

Understanding boys: In and out of the classroom

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Twelve Tips for Parenting Boys

- 1. Love the son you've got*
- 2. Let him see multiple versions of masculinity*
- 3. Acknowledge your son's feelings*
- 4. Listen to what is not being said*
- 5. Action-Talk*
- 6. Talk about verbal and physical violence*
- 7. Open up conversations about motivation*
- 8. Teach stress management*
- 9. Lead by example*
- 10. Encourage autonomy and independence*
- 11. Use respectful and positive methods of discipline*
- 12. Promote safety inside and outside the home*

Source: Educator Barry MacDonald and founder of MentoringBoys.com.

Understanding boys: In and out of the classroom

Does today's educational system shortchange boys? In the 21st century, researchers say boys are not receiving the best education, and as a result, have fallen behind girls in almost all educational categories.

Research shows boys are more likely to have behavior problems, be absent from school, suspended, expelled and have a higher dropout rate. Boys are also more likely to have ADHA.

Addressing this timely topic, presenter Stephanie Meegan of Boxford met with parents and educators last Tuesday at Procter Elementary School in Topsfield to present a program called "Boy-Sense."

Stephanie Meegan, a retired teacher and former school board member of the Tri-Town, is the author of two nationally recognized school curricula: "Kids and Company: Together for Safety" and "Peer Proofing."

Kids and Company is a K-6 prevention curriculum that gives classroom activities, teacher guidelines and parent resources that are designed to lower the exposure of children to abuse and abduction. The Peer Proofing program promotes self-esteem and social skill development. Friendship building strategies and peer pressure survival techniques are taught.

Meegan drew heavily from the work of Barry MacDonald, an educator, Registered Clinical Counselor and founder of MentoringBoys.com, explaining boys' behavior and thought processes. She stressed the way society has been treating children, especially boys, needs to change.

Different kinds of learners

Children are shaped by many forces, which include culture, upbringing and experience. There are differences between the way boys learn and the way girls learn. Boys tend to be more kinesthetic learners, while girls are more auditory.

To find out what learning style best suits your child do a simple "Learning Style Inventory" quiz that can be found online. Knowing how a child learns can help parents talk to their children, and assist teachers in better understanding the child's capabilities in the classroom.

Boys can be a challenge for educators. Fidgety and disruptive, teachers have a hard time getting through to boys.

Meegan strongly recommends encouraging bilateral thinking. She states most boys take longer to process information. After a question is prompted, it is important to give adequate amount of time, or "wait time" for boys to reach a higher order of thinking. Short, clear verbal instructions and written steps results in more boys thoroughly understanding a task.

It is important to keep in mind that leaning involves the body as well as the mind. Kinesthetic learners in particular learn best when they can use movement. Meegan suggests movement helps jump start boys' brains and therefore helps them concentrate Giving him something small and not distracting to others to play with like a stress ball, promotes bilateral thinking.

'Understanding the Boy Code'

Meegan also made references to "Understanding the Boy Code," an article adapted from the book "Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood" by Dr. William Pollock.

The four basic stereotyped male ideals or models of behavior are identified and explained in the article. Boy Code can be defined as a set of rules and expectations that are manifested in media and send outdated and dysfunctional gender stereotypes to boys.

Children are very impressionable and pick up on subliminal messages. Boys learn the code through experience, culture, society and the media. They are taught to repress their emotions and to reject any feminine qualities.

Pollock believes boys who are forced to repress their feelings show apparent symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder and behavioral problems.

The first stereotype is the “sturdy oak.” The idea that men should be stoic, independent and never show weakness is the “sturdy oak” stereotype. It conveys to boys that they should pretend to be confident, even when they may feel scared or need help.

“Give ‘em hell” is a stance based on a false self of extreme daring, bravado and attraction to violence.

“Big wheel” refers to the way in which boys and men are taught to avoid shame at all costs, to wear a mask and act indifferent to any situation.

“No sissy stuff” prohibits boys from expressing feelings or urges society deems as feminine.

What is even more damaging about the Boy Code is that it prevents a natural dialogue between adult and child. The various Boy Codes show that it takes boys longer to process their emotions. Boys often do not want to talk about their emotions because they do not have the vocabulary to do so.

Pollock has several tips for breaking the Boy Code. A few of his suggestions are to give your son your undivided attention every day, encourage the expression of the full range of emotions, and to avoid using shaming language.

Meegan is working closely with the Tri-Town Council to help teachers and parents understand what makes boys tick, how they operate, and what they seek. For more information about Meegan, visit her website stephaniemeegan.com.

Literature mentioned in this article can be found at www.tritowncouncil.org/resources.html.

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