

Thinking About Boys

Mid-States Spring Conference

April, 2008

- 1) Boys/Men feel most alive when they experience a release from constraint.
FOOTBALL: elude or escape from the tackle; run into the end zone!
BASKETBALL: running away with the layup!
BASEBALL: beating the pitcher; hitting the "homerun!"
Boy Fantasies: The Superhero!
- 2) This release from constraint is, loosely, freedom for boys.
- 3) Discipline (like study habits, training program, etc.), a temporary kind of constraint, is what develops skills into competencies, which in turn yields greater "freedom." Many boys do not "get" this and therefore resist discipline.
- 4) School/camp: when boys don't fit in.
- 5) Men grow by challenge. Boys "inspire" other boys to grow or move beyond their fears.
- 6) Courage: the willingness to push through fear, especially fear of shame. Boys need encouragement at specific times, like when separating (homesick), trying (sports, friends), persevering (toughing it out in a good way). Shaming boys or yelling at boys is false encouragement.

Check out Bob's training DVDs
Especially "Working with Boys"

“Be the Bigger Man”

Be the first to Apologize.

If the other guy won't talk with you, see if you can get someone else to approach him to make it better. If he still doesn't respond, let it go.

Don't keep a fight going—don't make it an everlasting thing.

Know when to walk away and keep out of fights.

Let it go.

Have integrity—don't talk behind people's backs.

**Stay out of other people's fights
(mind your own business)**

Y Children and Performance 五

✓ Kids think that if they try hard, it proves that they are less able.
(If you have to try so hard, maybe you stink!)

✎ Kids 9-12 see ability as separate from effort.
(Either you have talent or you don't!) They need help grasping the concept of *incremental improvement*.

† Kids feel that praise for doing simple or obvious or easy tasks is a sign of low ability. Such praise is experienced by children as an insult.

✓ Children will avoid humiliation at all costs. Acting up, clowning around or feigning illness and other inappropriate behaviors often mask shame or the fear of being shamed. ("I'd rather be a success at being bad than be a failure at stuff I can't do that would then be humiliating!")

Ⓢ Children, in concert with the prevailing culture, place an emphasis on *outcome* or *product* and not on *process*. A team or individual may win their competition but not know what it was *they did* or *need to keep doing* to continue having success.

Ⓞ A key developmental task in 7-12 years olds is mastery and control—gaining control over their own feelings and impulses. Some children are *poor winners*—they allow their feelings of relief, joy or aggression to run them.

Reflective Coaching

→ Getting children to reflect on their own performance: How do you think you did? I'll tell you what I think, but let's see what you think, first. Kids brains need prodding in order to be reflective. This is called the *observing ego*.

→ You can help kids assess their performance in sports and also social skills, like making friends or working out conflicts.

→ When kids are overly harsh self-critics: I hear what you're saying and I understand how you feel...and...I think you're doing better. (Offer specifics. Be honest!)

→ Be on the lookout for unrealistic expectations. Remember that kids are *product oriented*.

→ Help kids with their own "self talk"—what they say inside their own heads about their performance.

→ Is what you are doing helping you get where you want to go?

"... have you been Ditterized?"

Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW
72 Montgomery Street • Boston, Ma 02116
Phone: 617-572-3353 • fax: 617-572-3373
E-mail: bobditter1@aol.com

Boys' Circle of Respect—A Preventive Exercise

A powerful method for helping boys grow and support one another.

Objective: To help boys identify male values, broaden their *emotional vocabulary* and support one another.

Format: Group discussion. The topic is respect: what each member has seen in his peers or counselors that day or week that he admires or respects. A time limit is set (30-50 minutes), the agreements (see below) are reviewed and the discussion begins. Boys have a great tradition of supporting other boys in daring and courageous pursuits, but are not always helped or encouraged to put this support into words or to voice this support publicly.

Clarification of the Topics: "Respect" is what boys admire in other boys or adult males—something in another person you look up to. The term "respect" needs to be extended not only to action and tasks, like practicing hard or playing hard or not giving up, but also to relational and emotional issues, like respect for over-coming homesickness or respect for admitting an error in judgment or respect for asking for help or giving help, and so on. The male facilitator needs to model this by sharing moments from their own lives where they did and did not *respect themselves*, or when they respected the courage or actions of a friend, teacher, father, etc.

Procedure: The tips below *are essential* to success. Remember that as important as *what* the boys say is the *process*—how the boys listen to, encourage and support one another. Keeping the group agreements is an integral part of that process!

Specific Steps:

1.) Whenever you meet with boys, whether they are four or fourteen, *have them sit in a circle*. By sitting this way, every boy sees every other boy in the group. Each boy should have his own space in the circle and not be sitting on top of or hanging all over other boys, as younger boys tend to do. The idea is for each child to participate fully, without distractions. Boys may choose to sit in chairs or on the floor, but each boy should have a "place" in the circle.

2.) *Adult facilitators should sit across from one another, not side by side*. Not only does this give the adults greater exposure to the boys by spreading out, it allows facilitators to see one another during the meeting and signal each other in response to any change in the course of the meeting or any "infraction" of the rules of the meeting.

3.) Every meeting should begin with a review of the rules the boys make for how the meeting is conducted. These rules should be written on a piece of poster board or paper and held up at each gathering of the group. The agreements might sound like the following:

- a.) **One kid speaks at a time.** Boys often have a hard time waiting their turn. For younger or more impulsive boys, use a pine cone, sea shell, peace pipe or similar object (*not a stick or a stone*) to hold while talking. The person with the object speaks. The adult *should always acknowledge both the boy who spoke and the boys who waited patiently for their turn*. The adult facilitator *always controls the object*, giving it out and then getting it back after each boy speaks.
- b.) **Each boy speaks for himself.** Boys have an easier time of this than girls, but this agreement should always be gently enforced if necessary.
- c.) **No "put downs."** It is important to create and maintain an environment where boys can feel heard and not shamed. A lot of work can be done here to help boys disagree without fighting or having to shame others.
- d.) **What gets said here, stays here.** This agreement helps promote safety in the group by keeping what gets shared from being turned into "ammunition" used to shame others after the meeting is over. Facilitators may want to amend this agreement by stating that, as caring adults, they, too, will respect the boys' privacy; but will, of course, do whatever needs to be done to keep the boys safe. If a boy shares anything that has to do with hurting himself or another, this cannot be kept a "secret" by an adult leader.

Other Tips: •When you first meet, ask the boys if they have any other rules or agreements they think should be added to the list. •Give younger boys a small number of chips or marbles or something similar they "spend" each time they speak. This helps keep one or two boys from

monopolizing the group. •As a group matures some of the members might speak about things they respect in girls or women, too.

The Job of the Facilitator:

- 1) To clarify what kinds of things qualify as "respectful." Using personal examples of things they have done that they respect in themselves or have seen friends do that they respect sets the tone.
- 2) To encourage participation by listening and remaining non-judgmental.
- 3) To validate what the boys share.
- 4) To intervene when a boy says he respects something in himself or another that is inappropriate, like that he respects another boys from throwing stones at a rival or he respects a boy for being funny at someone else's expense. What is crucial here is to distinguish between boys who are clearly being silly or trying to thwart the process from boys who may be trying to say something like, "I respect how you tried to stick up for yourself." A skillful facilitator knows how to acknowledge the *positive intent* of an action while pointing out how *the way it was done* might have been hurtful or disrespectful, even if that is not what the boy intended. This can lead to some great discussion about how better to stand up for oneself or express a discontent or disagreement.
- 5) To actively keep the meeting agreements.

Communication with Boys

1. Develop a way of talking with boys that is shame free and non-judgmental. If boys sense they are about to be shamed, they clam up. For example, **learn to acknowledge the good intentions** of a boy's actions, even if it was over zealous and he may have messed up.

2. Connect through action: take a walk, jog, or throw a ball around. Boys often have an easier time talking when they are active or have a diversion or way of saving face.

3. Make the distinction between what a boy feels and *what they do* with what they feel. Most boys don't know that they can *feel* something (angry, for example) and not *act on that feeling*. An example I use often with boys is, "It is fine to have *angry feelings*, but that doesn't mean you can do *angry things*."

→Another thing I might say is: "I can understand you feeling angry. What I don't get is why you're trying so hard to let everyone know."

4. Look behind anger and "rambunctious" behavior for other meanings/feelings →be aware that for some boys, angry outbursts or "hyper" activity may be a sign that they are feeling threatened, frustrated or vulnerable in some way and not simply a show of defiance or being "bad."

5. Recognize "invitations." A challenge or rude remark may be a crude way on the part of a boy to say that he wants to engage. Underneath that challenge may be a need of support or reassurance.

6. Try talking about a behavior (e.g., a temper outburst) as an *external* thing: "Sometimes you are really on top of your temper; and then other days it seems to get the upper hand. Let's see what we can do to help *you* win this today, not your temper!"

Presenter: Bob Ditter
Midstates 2008

Boys To Men: working more effectively with Boys

Mastery - Things boys have to go through.

1 Separation

2 Aggression

3 Friendship

4 Skill Development

5 Sexuality/Intimacy

At 5 years old boys vocabulary is about 300 words fewer than girls. By age 7 they catch up.

Boys connect through performance, connections, actions.

Boys are counter-phobic, they master fears by taking them on. 80% (Boys) to 20% (Girls).

Boys identify with the aggressor.
Girls identify with the victim.

Fun is a boy word for mastery. Can I toughen up?

Boys isolate - they don't tell if they are in trouble, girls tell. Boys are okay with isolation, girls are not.

Boys gain currency through mastery. *An adult can teach him to do better with something he likes. You can make him "friend-eligible" by doing this. Make friends through the stuff they do.

Boys see women as objects, things to be avoided, yuck!

? Can I see a girl as an equal, friend.

1 Boys are clueless.

2 See girls as sexual objects (not people), turn them on.

Girls increase self-esteem through friendship building.
Power through relationships, you are either in or out.

Boys punish each other in different ways such as shame, accuse boys of not being a real boys by calling names such as wimp, gay, dickhead, dickless, wussy.

Learning: Boys get better at sports when they play with kids who are better or stronger than them.
(This includes staff and parents).

Wounds are like badges of courage (that is why they show them off so often)!

For outcasts they may be immature, a whiner, or just not matched because of not having social skills, maturity... Boost self-esteem; have an adult teach them. Practice, Practice.
One-on-one helps make friends for boys easier.

Triple Play

Ask the outcast, who would you like to be friends with? Then staff makes a play date with the 2 kids, but be smart, help with the choice.

Triple = 1 kid who doesn't fit in 2 1 choice boy 3 Counselor/staff
Later, add another boy, but take the outcast out so it isn't obvious. *One-on-One Time*

Don't be surprised if the boys go back to normal friends when coming back from the one-on-one time.

2 boys, 1 staff = PLAY!

Boys who are awkward are less awkward because of group dynamics.

- Play with this activity, Play is the Key. Fits both gender requirements: social, mastery.

Free play = problem solving, they do not get enough of this.

Use the word stinks NOT socks!!

Challenge them: use sports (staff/child)

When a child is losing their temper, use a signal or a code word.

- Evaluate the child, don't blow smoke, give specifics, tell the truth.

Ex: He wasn't the problem, his temper was.

- Use an object (tennis ball), call it the "temper," it is not you, it is getting the best of you, sometimes you have it and sometimes you have a good handle on it. Create something to master. Keep him in control.

Boys will keep doing what you don't want them to do until you... give them something else to do in its place.

Circle of Trust It didn't get the best of me.

Boys To men: Working More Effectively with Boys

The most important things to boys are freedom
and competence.

These are the notes I took from Bob
Ditter's presentation at Midstates. If
you don't understand something I
wrote, ask, and I will try to explain.

Kiester