

What We Can Do For Boys

1. Understand what it is to be a boy.

Learn about the biological and social influences that affect boys' development. Look for the strengths in boys. Work to accept their nature. Realize the powerful role of shame in boys' socialization.

2. Help boys to maintain empathy and caring.

Provide boys with opportunities to keep them caring, nurturing and empathic. Encourage them to volunteer to visit with elderly, mentor younger boys, or give them opportunities to take care of plants, insects, or animals.

Offer community service as a family. Encourage and reward acts of empathy and caring.

3. Help boys stay connected.

Give boys your time. Connect through activity. Use styles of communication that work better for boys. Tell boys you love them and show them your love through physical affection.

Help boys find something they are passionate about. Think beyond sports. Give them something to hold onto when their peers may become disconnected. Connect boys with mentors.

Know that even if your boys are acting as if their relationship to you is unimportant, IT IS.

4. Teach the importance of respect.

Help boys to grapple with the challenges of being strong without being aggressive.

Watch your inclination to encourage boys to be aggressive in the face of conflict. Teach effective and respectful ways to respond to taunting.

Take a stand against teasing and bullying. Do not allow disrespectful comments about others' abilities, sexual identity, etc. Teach boys what comments like 'gay and fag' mean and that they are hurtful and are disrespectful.

5. Help boys to become emotionally adept and relationally competent.

Continue to educate and support your boys to recognize and express the full range of their emotions. Ask them how they feel about things. Listen for feelings underneath their anger. Offer physical outlets for their emotions. Allow boys to feel scared, sad, vulnerable, and to ask for help.

Understand that boys, too, hunger for real connection and intimacy.

6. Help create schools that enable boys' success.

Create schools that support boys so that boys have a social structure that enforces resilience. Start a boys' group or start a parent group to support boys. Help schools to develop climates where teasing and bullying are not accepted. Encourage schools to find new ways to teach reading and writing that work better for boys.

7. Help boys to develop self-control.

Use language that rewards self-control and thinking before acting. Teach skills to slow down before reacting. Tell boys how you maintain self-control.

8. Watch what you model.

Particularly for women, support men in their role as fathers. Be watchful for comments that put down or limit men. Learn about boys' style of communication.

Particularly for men, watch how you share domestic chores, treat women, respond to homophobia, and demonstrate balance between work, family and play. Work to stay connected.

We teach more by what we do than what we say. Know that your boys are watching you.

9. Help boys to become aware of social influences.

Talk to boys about the pressures they face to conform to a certain model of masculinity. Allow for a greater range of ways to demonstrate their masculinity.

Ask open-ended questions that allow boys to examine the lessons they learn from playing or watching sports. Consider issues like athletes playing when injured, the importance of winning, the importance of having fun, coaching styles, how it feels to not be picked for sports teams.

10. Watch your expectations. Monitor your own biases.

Show boys that you trust them and expect them to become positive men.

Women, ask yourself what have you learned about men. How does this affect the way you interact with boys? Men, ask yourself what you have learned about what it takes to be a man. How does this affect the way you interact with boys? Get support from other adults so we don't put our own limitations on our boys.

Be mindful about how we recognize boys. Do they only get acknowledged for athletics or can they also get applauded for how they dance, cook and perform other non-traditional activities? How about acknowledging them for how well they take care of themselves (physically and emotionally), ask for help, or express their emotions?