit your tech rules now and then. Maybe once a month for the first six months, then very three months thereafter. And if you happen to forget, congratulations, as what you're doing is probably working.

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Hugs and Slugs – If Boys Could Speak *by Janet Allison*



Recently, I watched as a 6-year-old boy and his mom greeted grandma at the airport gate. Grandma was eager to give her grandson a hug. He readily complied, however, his arms were by his side, his body held tightly erect. As soon as Grandma released her grandson, with exclamations of joy from her and a smile from him, he turned -- and slugged his mom's leg with his fist.

Translation: *I'm excited beyond words!*

Two kindergarten boys do the 'wrist-burn,' one squeezing and twisting the other's wrist as hard as he can – each smiling from ear to ear.

Translation: *You are my best friend!*

Two 4th grade boys grab each other by the shoulders - shaking each other, fake-wrestling, and giggling.

Translation: *Will you play with me at recess?*

Parents and teachers generally respond to situations like these with, "Use your words." We can be uncomfortable with these physical expressions of connection, especially in a school setting. They may include more physical doing – using hands and bodies and less direct eye-contact and words.

In his book, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*, Michael Gurian explains that these interactions are typical male ways of interacting, calling them **aggression-nurturance**. Females, on the other hand, typically relate more with **empathy-nurturance**, which includes many more words.

There are two tasks at hand for us:

1. Understanding and becoming comfortable with the idea of aggression-nurturance and recognizing that there is as much value in this expression of connection as there is in empathy-nurturance.
2. Continuing to help boys and girls grow in their use of language – especially understanding and using words that explain feelings, thus developing **empathy** skills.

Empathy is developed by:

- Identifying our feelings.
- Giving them words.
- Expressing them to another – appropriately or inappropriately .

The boy at the airport had a big feeling – but didn't know how to express it.

How do we help him Feel, Acknowledge, and Express?

FEELINGS: We think in pictures and so it is helpful to give children images to describe their feelings. This will also help them understand the many nuances of feelings that occur. *Do you feel like a rumbling volcano? Do you feel like hot lava rolling down the sides of a volcano? Or do you feel like a volcano shooting fire into the air?* Children are brilliant, and with some guidance, will give you images of their own. Using animals for imagery is often helpful, too.

The boy at the airport may have been *“feeling all bubbly inside.”*

WORDS: Boys typically develop their vocabulary later than girls and use less words than girls. It is helpful to give boys a 'smorgasboard' of feeling words. We can prepare them ahead, role-play, or follow-up after the emotions of a situation have calmed down. In all cases, giving them suggested words to put with emotions helps them expand their emotional vocabulary.

The boy at the airport could be given words such as, *“excited, ecstatic, nervous.”*

EXPRESSING: Boys and girls (and men and women) have very different styles of communicating. Many boys and men prefer to communicate shoulder-to-shoulder while doing something, rather than focusing intently with eye-to-eye contact. Allow him to play with something in his hands, move his body, or be looking away and know that he is more comfortable (and therefore the words may come more readily) and that you're creating a safe way for him to connect with you.

The boy at the airport could be talking with mom as he is watching people in the security line, and she stands shoulder-to-shoulder beside him.

Rather than shutting down aggression-nurturance and making it wrong, we can welcome it and add some empathy-nurturance, too. As parents and teachers recognize these differences, we can bring balance to the communication styles of both boys and girls.

Recommended Further Study:

Boys Alive! Bring Out Their Best! By Janet Allison www.boysalive.com

Boys and Girls Learn Differently by Michael Gurian www.gurianinstitute.com

Boy Talk – How you can help your son express his emotions by Mary Polce-Lynch

For Professional Development on Gender-Friendly Strategies: The Gurian Institute
www.gurianinstitute.com

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***Mentoring Boys:
The Challenge of Improving Communication Skills***
by Dennis E. Coates, Ph.D.



“It takes a village to raise a child.” – African proverb

In his classic parenting book, *The Wonder of Boys*, psychologist Michael Gurian claims that “three families - not one” are needed to raise a healthy child to be a happy, successful adult. The first family is the “nuclear family”—the parents and grandparents who raise the child. The second family is the “extended family”—teachers, coaches, relatives, caretakers and other adult mentors. The third family is the surrounding culture and community—media, churches, government and other institutions.

Gurian makes the case that raising a boy to be a strong adult takes so much effort that a mother and father simply can't do it all. This has always been so, but today both parents may be working; modern life is more complex than it used to be; new media present new risks; and at a time when boys need guidance the most, they're spending much more time away from home than with their parents.

Of course the traditional “tribe” or “village” is no longer a typical part of modern culture. In our mobile society, grown children often move away to create lives far from where they grew up. They may move many times, and their own children may be growing up in a community of strangers.

Furthermore, many nuclear families these days are headed by single parents. This is especially tricky when the single parent is trying to raise a child of the opposite sex. Moms have never been boys, and dads have never been girls, so they may not fully understand what their child needs.

Today, caring parents attempt to create a modern-day version of the village by getting their boys involved in programs that will put them in contact with teachers, athletic coaches, counselors, ministers and other youth programs leaders, who parents hope will help their boy grow up strong for life.

That potential for a positive impact is real and significant. The classroom, sports, work, and other youth programs can demand that a boy acquire specialized knowledge and skills, dealing with difficult challenges, striving against adversity, and working well with others. Like sharpening an ax against a grindstone, boys can become stronger by dealing with life's inherent challenges. With the facilitation of a skilled mentor, the boy's efforts can lead to building aspects of character strength such as composure, cooperation, commitment, compassion, effort, excellence, initiative, integrity, perseverance, responsibility, self-confidence and self-discipline.

These are the kinds of strengths that will help young men succeed in school, university and later in work and life.

But there's a problem. For nearly 40 years I've been delivering training programs, assessment tools and learning systems to millions of working adults, the kinds of adults who will comprise this modern-day village; and what I've learned is that few of these adults have the kind of communication skills that are essential to effective mentoring. They're not very good listeners. They don't know the best way to give feedback, whether positive or negative. And they don't know how to coach a boy to transform a life experience into a life lesson.

These deficiencies are not the fault of the adults. When we were growing up and learning how to deal with each other, we weren't taught effective communication skills. While these are probably the most important skills a person can learn, the irony is that they've never been a part of anyone's formal education. The assumption has always been that people learn how to interact through normal socialization. The idea has never caught on that there are ideal ways to communicate and that there are quite a few interpersonal skills that can help people interact well with each other—and they can be taught.

Those of us who were lucky enough to have excellent role models while growing up may have acquired a few effective communication skills, and these abilities no doubt helped us succeed. But these are exceptions. Most of us grow up with communication habits that make relationships difficult.

The problem is that the ability to engage with young people is crucial to the effectiveness of an adult mentor.

For example, most people mistakenly believe they are good listeners. The goal of listening is to “get the message,” to understand exactly what the speaker is trying to say. Most people don't even realize when a “listening moment” is happening, because they think they're involved in conversation, which is quite different from listening. They might be doing something else at the time and not give the speaker full attention. Or they might do more talking than listening in order to share their own stories and opinions. They might even interrupt the speaker to get their own points across.

When adult mentors fail to listen well, they can misunderstand what a young man is trying to say. During adolescence, most boys are seeking greater independence, pushing away from their families and other adults. When they try to connect with an adult and they get the feeling that they haven't been heard, most of them will feel disrespected and misunderstood, and they'll stop trying.

Another key mentor-youth communication skill is the ability to guide learning, a powerful skill that most adults have never heard of.

When it comes to teaching skills and techniques, a good approach is instruction, followed by demonstration, then lots of practice and coaching. To convey concepts and knowledge, lectures are often effective. However, neither of these approaches works well at all when teaching life lessons. When most adults spot a learning opportunity, their instinct is to lecture, to make sure the lesson is made clear. The problem is that young boys don't react well to lectures. Even if they know the adult means well and is right, they don't like being preached to. The lesson belongs to the adult but not to the boy, and it can be perceived as a put-down. He may endure the lecture in silence, discounting what he's been told.

A better method is to ask open-ended questions that guide the boy to discover the lesson:

- "What happened?"
- "Why do you think it happened that way?"
- "What were the consequences?"
- "What do you think is a better way to handle that situation?"

Most adults aren't familiar with this way of transforming life experiences into life lessons; but when it comes to helping boys grow stronger, it's practically the only approach that works.

Other important mentor-youth communication skills include giving feedback, giving encouragement, dialogue and resolving conflict.

Few adults have mastered any of these best practices, and I've never met an adult who was good at all of them.

And yet, the adults in a child's life want to have a positive impact. They're doing the best they can, but typically they aren't conscious of issues about the way they communicate. Even if they were, they wouldn't know what to do about it. They may not appreciate that improving only a few specific skills can make a world of difference.

One of the difficulties I've encountered in my years working with adults is that improving skills like these takes much more than watching a video or reading about it in a book. A line from "The Matrix," one of my favorite movies, comes to mind: "There's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path." Changing a long-ingrained behavior pattern takes a long-term program of modeling, reinforcement, feedback and encouragement. Like an athlete working on skills, the adult has to "do the reps." The reason is that when it comes to interacting, adults don't consciously decide how they'll communicate. They do what we all do: they react out of habit. They have to wire their brains for new habits of communicating.

To deal with this challenge as a developer of adult learning systems, I designed **ProStar Coach**, a brain-based, online coaching system for developing communication skills and personal strengths. My recent focus on youth has led me to create versions of this program for young people and the adults who mentor them. Anyone who is interested in these learning platforms can learn more at www.prostarcoach.com.

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For Girls: [Conversations with the Wise Aunt](#).*

When A Son “Hates” His Mom *by Pastor Tim Wright*



When our son was little, he and mom had a very close, happy relationship. Mike was a sweet boy who had no problem giving mom hugs and asking her lots of questions. He was her little boy.

But then Mike moved into the early stages of puberty and the relationship changed...dramatically. With tears in her eyes, Jan asked me one day why her son hated her.

What Jan didn't know at the time was that Mike was at a crucial point in his life—the point where he had to start moving into manhood. And the movement into manhood meant he had to begin to pull away from his mom.

Most moms I know aren't prepared for that moment. They don't understand it. So as their boys start moving into manhood moms often feel lost.

What's a mom to do?

Mom, the good news is that you play a vital role in the kind of man your son will become, even in those years when he seems to pull away from you. Here are some positive ways you can shape his life:

Pour your mother's love into your son. Though there will be times when your son seems to resist your love, he will never stop needing or craving it. How you demonstrate that love will change as your son ages, but keep reaching out to him, keep taking an interest in his life, keep praying for him, and keep hugging him (as much as he will allow). Remember, when men mug in front of a video camera, 99% of the time they say, "Hi, mom!" A boy never outgrows his need for mom's love.

Teach him about women: You will be a primary teacher for your son on how to relate to girls. Teach him to be the man you want him to be for you, for his future wife should he marry, for a potential future daughter, and for all of the women he will interact with during his life. Give him insights into a woman's world so that he can navigate his way through it with honor and goodness. It takes a mom to instill in her son a deep understanding of women.

Immerse your son in masculine energy: As cultures throughout history have always known, it takes a tribe of men to raise a boy into a man. To become men boys need masculine energy poured into them. They need positive male role models to

follow. The key to building boys into good men is to surround them with great men—their own dad (if possible) *and* other men—who can model responsibility, love, compassion, fatherhood, and manhood to these men in the making. Churches, Boy’s Clubs, Big Brother, Scouting programs, and other boy-focused organizations can partner with you in raising your son into manhood. This is especially crucial for boys being raised by single moms.

Give your son an honorable vision for manhood: Moms, to the best of your ability, paint a picture of manhood for your son built on honor, courage, commitment, sacrifice, love, compassion, forgiveness, wisdom, and grace. When you see your son acting honorably, affirm him. When he acts less than nobly, use it as a teaching moment and call the noble out of him. But remember, mom, a boy ultimately needs men to instill in him a vision for manhood.

Give your son purpose: Your son was created to save the world. Testosterone is the fuel of super heroes (although at times it may seem like the fuel for driving mom insane!). As you see his emerging gifts and talents, affirm them in him. Once in a while look him in the eye and tell him you know that God has created him for something very special.

Let your boy become a man. At some point, around puberty, your son will need to distance himself from you, as my wife experienced. He needs to leave behind all of the feminine energy that has been shaping his life (you and the overwhelming majority of his teachers) and enter into the world of men. This is going to be extremely hard on you. You will wonder at times what happened to your gentle, loving little boy. You will wonder at other times why your son hates you. There will be lots of tears and doubt. But this is an absolutely crucial time in the life of your son. Let him go...but let him go into the hands of dad (if dad is around) and other good men.

Learn all you can about boys. The more you know, the better equipped you will be to raise your son into good, honorable manhood. (I recommend you look at Michael Thompson’s book, *It’s a Boy!* and the Michael Gurian trilogy of books: *The Wonder of Boys*; *The Mind of Boys*; and *The Purpose of Boys*. My book on boys, *Searching for Tom Sawyer*, is geared to a Christian audience.)

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Dad: Coach, Cheerleader and Companion

by Dave Brown

Proverbs 17:6 says: "...the glory of sons is their fathers" (NASB). The Hebrew root for glory is weight. So we could translate the text, "...the weight of sons is their father".



In other words, dads are meant to provide their sons substance and weightiness for manhood. In their dads, sons are supposed to be anchored, rooted and not easily moved and carried off.

Dad is a boy's mooring. He is a point of reference, a navigational beacon to guide and direct him. But if dad has checked out or has disengaged from his son, the son will likely drift in a counterfeit masculinity. Without the "weightiness" of dad stabilizing him, the son heads off into isolation or passivity, or both. Cut loose from his father mooring he'll drift into a world of fantasy, addictions, anger and violence. He'll grow up lacking identity, purpose, meaning and connectedness.

A man's deepest wounds are not physical but wounds of the soul. An absent, abusive or passive dad can scar a man for life. Many of us pretend these wounds aren't there and will try to cover them and move on. Others are oblivious to them even well into adulthood. But these so-called father wounds explain much about who we are and why we do the things we do. Sons desperately need dads as their coach, cheerleader and companion into authentic manhood that is found only in a vital relationship with Christ.

God has given dads responsibility and power to teach and lead their sons in the following ways.

(1) To model authentic manhood.

In the movie *Gladiator*, Maximus as he leads his men into battle exhorts them, "What we do in life echoes in eternity." Our boys are always watching us, learning from us, and picking up cues from us, particularly what it means to be a man. The words you use, the things you deem important, your demeanor and attitude, and so forth inform your son's life agenda. You leave in your son what you've lived out in your marriage, home, church and vocation. To leave him a godly legacy, you've got to live a godly life.

(2) To help them discover and develop their gifts and talents.

God has given our sons a specific design and a natural bent. They can either follow them or chase fanciful pursuits disconnected from their gifts. So dads set the stage for the son's future, serving as a launch pad, and help him determine his life trajectory. Dads prime the pump for the discovery and use of their passions, gifts and talents.

(3) To teach them life skills.

In the course of time a son needs to know how to shave, play hard and fair, have wholesome fun, buy a car or house, follow proper manners, choose friends, respect authority and look out for the wellbeing of others. He'll learn these skills primarily from dad. He'll also need to know how to treat women respectfully. He'll learn that from how you treat your wife.

Dads are their sons' first and most important life coach through thick and thin. It's not only about quality time with your son but also quantity. To spend more time with him will often require you to reprioritize schedule. That could mean making some hard decisions about your career. God intends fathers to help sons make sense of life and to see in us Jesus with skin.

(4) To give the affirmation of manhood he hungers for.

Sons need to hear from their fathers things like: "I love you"; "I'm proud of you"; "You're really good at...".

Let your son often know he has what it takes to be a man. That's the question men ask of themselves. Inadequacy is one of a man's greatest fears. Many of us spend our entire life trying to answer the question by seeking affirmation in our performance, position, power, and possessions. If your son knows that he only finds his identity, significance, affirmation and satisfaction in Christ, he will not pursue of the idols of his heart. Only when men are united in Christ will they have what it takes to be an authentic man.

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