

Real Boys® Voices: Creating Healthy Connections

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Getting Behind the Mask: Breaking The “Boy Code”

Action Talk: Connection, Connection, Connection

- Honor a boy’s need for “Timed Silence” – to choose when to talk.
- Find a safe place, a “shame-free zone.”
- Connect through activity or play (an activity the boy likes).
- Avoid shaming – boys are shame-phobic.
- Make brief statements and wait – do not lecture.
- Share your own experiences (if relevant). It lets your boy know he is not alone.
- Be quiet and listen.
- Convey how much you admire and care about and love the boy—at all ages

Encouraging Boys’ Voices

- Give your boy regular periods of undivided attention and listening space.
- Don’t prematurely push him to be “independent.”
- Encourage the expression of a full and wide range of emotions.
- Let him know that “real boys,” and “real men” do cry and speak.
- Express your love as openly as you would with a girl (although different way, at different times.)
- When you see aggressive or angry behavior, look for the pain behind it.
- Let him know he doesn’t always have to be tough and strong.

Overcoming Bullying

- Educate yourself and your community about the reality of bullying.
- Educate your community about the pitfalls of the Boy Code.
- Learn the warning signs of bullying.
- Show boys that you take the problem seriously but avoid shaming them.
- Create safe, “shame-free” zones to which the boy can retreat.
- Remind boys of the things you like about them.
- Solve the problem together.
- Help the boy to develop a group of allies.
- Stay connected to the boy.
- Be cautious about contacting the bully’s parents.
- Advocate for the boy at school.
- Get support for your self too.

What if Your Child is Bullying

- Look behind the mask and try to understand the bully’s perspective.
- Watch for the signs of depression.
- Teach the bully alternative ways of expressing his pain.
- Do not tolerate the violence, but show appropriate empathy for the boy behind it.
- Give the bully opportunities to succeed at something.
- Set firm guidelines and if a bully persists in breaking them, place him in a new environment.

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What Should Boys Who Are Bullied Know

- There is nothing wrong with the boy who is targeted.
- Help the boy to understand the psychology of the bully.
- Avoid the bully but stay connected to peers.
- Give him a sense of power

How Do You Tell if a Boy is Depressed

- Increased withdrawal from relationships and problems in friendships.
- Depleted mood or increased impulsiveness.
- Irritability or an increase in intensity or frequency of angry outbursts.
- Increased risk taking, bravado, or acting out.
- New or renewed interest in alcohol or drugs.
- Discussion of death, dying, or suicide.
- Increased aggression.
- Concentration, sleep, or weight changes, or other unusual physical changes or symptoms.
- Low self-esteem, harsh self-criticism, or perfectionism.
- School or academic difficulties.
- Denial of pain, denying others' help, or inability to cry.
- Shift in sexual activity or interest level.
- Inappropriate silliness or "clowning."
- Obsessive overworking in school or sports.

15 Step Program to Mentor/Connect to: Boys

- Create many highly accessible safe, "shame-free" zones.
- Identify at least one reliable mentor upon whom a boy can rely for guidance, love and support.
- Develop your sensitivity to boys' unique communication styles.
- Talk candidly about the boy Code and gender straightjacket.
- Teach boys that there are many different ways to become a real man.
- Create trusting bridges.
- Mentors should connect with boys through actions as well as words.
- Empower boys: train them to be mentors too.
- No matter your age and no matter the boys' age, play and become active with him.
- Encourage creative expression
- Educate boys about homophobia.
- Bully-proof your neighborhood and schools.
- Seek appropriate chances to share your own feelings and experiences.
- Encourage spiritual connections.
- Validate authenticity instead of traditional masculine "success."