

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Raising Mighty Boys

Understanding what makes boys tick is the key to teaching and raising them. Here are twelve essentials in order to connect with our sons and help raise well-adjusted boys.

Raising and educating boys is a hot topic in Australia and other parts of the world. From my experience those adults who do best teaching and raising boys have a significant understanding of what makes boys tick.

Here are twelve key understandings that will help you regardless of your gender or family situation raise well-adjusted boys:

1 You must like them

Approval is at the heart of raising boys. Most will walk over hot coals for you if they know you like them. In a sense, this need for approval holds many boys back in school, as they can shut down for a teacher who doesn't like them. If you can feel comfortable with their boisterousness, live with their lack of organisational skills, and not be confronted by their in-your-face ways then the chances are that they'll respond to you.

2 Boys like to blend in

Boys are group-oriented by nature. They want to fit in. They tend to play group games and form themselves into structured groups. Boys don't want to stand out from the crowd. Don't put them down in front of their friends and understand that they make poor friendship choices rather than be in a group of one. They'll generally prefer the wrong friends rather than no friends at all.

3 They are hierarchical by nature

Boys need limits and boundaries as they make them feel safe and secure. They like to know someone is going to enforce those rules, so don't be afraid to take the lead with them.

4 Many boys hide behind a mask

Some boys wear a mask to protect them from being hurt. The mask can take many guises including: 'tough nut', 'cool dude' and 'class clown.' Refuse to communicate with the mask. Make them feel comfortable, joke with them,

even tickle them. Do whatever you can to get behind the mask.

5 Boys are just as sensitive as girls

Despite the fact that research shows that boys are more easily stressed and more fragile than girls parents will ask daughters how they feel more often than they ask sons. Also when daughters get hurt, parents tend to comfort them more than they comfort sons. Boys are sensitive you just need to use different language to get them to open up than you do with girls. For instance, a boy will more than likely tell you how he feels if you ask him how he thinks about something. Also, he generally needs more time to process his feelings so bedrooms can become their caves that they'll retreat to when they need the space to work out what's going in their hearts.

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6 Boys are tactile by nature

Ever noticed how little boys are more likely than little girls to pop new objects in their mouths. That's because taste and touch are two important ways that they take in the world. That tactile nature of boys needs to be nurtured, not ignored. One way is to hug them –lots! Boys need to be touched two to three times as much as girls to release the same amount of oxytocin (a feel-good chemical in the brain) that is released during a hug.

7 Boys learn from experience

Many parents know the extreme frustration that comes from imparting their wisdom on to their sons, only to see it completely ignored. If you have boys in your life then you need to get used to the fact that boys like to learn many of their life lessons for themselves. Experience, for better or worse, is a teacher that many boys can relate to.

8 Loyalty is a high driver

Understand that a boy's loyalty to his friends and family is a key driver and you'll unlock the key to the male psyche. They are incredibly influenced by their peers, which can hold them back, stopping many from getting too far ahead of the pack. Loyalty also gets many boys into strife with authority.

Call a boy's sister or friend an insulting name and you're asking for trouble!

9 Many boys' mouths don't work unless they are moving

If you want to have a serious or personal conversation with a boy then you are better off joining him on a walk. Face-to-face conversation can make them feel awkward, whereas shoulder-to-shoulder chats or conversations that happen during a game or activity seem to flow more naturally.

10 Boys need social scripts

Most boys need some didactic teaching about how to act and what to say to others at some stage in their life. Don't be afraid to tell boys of any age exactly what to say in new social situations as they can often struggle to find the words and the way to get their messages across.

11 Boys need a purpose to learn

If you want to motivate a boy to learn then you need to offer him tangible, short-term goals. He'll learn to play a musical instrument if he wants to be in a band; but get him to practise a musical instrument without a purpose and you'll probably be locked in a continuous struggle.

12 A boy's brain mature differently than a girl's brain

The maturation rate and sequence is different for boys than girls. For instance, the brain developments in the first five years of life prepares girls for the rigours of school better than it does for boys. A girl's brain in that period is busy developing fine motor skills, verbal acuity and social skills, which are highly valued by parents and teachers. A boy's brain, on the other hand, is busy developing gross motor, spatial and visual skills, which are essential hunting skills. Unfortunately, there isn't a great need for these traits in primary schools these days!!

There's no doubt that raising boys tends to be more of a challenge for parents than raising girls. Understanding and appreciating the differences is a great start. However I think parents who really connect well with boys somehow develop the wisdom to step as well as speak up at the right time, and the smarts to know when to stand back and allow their sons to work things out for themselves.

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