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Know what makes boys tick

by Michael Grose

Boys can be a mystery to many parents, particularly those who were raised in all-girl households or who have had minimum exposure to males in their formative years. Here are some insights into what makes boys tick:

Boys are more likely to learn from experience than being told

Boys, more than girls, are likely to learn many of their lessons from experience rather than being told. This can make parenting them challenging, particularly if you don't have an appetite for risk yourself. Perhaps the biggest challenge is keeping them safe, so some risks need to be out-of-bounds. It can also be difficult as a parent being the support person when the lessons that boys learn bring hardship and tears.

Boys brains are designed by a different architect

In the first five years of life a girl's brain is busy developing fine motor skills, verbal skills, and social skills, which are all highly valued by parents and teachers. Meanwhile, a boy's brain is busy developing gross motor skills, spatial skills, and visual skills. These are all handy hunting skills. So, boys often start school with a distinct disadvantage when it comes to learning and fitting in. You can overcome this disadvantage through extra fine motor activities in the early years.

Boys mature differently to girls

The maturity gap between boys and girls of anywhere between 12 months and two years, seems to be consistent all the way to adulthood. Parents should take this into account when deciding the school starting age of their sons. This maturity gap is also evident when kids finish school and move into tertiary studies or the workplace. Girls are often better placed to succeed, and many boys get lost once they leave school. You need to be prepared to keep supporting boys well into their adulthood.

Loyalty is high driver for boys

Understand that a boy's loyalty to his friends and family is a key driver and you'll begin to understand the male psyche. They are incredibly influenced by their peers, which can hold many of them back. It takes a brave boy to get too far ahead of the pack, so they often hold each other back when it comes to achieving. Use encouragement rather than praise to motivate your son, thus decreasing his reliance on others for approval.

Boys are more likely to be visual learners

Boys generally need a reason to learn. If you are having difficulty motivating your son then try linking learning to their interests. They may play a musical instrument when they know they can play in a band or practise their kicking a football if they can see it will help kick more goals. If they love skateboarding the chances, are they want to know more about it, so use this as a lever to motivate them if reading is a problem.

Boys benefit greatly from silence

Boys don't have the same innate tendency for reflection that girls are born with. Don't get me wrong, males of all ages have the ability reflect on their behaviours, values, and their lives (when older) but they need the environment to be right for them to do so.

Quiet time and down time give boys the chance to let their thoughts wander around inside their heads. It also helps them get to know and even like themselves. Boys will often do their best thinking on their own, so they tend to retreat to their caves (bedroom) when things go wrong at school or in their relationships. They need to go within to find their own answer.

Boys just want 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 friendship groups. Boys generally don't want to stand out from the crowd.

Don't put them down in front of their friends and understand that they may make poor friendship choices rather than be in a group of one – by themselves. They prefer the 'wrong friends' rather than no friends at all.

Approval is at the heart of parenting boys

Approval is at the heart of working parenting boys. They will walk over broken glass or hot coals if they feel you like them. In a sense this notion holds many of them back, as most boys will only work for a teacher if they like them and close down on learning if they sense the teacher doesn't like them. If as a mum or dad you show your love and approval of them personally, even though you may not always approve of their choice of behaviours then you'll more than likely enjoy a strong relationship with your son.

Take the time to nurture a relationship with your sons or the boys that you interact with. Some boys like to talk; others like to share an activity; some like you as an adult to do something for them; others are very kinaesthetic and love to be touched, cuddled, and hugged, while some just love gifts and mementoes. Work out the relational preferences of the males in your life and make sure you match these.

For more tips and tools for raising boys, please join us for our [Parenting Boys online course](#).