



Parenting Boys who are 5-11 years old (A brief guide)

A Boys' Development Project publication



This booklet has been written for those parents of boys aged 5-11 in order to offer practical guidance about getting the best from their sons.

It accompanies our 'About Boys' course, aimed at parents with sons who are aged 5-11.

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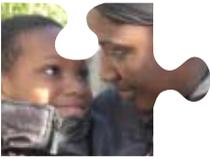
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Why this booklet?

This brief guide is for parents with sons aged five to eleven. It aims to help you understand your son enough to avoid some of the risks that can go along with being male. It also aims to highlight some of the ways you can support and protect him from challenges ahead.

While some boys get into difficulties, the majority do not. The more you understand the way he ticks and develop ways to help him manage the barriers he will meet, the better he will do. First the bad news and then the good!





Some (unfortunate) trends *

- Girls are increasingly outperforming boys at GCSE and most other test levels
 - Boys are more likely to be excluded from school
 - Boys are more likely to have learning difficulties
 - Boys are much more likely to be involved in criminal activity
 - Young men are more likely to get involved in excessive alcohol and drug use than young women
- * See our Boys factsheet for more trends and references (see page 35).

These are trends comparing boys with girls, although there are some big differences between boys themselves. Not all boys get involved in crime, are poor achievers and have learning difficulties. Just because they are boys doesn't mean there is necessarily trouble ahead.

These trends are important because they seriously impact on an individual boy's life chances. Twenty years ago leaving school with no qualifications could still lead to an apprenticeship and a decent waged job; now it won't. To get a modern apprenticeship needs five GCSEs with grades of A–C and if you have a criminal record your options are reduced still further.





What makes a difference?

There are four important factors that are more likely to lead some boys to become part of the trends above. While the existence of some or all of these factors does not necessarily mean that your son will become a statistic, they are common to see in boys of fourteen to sixteen who are having difficulties.

1. Boys who have strong communication skills are much more likely to do well within school and life. Those who struggle are much more likely to underachieve.



2. Boys who struggle with discipline and boundaries are also more likely to struggle with life! Taking instructions from others; understanding the difference between right and wrong; and being prepared to be told what to do and accepting authority (when appropriate and necessary) are all critical skills for boys in particular.

3. Boys who have little or no motivation in education or other ways that will enhance their life chances, are much more likely to struggle in life. Boys who want to give up before they have tried, or don't even try just because they do not want to fail are also more likely to struggle.
4. Boys need a sense of belonging and of contributing to the family. When they are very young boys are often looking for responsibilities. If they are not encouraged to take these they are more likely to drift away from their parents and families. If they have young brothers and sisters and are left to their own devices they can reposition themselves outside of the family and find themselves in conflict with their parents.





Boys getting older

Between the ages of five and eleven there are a number of developmental issues that your son might go through. We have listed some of the important ones.

Boundaries and discipline

Between the ages of five and eleven, boys are often more demanding; bigger; wanting what others have and wanting to be treated in a more grown-up manner. This often leads to more challenging behaviour and them pushing boundaries.

Independence

Boys often want more grown-up treatment and want to act more independently. They are also happy to have things done for them though. However, both can lead to disagreements.



Risk taking (the 'buzz')

Some boys are attracted to the buzz of risk-taking and danger. Also, boys will wind each other up and pressure each other into risk-taking, by suggesting they can't do things ... 'What are you, chicken?'

Tensions between home and mates

Often what is expected outside the family home can be different from inside. For example, some boys will swear when out with friends, but not at home. His attitude towards others may be harsher and he can often develop a strong distinction between the public (being with mates out on the road or even in school) and private (at home with the family).

Public and private

Boys from as young as five or six can develop a 'public' image, which is usually harder and less emotional. They often want to appear older than they actually are.

Narrowing of emotions

The type of emotions boys feel they are able to show in public without appearing weak narrows during this period. Boys as young as seven can decide they are too old to cry when they get hurt and by eight cuddling their mum in public is best avoided.

TV / video games and the internet

As some boys get older the impact of computer games and the internet can become more central to their lives. While this isn't all bad, it can have its downsides (see below).

Competition (giving up)

While boys aged seven or eight are more able to deal with losing, for many boys this is still difficult. Some boys will give up rather than compete and risk losing.

Motivation

Some boys' motivation will drop when stickers (or other external incentives) stop in school, with some looking for deals before they will do tasks ('If I do a good drawing, what will I get?').

Sleep, Food, Exercise

As they grow up, some boys expect to be treated as older than they are. This means they want to stay up later and eat what they like. Often the result of this is that some boys do not get enough sleep and have poor diets.

Conflict with schools

As some boys get older they expect parents and teachers to treat them differently. They also feel an increased pressure to appear more manly / adult in front of their mates.





Discipline and boundaries

Probably the most important way you can protect your son from the trends above is for you to get discipline and boundaries right.

While most girls can be talked to, encouraged and cajoled, most boys seem to need very clear boundaries. Interestingly, young men in schools who are underachieving usually describe a good teacher as one who is firm, fun and fair. They often say they are not concerned about how strict a teacher is, but that they need to know that if a teacher defines the boundaries they will be kept to.



This doesn't mean that being strict involves threats or even menace. As long as a warning of a visit to the head teacher's office when the boy is misbehaving is followed through firmly, fairly and calmly then there is little problem. For some parents this comes naturally; others have to learn and practice this.

Young men often define bad teachers as inconsistent and moody. This means that they don't know what will get the teacher annoyed on a given day, what the consequences will be and aren't sure that when the teacher makes a threat it will be seen through.

What you can do

Here are sixteen techniques and ways of getting your son to listen, engage and accept discipline and boundaries. All of these are well tested and, when used correctly, will work with most boys. For those of you attending an About Boys Course 5-11, these are an important part of what you will learn.

Touch and Talk

If you want his attention, touch your son on the arm. Even if he looks away his ears will open. This isn't a grip or a tug, just touch.

Low and Slow

If you want him to listen to what you say, you will need to deepen your voice and slow down your speech. This is just low and slow, not aggressive or angry.

Fewer Words

Whatever you want him to do, strip it down to as few words as possible removing the commentary. It is much better to state your requirement without unnecessary words. Instead of 'I have asked you ten times to put those toys away, you are doing my head in' it is much better to say 'TOYS AWAY PLEASE'. You can drop all of the 'can you' and 'would you'.



Right Words

Boys take words literally. If you say 'in a minute' he will think you mean 'in a minute'. If you say 'you can walk on ahead' without saying 'near enough so you can hear me if I call', he will go further than you want. This will only increase, so get used to it now.

Know the Rules

Boys need to be told the rules; they rarely ask what they are. You have to assume he doesn't know how to behave in a supermarket, so tell him 'here we walk', 'the trolley is pushed slowly', 'we put in the basket what is on the list'. Boys often see the world as a playground, so if there are rules they need to be told.

Eyes and Mouth

When we deepen our tone, our sons will look at us to make sure that our eyes and mouth match our words. If you are speaking firmly, but having trouble not laughing, or feeling bad because you are telling him off, then your eyes will give that away. Make sure your words, eyes and mouth are all saying the same thing.

Look over Here

If he is becoming too focussed on something that is likely to lead to upset then draw his attention away. It can be onto something else, such as another toy, something funny, someone else or another activity.

This or This

Boys will often react to what you ask them to do. If you give him a choice then he will engage with the choice. So rather than saying 'eat your sweetcorn' ask him if he is going to eat his rice or his sweetcorn first.

NO

This is especially useful if you tend to give him a lot of explanations and certainly if he knows he should not be doing something; a very firm NO will do the trick. If he is about to throw something at someone then say NO firmly, but not aggressively or in a threatening manner. An explanation can follow later, but he needs to know there is no negotiation.

Nip Things in the Bud

Some parents say they ask their sons to do something ten times and then shout. Sometimes nipping things in the bud is about timing; if you use the techniques above when you can see that something WILL become a problem then both he and you are more relaxed. Sort it out before it becomes a drama.

Three-week Rule

Boys form habits quickly. If you use any of these techniques consistently for three weeks they will become habit and you will find you need to use them less and less.

Walk and Talk

A lot of boys find it easier to talk when on the move. We often ask boys to sit down and talk, but they are often more comfortable when they are walking. If you have to have a difficult conversation with him then walk him around the block while having it.

Time Out for YOU

Usually Time Out is suggested as a way for a child to sit and reflect on what they have done. This does not really work for many children under seven because they don't reflect in that way. This time out is for you and gives you a chance to take stock. After all, you are the adult and problems arise because of the way two people interact. Don't forget ... you have a part to play in the drama.

Find Out

Many boys prefer to learn by doing. If he looks out of the window on a winter's day and sees the sun he may decide that he doesn't want to wear a coat. Rather than having a disagreement, let him go out without it but don't forget take it with you. He will ask you for it before he gets to the gate when he realises he needs it. If something can't hurt him then let him find out for himself.

Fits the Crime

A parent might tell a child to go to his room because he doesn't put away his toys. But there is no link between his toys and going to his room so he probably won't make the association. Where possible make sure that the punishment fits the crime (if he doesn't put his toys away then he doesn't get to play with them).

Later when calm

Choose your time to deal with situations when the level of tension is low. As parents we usually want to explain to our children what they did wrong at the time of the event. Even if your son is capable of reflecting, he probably won't be able to at a time when both of you are upset. Wait until later when normal relations have been reestablished to discuss it calmly and quietly.





Risk-taking

A lot of young men take risks. Risks related to sex, alcohol, drugs, and physical risk-taking are all-common for boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen.

It is difficult to tell how excited under-fives get or whether they get the same buzz that young men experience from risk-taking, but it is clear that for many boys in the five-to-eleven age range risk-taking behaviour is a magnet. They try to climb as high as they dare, do tricks on their bikes and they are drawn to anything that makes a boy appear older. It is often very tempting for some boys as young as six.

His mates and other boys may start to expect your son to take risks. He might also feel as though he has to, in order to fit in. This combination of being drawn to risks for the buzz and others' expectations becomes a stronger pull than any discouragement he may get from you.



This is an important time for him to learn how to assess risk so allow him to be in controlled, but risky situations. The more you encourage his risk-taking when you are with him, the less he is likely to look for that buzz elsewhere.

It is often mothers who want to stop or reduce levels of risk-taking while fathers tend to encourage it (although sometimes too far). It is fathers who seem to understand that boys need to learn about assessing risks by taking them.

What you can do

Boys (and girls) need to be provided with opportunities to take controlled risks. The more this happens the less they are likely to feel the need to look elsewhere for that buzz. While letting boys take too big a risk is a mistake, stopping them from taking any at all is also one.

Some boys want to learn how far their bodies can go. If you overprotect him, your son will resist. The more you try to protect him from danger the more likely it is that his nature will drive him to look for risks elsewhere. Playgrounds are built for controlled risk-taking and are ideal for boys to stretch themselves physically.

There is a strong relationship between risk-taking and responsibility. The more responsibility boys have, the fewer risks they seem to take and vice versa. Quite often boys of eleven or twelve are looking to practice independence; they want to do things by themselves and take responsibilities. The more they are encouraged, the more they will build their sense of responsibility and the less they will be attracted to risk. Doing jobs around the house, if introduced as their contribution to the family; being responsible for looking after younger brothers and sisters (as long it isn't too much); and of course caring for pets can all provide important opportunities to rehearse and develop responsibility. If you want him to take fewer risks, encourage him to take more responsibility.



Emotions

Males and females feel the same range of emotions, but tend to express them in different ways. It is not unusual for a seven-year-old boy thinking that he is too old to cry, especially in the playground and, by the time he gets to eight, hugging his mum goodbye at the school gate becomes a no, no.

Meanwhile, again in public, by the age of ten or eleven many boys are reluctant to show love for someone and other 'soft' emotions. In fact, boys at this age are often becoming aware of differences between what they do at home and what they do in front of their mates and outside generally.

While talking (and general communication skills) is critical in boys' ability to express their emotions, for many there is a strong relationship between their emotions and physical activity. Many

boys start to get physically restless when they feel emotional. Anything from squirming to running around can help alleviate this. For some boys being able to move physically helps them deal with their emotions more effectively.



What you can do

The more developed his communication skills are, the more likely your son is to express his emotions verbally.

Make sure there is a balance between busy and quiet activities, however reluctant he might be. Sitting down and reading for five minutes a day can lead to ten minutes then twenty minutes.

His ability to sit still, rest and sleep plays a critical role in growth, concentration and schoolwork, as well as helping him to express his emotions through talk rather than action.

If he is emotionally restless and not communicative, then try going for a walk. This will usually enable him to talk.

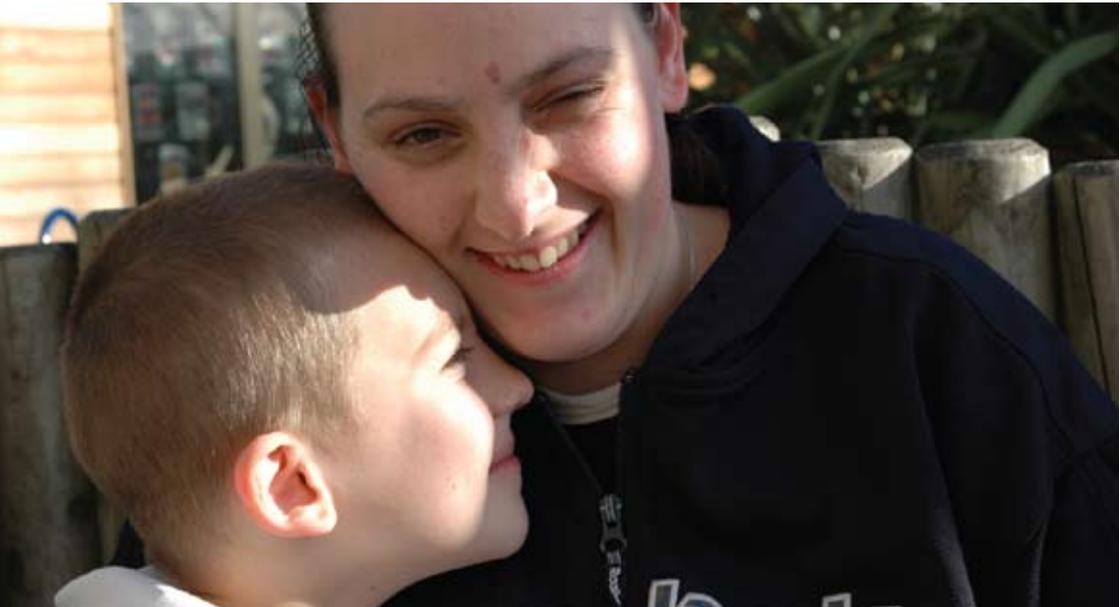




Television, computers, games consoles and other screens!

Television, PlayStation and the internet all become increasingly central to some boys' lives. There isn't a problem with any of these, unless they are used too much. What can be defined as too much varies from boy to boy, although all these activities are time stealers; once they are switched on then, for some, it is hard to get them turned off.

Some parents notice that their sons have difficulties turning the electronic entertainment off. They will allow 'one more go' or 'just a bit longer' and, while stopping short of calling it addictive, these parents realise that if they do not limit the amount of time then their sons will struggle to get much else done.



If boys spend a lot of time looking at screens it is likely to make it harder for them to concentrate on their school work. Electronic gadgets are more likely to limit their creativity and reduce boys' willingness to communicate. However, these are just the impact of the screens. If the content being shown is violent then that is another story. Screens in bedrooms will often make it harder for boys to sleep. As well as stealing time they will make many other activities much less stimulating (screens tend to draw the watcher in actively – most people will look at a screen in a room before they turn their attention to people).



What can you do?

Limit how much time he spends looking at screens – an hour a night is fine; three hours is not. Initially you may have to be firm and insistent, but after a week or so of insistence your son will find other activities to do. The earlier this is contained the better! Screens, if not addictive are certainly habit forming. Trade off or make using them a treat, but make using electronic entertainment the exception rather than the rule. Make sure that if he has schoolwork, this is done before he hits the screens.

Organise and encourage him to do other activities that will stimulate and help his development. Sport and exercise are good examples, as well as other activities such as board games.

Make sure that his electronic entertainment is age appropriate – follow the guidance on computer games. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESBRB) rate games as follows: EC (early childhood) – suitable for children three years and older; E (everyone) – six years and older, containing minimal violence and some ‘comic mischief’; T (teen) – suitable for persons thirteen and older (more violent than E rating and contains mild or strong language and ‘suggestive’ themes); M (mature) – seventeen years and older, with more mature sexual themes, intense violence and stronger language; AO (adults only) – for those over the age of eighteen.

Help him manage – if he finds it difficult to control his game playing, you need to help him to set limits on how much time he can play and encourage him to be involved in other activities. Boys have to learn to manage; so ‘NO’ on its own doesn’t help. Make this an area for negotiation and look for signs that he is managing the amount of time he is looking at screens. If he doesn’t learn where or how to define the usage boundaries, it will probably mean that he will go to friends’ houses where there are no or fewer limits.

Make sure you can monitor the screens – one of the toughest decisions is whether screens are OK in bedrooms. Issues about supervision; watching and not sleeping; disturbed sleep and waking with the TV are all important if you are going to help him manage and reduce the negative impact that screens might have on his life.

Always bear in mind what is best for him – remember, this is about his development, not what is convenient for you, or even whether you are for or against something. If his use of screens has allowed you to get on with what you need to do, but has negatively impacted on him, address this now ... it won’t get any easier when he is older.



Male role models; do boys need them?

A lot of single mothers are very concerned about whether their sons need a dad and male role models. Either they are concerned that his father has a negative impact on him, or they are concerned that their son needs a male role model and his father does not provide it.

Maybe the bigger question is what defines the role model that a boy needs? A lot of boys will talk about skills and attributes that they want and not talk about a person they want to be like. When they talk about these skills they are as likely to mention a female as a male ('I don't want to be messed around – I'm a bit like my aunt.'). So, role modelling is a bit more complicated than simply putting a man in a room with boys and expecting it to lead to good things.



Some fathers definitely have a positive impact on their sons, even if they don't live with them and some boys definitely benefit from contact with their fathers, especially if he enjoys being with his son and his son knows it. However, not having a father is certainly better than having one who has a negative impact on his son.

It is important to distinguish between a man who was a good partner and one that might be a good father. He may have been a real let down for you as a partner, but that doesn't mean that he can't treat his children well and have a positive contribution as a father.

Having said that, there are two periods where boys often seem to be looking for male role models. The first is between ages two and four (where they are learning the difference between men and women) and then between twelve and fourteen, when they are looking to become more independent of their mum. At this second stage boys instinctively think that men will understand them more than women.

What can you do?

Don't put yourself at risk, but if your son benefits from contact with his dad then make it happen.

If your son doesn't have contact with his dad, then make sure that there are plenty of men around (such as older brothers, uncles and your male friends). Of course what is critical is that these men have a positive impact and that they are around for a good while. A steady, ever-changing flow of men is no good for him.



Too much like his dad?

As boys get older (especially if they have contact with their blood fathers) they often start to resemble them. When a boy starts to have opinions, doesn't necessarily listen to instructions and starts to talk back, a mother can stop seeing him as her son and start seeing their ex! This is particularly the case if their son physically resembles his dad. Of course the worst thing you can do is to react as if he is your ex! This is even more likely if your son is given the title of 'the little man of the house'. As he gets older he will increasingly have views of his own, which may not be the same as yours. However this means that it is time for negotiation, not time for a fight.





Keep him as close, but ...

As boys get older (from five to eleven), they often want to become more independent. This will start (often before five), with wanting to dress themselves and to do other household activities away from you. This is very important, but what you need to remember is that this is a period to **rehearse** independence and not **be** independent. Some parents will stop their sons from cuddling and encourage him to stop crying if he hurts himself because they do not want their son to grow up 'soft' or to be unable to look after himself.

Independence is a critical set of skills to learn and it is your role to create opportunities for him to learn these. The closer you keep your son, the more he is likely to learn to be independent. However, this isn't the same as over-protecting him while keeping him close, you also have to let him (at times) be distant enough to take risks. There is an example of a six-year-old and an eight-year-old recently seen doing the family shop in a local supermarket, and another example of an eight-year-old whose mum's anxieties about him getting hurt stopped him from climbing in the playground which left him furious. These two extremes show parents of boys a line that they need to be in the middle of.

Another factor that comes into play during this period is that of your son developing an outside and inside way of behaving. At home he might want to be cuddled, while outside he will want to be seen as more independent (not kissing you goodbye or holding your hand). This is where pressure from his mates and others of his age to be independent will lead him to develop a 'public' image. There is no simple answer to this, but it also isn't a reason for you to pull away from him. Remember to view these occasions as opportunities to rehearse his independence and not for him to BE independent.



Motivation

When your boys under five years, motivation was closely linked with discipline and boundaries. There were always activities that you wanted your son to do which didn't make him feel good and where he resisted or just said no! These occasions ranged from activities such as going to bed, or getting up; getting ready for nursery or school; cleaning his teeth; reading a book; sitting still; moving further away from the TV; eating his vegetables; and the list goes on. Now for many parents this leads to three choices: they do the task themselves (put his toys away or dress him); they have a regular fight and insist; or they negotiate and make a deal ('If you get ready for school, we might get sweets on the way home' or 'Clean your teeth and put your pyjamas on and you can watch television for fifteen minutes.').



Doing the tasks for them can often lead to their expectation that they will continue to be done (I met a mother whose 25-year-old son still expects her to wake him up in the morning for work and sort out his packed lunch and get his clothes ready). She continues to do these things because she says if she didn't then he wouldn't get up and he would lose his job. She had become his motivation!

Making deals also has its problems. A bribe of sweets at two years old, becomes £10 at ten! If boys get used to deals from a young age then they start to look at each scenario in terms of 'What do I get if I do that?' The deal then starts to determine what they do. This leads to difficulties at school when the rewards for working hard are not immediate. This can demotivate some boys.

Some schools build on the negotiation approach by offering stickers for achievements. However, these are often withdrawn in year two or three and as a result some boys' motivation drops. In fact motivation can be the critical element in whether boys do well at school. If boys

are over-reliant on external deals, they are more likely to underachieve at school.

Those children who have strong internal motivations usually achieve more than those only motivated by external factors. So while external motivators have their place, the more boys are encouraged to develop internal motivation the better they are likely to achieve.



A number of the external motivators have their problems and limitation:

Rewards and incentives (money, bribes, deals) – Money can cause headaches as an incentive because the older boys get the more it will cost the parent! Rewards are fine as one of a number of motivators, but are more problematic if they are the main one.

Threats and punishment – Physical punishment has very limited success as a motivator especially in the longer term. The punishment has to get bigger to maintain the same threat. A threat is usually only a threat when you are in the room or if he thinks you might find out. This often leads boys to behave differently when they are away from you.

Competition – for some boys competition becomes a strong motivator. However if there are winners then there are also losers and some boys will find losing very difficult. For some this means they will stop competing, give up or not even try if they think they will lose / fail.

Be the best – this is a variation on competition. For some boys who do well in class, being the best can lead to doing only just enough to keep them at the top. These same boys, who might have been easily in the top three of their primary school, can become demotivated when they find themselves average when they reach secondary school, simply because they aren't the best anymore.

Because god is watching – some parents will introduce their children to God in this way. The reasoning is that they want to make the child think that wherever they are, whatever they are doing, they are being watched and, as a result, their behaviour is always being monitored. This will work for as long as they have belief. If they lose belief then they can also lose their motivation to behave well!

To please you – if your son is motivated to behave well to please you, he may only behave well when you are there! There is a difference between praise ('Well done, that looks great.') and pleasing you ('Do this for mummy.').

What you can do

There are some external motivators that increase internal motivation. These include:

Praise – The more you praise your son the more likely he is to develop internal motivation. So, for example, if you praise him in his reading the more likely he is to want to get even better at it.

Have high expectations – Parents who have expectations of their sons doing well at school, often do. However, it is important to get the balance between high expectations and too high expectations.

Challenge – This is different from competition. Competition is against others, while challenge is usually against himself. For something he is reluctant to do or doesn't think he is good at, then set him a challenge. 'I bet you can't read for more than five minutes.' Time challenges are better than saying 'I bet you can't read that book', because if he gets involved in the challenge more than the book itself then he might succumb to turning pages quickly rather than getting anything from the book.

Do your best – Trust him to make an assessment of what he does. Ask him if he did the best he could in class that day. If he thinks you are asking so that you can tell him you don't think he has, then this will not work. However, if you trust his assessment then he is likely to make a critical judgment of what he does. 'Do your best' is a very valuable internal motivator for boys and provides them with a measure that only they can determine.

Give him a reason – Boys often need to be given a reason for why they should do something. They often want to know what it will result in (same as a deal). He might be six years old and say that he wants to be a plumber. If you tell him that he will need to be great at measuring and numbers then this will help him make the link between what he is learning and how he might use it later. Usually the more boys understand ‘why’ then the more they will try. A five-year-old who wants to be a doctor is also likely to say that they know they will need to do very well at school. Help him to make the link.

Give him responsibility – Boys aged even two and three are often motivated to do jobs around the house. Emptying the washing machine, laying the table and taking out the rubbish are all jobs boys will associate with being responsible and being adult and independent. If he is given responsibilities and he sees himself as an important family member he will be motivated to carry out all sorts of domestic tasks. This will build an internal motivation and a sense of value in what he does.



Ability to struggle – It goes without saying that children need our protection. However, there are a range of situations when we might think they need to be wrapped in cotton wool but where they're not actually going to get hurt. If we give the child his head then he can only learn from the experience. A one-year-old child struggles with a top on a container. He pulls and pulls and nothing happens. He starts to get annoyed so his mum takes the container from him and removes the top and the difficulty is over. However, this was an opportunity not a crisis. As long as the top can be removed fairly easily, the child is likely to get frustrated but persist in trying until the top comes off. In this circumstance he will smile and more often than not try to put the lid back on again so he can repeat the exercise. He is inviting both the challenge and the struggle. He learns that if he persists he can do things that please him, which builds his internal motivation and confidence.



Not to give up – Boys often give up too easily. Again, there are opportunities here described above. Allow him to see the benefits of not giving up. Persistence is such a critical ability for a child to develop, especially a boy.

Concentration – If boys can concentrate on a range of activities they usually do well in a classroom. This is a skill that develops through practice and if it is not practiced it will not develop. Very short periods of time may be the starting point; five minutes' practice will become ten. You might try using an egg timer or anything that helps boys stay focussed and build this critical skill.

Boredom – In the same way, dealing with boredom can be learned. When children say they are bored, too often we want to make it better rather than recognise that dealing with boredom is an essential life skill for them to develop.

General problem solving – Again, this requires practice. The more we encourage boys to solve problems the more their confidence will grow.

Do as well as he can – If there is something he is already good at then encourage him to do even better. It almost doesn't matter what the activity is, as what you are encouraging is the actual process and the skills associated with the art of improving rather than his improvement of the activity itself. So if he is interested in football skills, then let him spend the time getting better and better at these. When he struggles with his schoolwork, you can remind him of the benefits of practice, persisting and doing as well as he can, by referring to his football skills.



What will make a difference for you and your son?

1. Make sure he has strong boundaries and discipline.
2. Give him responsibilities and a role in the family (which will lead to lower risk-taking).
3. Keep him close, but not too close (there is a fine balance between being dependent and overprotected and too independent and taking too many risks).
4. Let him get older, but not too quickly (look for a balance between acknowledging that he is getting older, while at the same time not letting go too quickly).
5. Make sure he gets opportunities to assess risk.
6. Have high expectations (but not too high) – the more we expect of boys, the more we get.
7. Allow access to screens, but not too much.
8. Maintain communication – it is important to maintain high levels of communication throughout this period.
9. Provide a consistent structure within which he can learn.
10. Sleep, diet and exercise – maintain a balance between these three critical areas.



'About Boys' course 5-11

This booklet has been written to accompany a course targeted at parents with sons. There are two courses; one for parents with sons that are 0-5, and another for parents with sons aged 5-11.

The courses aim to provide parents with an opportunity to sift fact from fiction, as well as learn strategies for encouraging and supporting their sons and ways to deal with boundaries and behaviour.

The course also aims to increase parents' understanding of their son's development as a male and increase their confidence in dealing with their son's behaviour and development.

Each course comprises four sessions, as follows:

Differences between boys and girls and boys' development

Discipline and boundaries

Why boys do what they do and what motivates them

Education and achievement

Other publications and factsheets from the Boys' Development Project:

Discipline and Boys who are under five (a brief guide)

Boys into School

Boys and Screens factsheet

Boys ADHD factsheet

You can download and print these for free or buy copies.

Go to our website: www.boysdevelopmentproject.org.uk

This brief guide is for you if you are a parent with a son aged five to eleven. It aims to help you understand your son enough to support him in ways that will protect him from some of the difficulties ahead.

However, this booklet is not about parenting failure. Many of the difficulties for boys are not new, but they are much more difficult for boys to negotiate in this day and age. In turn this makes it more difficult for you to parent them through.

Most parents want the best for their sons and to do this we may have to look critically at how we parent, try new methods and look for new ways of addressing old difficulties. This guide will help you do this.



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