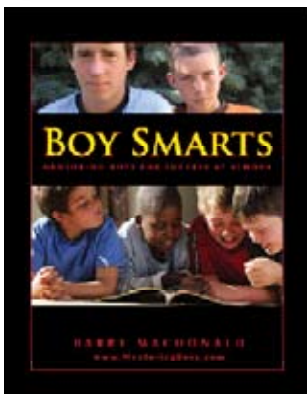


BOYS ON TARGET QUIZ



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THIS is a challenging time for boys, and for those who mentor boys. Once teachers might have said to students, “If you’ll pay close attention to what I teach you, you’ll learn what you need to know.” Today, we are acutely aware that we don’t know all the answers that children will need, or even the questions they will struggle with. As advances in technology and communication keep accelerating, we may question whether schools were even designed to teach the kinds of students we have now.

Are you game to test your knowledge on what the research reports as the best practices to support boys’ growth and development in our homes, schools and communities?

The following quiz draws on material from my new publication *Boys on Target: Raising Boys into Men of Courage and Compassion*.

Whether you are a parent completing this quiz at home or an educator using this quiz as a professional development activity, it is my hope that this quiz will help us launch or sustain dialogue about how we can reach out to boys, respond to their needs, and encourage their growth toward healthy manhood.

Test your knowledge on what research and best practice says about mentoring boys...

Answer True or False for each of the following statements:

1. ____ Boys learn differently than girls.
2. ____ Brain science explains the differences between boys and girls.
3. ____ All boys benefit from more rough-and-tumble activities.
4. ____ Whereas girls tend to set limits with other girls through social exclusion, there is ample evidence to indicate that boys draw lines in the sand non-verbally through aggressive behaviour that is not intended to harm.
5. ____ A boy's internal processing of thought and release of feelings often involves action.
6. ____ Both parents have critical roles in helping siblings learn to get along with each other, but as gender role models fathers are uniquely positioned to teach boys how to manage their emotions and aggression.
7. ____ Affluence is the greatest predictor of a boy's success with reading.
8. ____ Reports of research on gender differences in the brain show that boys' development, on average, lags about six months behind girls' development.
9. ____ Boys are more likely to externalize their stress than girls are.
10. ____ Witnessing violence in the family does not create increased risk of aggression among boys who play violent video games.



11. ____ Boys often can mask their strong emotions with a show of indifference or bravado that makes them hard to reach.

12. ____ Encouraging boys to open up is less about getting them to talk, and more about getting them to listen so they can be successful learners.

13. ____ If mentoring from a father is absent, inadequate, or marked by excessive emotional distance, boys can develop a distorted view of themselves.

14. ____ The majority of school administrators believe that it can be somewhat productive to keep boys inside during recess breaks because of earlier infractions such as incomplete schoolwork.

15. ____ Experienced teachers know that seeking a medical diagnosis should be the first response to helping children with behaviour characterized as ADHD.

16. ____ Auditory processing difficulties are equally common among boys and girls.

17. ____ A boy's long-standing attraction to drawing, playing computer games, and working through math problem-solving characterize what is called an auditory learning style.

18. ____ Over the past decade best-practice teacher research has stressed that teachers steer clear of traditional stand and deliver methods of instruction.

19. ____ Single-gender classrooms have been shown to be highly effective for teaching boys.

20. ____ When boys misbehave or disengage from learning a consequence will hold them accountable and teach them how to become more resilient learners.

Answers:

1. False—While it is true that certain tendencies do exist among boys as compared to girls, and it is possible that some differences even appear to be genetically driven, we need to avoid the temptation to typecast and pigeonhole boys. I do not imagine there is a single cause of boys' struggles, nor do I believe there is a single remedy—certainly not *Zero Tolerance*, single-gender schooling, or a return to the nineteenth century!

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2. False—Often missing from the conclusions drawn from gendered brain science is the understanding that brain differences reveal relative tendencies, or averages. Averages, which are statistical and mathematical means used to describe the general differences between populations, do not tell the complete story. Learning about average statistical tendencies may lead us to exaggerate differences between boys and girls and thus limit our understanding of their needs. Knowing that the average boy finds it easier than a typical girl to construct buildings from two-dimensional blueprints does not explain why another boy has difficulty interpreting the same blueprint.

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3. False—Rather than automatically assuming that all boys benefit from more rough-and-tumble activities, we could provide a range of activities for boys that meet varied needs—for reflection as well as for rambunctious play. We would appreciate that while many boys need recess and opportunities to get their wiggles out, others need space for quieter activities such as chess, model building, and reading clubs. We know from nature that diversity makes the species stronger. Appreciating the diversity of all children—boys and girls—we must work toward providing a range of opportunities for learning—in realms that include the physical and emotional; technological and creative; academic and practical.

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4. True—For girls the conflict can span several days, while for boys the conflict is more commonly a momentary flair. Certainly codes of safety around playground behaviour are necessary, but many parents and teachers have indicated to me that school regulations of recent years that are too inflexible can typically constrict and oppose non-threatening playground behaviour. A *Zero Tolerance* fighting policy means that boys who are very energetic during their recess break and participate in ritualistic play fighting, along with pushing and shoving, are often reprimanded or disciplined. Rather than banning certain playground behaviours such as tag, physical touching, and snowball throwing, the parents and school staff might reflect on more imaginative and effective ways to structure playtime while also providing some scope for energetic play.

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5. True—Sometimes seen in fidgeting, avoidance of eye contact, or quick bursts of energy, like slamming a door, boys are more likely than girls to express themselves through activity. For many males, talking is like playing a sport, with bursts of excitement and periods of lull. With boys, talking while moving—*Action-talk*—promotes closeness and lets them talk on their terms.

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6. True—From their own boyhood experiences, men know that boys in play may turn sticks into guns, but fantasy play is not reality, and very few boys confuse the two after the age of six or seven. Most fathers also understand that it is not possible, or productive, to try to insulate boys from all fantasy enactments of violence. Fathers can help boys develop the empathy that is the best inhibitor of real life violence that hurts others. Through modelling compassion in their communication with their sons, fathers are in a unique position to help their sons internalize a compassionate outlook toward others.

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7. False—According to research carried out by the *Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development*, school success is more determined by the extent children read for pleasure in their spare time than their degree of affluence; especially reading forms of literacy they enjoy—comics, magazines, websites, newspapers, games, etc. Encouraging all boys to read for pleasure is essential.

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8. False—On average boys acquire speech clarity and the readiness to read at 1.5 years later than girls; girls typically take in more sensorial information, and are more attentive to their surroundings; the majority of boys arrive at kindergarten with fewer social skills such as turn-taking; girls, who are more likely to have increased levels of serotonin, have, on average, higher tolerance levels for frustration.

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9. False—While girls are encouraged to relieve their stress by sharing their problems with others, boys are more likely to be ashamed to disclose and commonly internalize their stress. Societal attitudes have fostered a silent crisis among males and boys learn that to reach manhood they must be strong without fail. Boys are more likely to be taught to turn their uncomfortable feelings into anger—which we all know contributes to the number of men felled by accidents, suicides, and heart attacks. The male ritual of using alcohol and drugs to manage and conceal strong feelings only adds to the damage.

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10. False—Even though studies like *The Role of Media Violence in Violent Behaviour* by Huesmann and Taylor (2006) show that a small percentage—4 to 9%—of violence could be traced or exacerbated by the viewing of violence in a video game or television in the general population, boys who witness violence in their families are often more vulnerable to being influenced by too much virtual violence, making a bad situation worse. Often, it is the most vulnerable boys who are most attracted to violent gaming—that is, boys who have poor attachments to adults.

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11. True—In their developing autonomy, boys will experiment with shrugging off the guidance of loving parents. They want to feel strong and grown-up, and to appear unfazed as if trouble bounces off them. They may have internalized messages from the media and the wider culture that REAL MEN hide their feelings.

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12. False—As boys observe adults, and particularly men numb our own emotions of fear, sadness, and anger, they may conclude that vulnerable feelings should be dulled, deflected, or hidden.

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13. True—If father hunger is too intense, a boy may assume the aggressive or exaggerated masculine identity of some TV or video game heroes. He may feel he can never be good enough, adequate enough, manly enough. He may distrust other males, fearing their criticism and abandonment.

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14. False—A *Gallup* poll conducted in March 2010 of almost 2000 school principals reported overwhelmingly that recess has a strong positive impact on academic achievement, that students listened better and were more focussed after recess, and that student's social development and well-being also improved. These school principals likely recognize that when boys are freshly sprung from mainly sedentary classrooms, they can work off their nervous rambunctious energy without disrupting classroom activities. Recess primes the pump for academic learning, and promotes child development in a variety of ways. Recess is not a privilege to be taken away when boys get distracted or act out in class. Recess is a basic right.

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15. False—Skillful teachers know that boys who struggle with their attention respond favourably to a consistent, structured environment with clear rules, engaging and active classroom inquiry, and flexible classroom or individual adaptations. These teachers may, for example, break learning tasks down into smaller, more discrete steps; make sure that they have the child's attention when they give directions that are both spoken and written; they may find one-

-on-one tutors, note-takers, peer helpers for the student; they may give the disruptive student a responsibility; they often arrange subtle reminder cues or hand signals with these boys; they teach organizational skills.

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16. False—Despite most boys having excellent hearing more boys than girls will struggle with auditory processing. They may process part, but without processing the rest, often the whole meaning is lost, or a boy might perceive a totally incorrect idea of what has been said. More than girls, some boys may be able to repeat back word for word without understanding the intended meaning. If conversation has a high emotional content, understanding can be even more difficult.

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17. False—Visual-spatial learners prefer to organize information and communicate with others through images, pictures, colours, and maps rather than verbally. They also typically have a first-rate sense of direction and can easily use maps to find their way around. Visual-spatial learners dislike step-by-step repetition, which they find counter-productive. Once they get a picture of a concept, repeated practice bores them. In the classroom these boys tend to appear disorganized. They struggle with deadlines, and do poorly on timed tests. Many of the brightest minds—those of architects, engineers, designers, sculptors, painters, creative scientists, some mathematicians, as well as computer-graphic artists and game designers—often struggled in word-dominated classrooms, especially in their early years.

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18. True—We need to move away from what recent data from the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network* (2005) reveals as the primary focus in schools—the finding that most school instructional time is composed of seatwork and whole-class instruction led by the teacher. In order to engage boys and the wider community, we must move more and more toward education that emphasizes collaboration and relevant problem-solving. Boys who grow up in the new digital world, sometimes called digital natives, think and process information fundamentally differently than those of us who are digital immigrants, and these differences run deep.

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19. False—The 2009 international report on gender and achievement, *Equally Prepared for Life? How 15-year-old Boys and Girls Perform in School* (prepared by the OECD, *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*) revealed that in countries like Korea and Australia, where data indicated a significant difference in achievement for males in single-gender schools compared to those in co-ed schools, these differences disappeared after the schools socio-economic levels were taken into consideration. The American data overwhelmingly point to race and class as the strongest determinants of achievement.

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20. False—When boys are resistant or disengaged at school, teachers advance resiliency by considering how boys are often attempting to manage their anxiety and frustration in unskilled ways. Effective teachers recognize that beneath a boy's bravado or veneer of indifference, boys have many worries. They worry about performing well enough socially, academically, athletically, and in other arenas. They worry whether they are manly enough. Ultimately they worry about not fitting in.

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How did you grade?

If you got only one wrong, consider yourself a *Boys on Target* expert!

If you got two or three wrong, consider yourself a soon-to-be expert.

And if you got four or more wrong, consider this quiz an opportunity for discovery.

As you consider your grade and your knowledge about mentoring boys, keep in mind that perfect parenting and perfect teaching are myths. Learning and questioning our assumptions about boys' development and learning is less about getting it right and more about being open to new ideas. As you work on becoming more knowledgeable about boys' needs and more self-aware, you will find your own creative, intuitive ways to influence boys in positive ways.

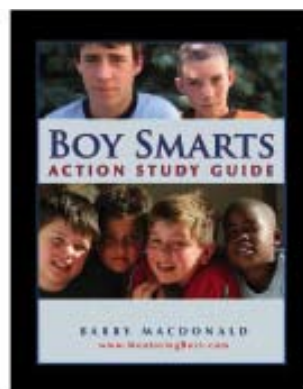
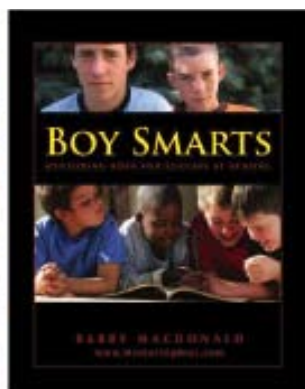
As we parents and teachers work together, we can raise expectations for boys as we once did for girls, this time taking care not to pit the needs of one group against the needs of another.

We know that while subtle differences in brain design may account for some different tendencies in boys and girls, we also know that there can be wide variations throughout the gender matrix, and that environ-

ment and culture are also strong influences. We also recognize that the individual temperament matters, and that different learning styles call for different approaches: perhaps more opportunity to engage in interpersonal relationship, more visual-spatial learning, or more active learning and movement. As we foster language-rich learning environments in our homes and schools, as well as opportunities for physical play, hands-on and real life learning, we can help boys tap into their strengths.

As we work with the boys and girls we are privileged to care for, our approaches must be nuanced, respectful of individual differences. We can honour each child's powerful desire to learn, doing our best to keep this powerful desire alive. • • •

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