

# BOYS, BOYS, BOYS

## *Understanding, Nurturing & Connecting With Today's Boys*

### **Bonding with boys**

Strong bondedness and feeling loved and valued is the best way to keep boys feeling happy, secure and safe. Having a circle of caring adults — a parent lead team — can make a huge difference in building healthy attachment and bonding.

### **Reducing boys' stress**

"Boys are more prone to separation distress, anxiety and can become emotionally shut down as a result of feeling abandoned." — Steve Biddulph

Male adolescent violence has been linked to neglect in childhood — this includes a **lack of physical and emotional nurturing**.

Keeping stressors to a minimum and increasing things and activities that calm our little boys' nervous systems can have lifelong benefits. Safe touch, good food, laughter, quiet, calm environments that don't overstimulate are just a few things that can help with this.

Boys' mask, or defence strategy, is to wear their anger outwardly, as they feel like a volcano building up for an eruption inside them. They are seeking love, appreciation and validation even though they are being so hard to love!

*Feeling misunderstood or feeling dumb or a failure causes boys stress.*

### **Some boy differences that can help build understanding and connection**

- ✓ Prefer to do — with autonomy i.e. boys like an adventure
- ✓ Single focus — often can't hear when their attention is focused elsewhere
- ✓ Some reports indicate boys hear less, up to 70%
- ✓ Get 'information overload'
- ✓ Memory issues
- ✓ Need gentle reminders — preferably visual/ non verbal
- ✓ Have shorter attention spans — dopamine levels drop
- ✓ Need greater stimulation to get involved — is the activity worthwhile?
- ✓ Growth spurts.

### **Young boys tend to have:**

- Lack of language skills
- Less emotional development
- Physically "unjoined" up and emotions expressed through action.  
— Neil Farmer, *Getting it Right for Boys* (2012)

Boys are often up to 6-18 months behind girls when they start school.

## Communication tips

- Build rapport first.
- Keep verbal instructions short.
- Make eye contact and ensure they are listening to you. They can listen without eye contact and while doing something provided you made the initial connection.
- Use non-verbal communication especially encouragement.
- Use gestures to help them connect to what-where-when.
- Give time warnings/suggestions.
- Give choices and ask rather than demand.
- Don't sweat the small stuff.

## What boys need:

- to feel part of a team — belonging
- opportunities to explore and investigate how things work
- to kick balls, run races and pit themselves physically against a challenge
- structure and help getting organised
- goals and good coaching
- safe environments and a zero-tolerance attitude to ridicule and shaming

– Ian Grant, *Growing Great Boys* (2006).

## Boys need from their Dads

- Rules
- Routines
- Ridiculousness — Fun, laughter, jokes, surprise and warmth create safety for boys
- A “you have what it takes approach.”
- Love and affirmation

## Emotional vulnerability

Boys struggle emotionally on many levels and this is partly due to the inner struggle between hormones, brain chemicals, slower and poorer verbal and emotional processing, social conditioning and the pressure for boys to appear powerful and successful often at any cost. There is a mistaken perception that boys and men don't feel emotions as much as women — they do. They just process them and often communicate them very differently.

When boys feel emotionally vulnerable they tend to have a default setting that takes them straight through to anger, which is a very acceptable warrior emotion but often not acceptable in everyday settings.

“Often we place boys in the most terrible situations because we genuinely believe it will be the making of them, not realising how much of them we might be destroying in the process.” — Maggie Hamilton, *What’s Happening to Our Boys?* (2010)

## When boys muck up

### The damaging effects of shaming

#### Examples of shaming

- Deliberately ignoring the child
- Being sarcastic
- Walking away as though the child does not exist
- Rolling one’s eyes
- Glaring at the child with disgust
- Shouting, yelling and swearing at a child
- Freezing a boy out!
- Saying things like:
  - You ought to be ashamed of yourself
  - You naughty boy!
  - You are acting like a selfish brat.
  - Grow up!
  - Stop acting like a baby.
  - Don’t be a sissy.
  - You’re hopeless.
  - You’re not even trying.
  - Why can’t you be more like your brother?
  - What are people going to think?

Please avoid telling a boy to “be a man!”

### Helping boys with conflict

- Help them know what went wrong.
- Help them to work out how to make it right.
- Then forgive and forget.
- Acknowledge the valuable learning experience — growth and awareness.

## Structure and rules do matter for boys

Steve Biddulph (2013) believes boys need to know the following:

- Who's in charge?
- What are the rules?
- Will the rules be enforced in a fair way?

*Boys learn best through teachers who they like or who they think like them.*

Despite what they show with their tough masks, **boys are influenced positively or negatively by the perceived absence of acceptance and genuine care.**

“Our adolescent boys are struggling with the modern world and its massively stimulating environments full of distractions and mixed messages about how to be a man.”  
— Maggie Dent, *Nurturing Kids' Hearts and Souls* (2005)

“There were moments when their vulnerability washed over me and I was wondering how we actually manage to get so many of them safely through to adulthood...Their childlike naivety... their dependence on their peers to define their behaviour, their desire to live in the moment and their associated unwillingness to plan all combine at a time when male hormones are raging through their bodies and the blood appears to be going down rather than up.”

— Celia Lashlie, *He'll Be OK: Growing Gorgeous Boys into Good Men* (2007)

## Good reads

Steve Biddulph's books latest *The New Manhood; Raising Boys*

Ian Grant's *Growing Great Boys*

Dr Arne Rubinstein's *The Making of Men*

Prof Bruce Robinson's *Fathering in the Fast Lane*

Dr Tim Hawkes' *10 Conversations You Must Have with Your Son; Boy oh Boy*

Richard Fletcher's *The Dad Factor*

Celia Lashlie's *He'll Be Ok*

Neil Farmer's *Getting it Right for Boys*

Kathy Walker's *Parenting Boys*

Ruth Hanford Morhard's *Wired to Move: Facts and strategies for Nurturing Boys in an Early Childhood Setting*

Christina Hoff Sommers' *The War Against Boys*

Michael Gurian's *The Wonder of Boys; The Minds of Boys* (with Kathy Stevens)

*The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Guide for Teachers* (with Arlette C Ballew)

William S. Pollack's *Real Boys' Voices*

John Broadbent's *Man Unplugged*

Glen Gerreyn's *Men of Honour*

Maggie Dent's *Some Secrets for the Modern-Day Mammoth Hunter: Becoming and Being a Good Man*

Maggie Hamilton's *What's Happening to our Boys?*