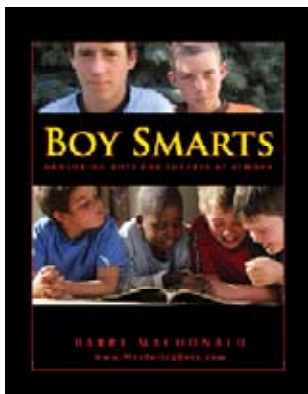




## The Power of the Student Teacher Bond



Dear Barry,

My son Aiden dislikes school and he is only 3 months into kindergarten! Daily he complains that his teacher is mean, that she doesn't like him, and that he HATES school.

His teacher says that Aiden gets too worked up and aggressive with other kids. She says she has to give him a lot of timeouts to get him to behave. She expects her kindergarten and grade one classroom of students to be able to sit still for at least 30 minutes as they learn, that they are to be quiet and focused, but that my son is not able to do this.

When she asked me to complete a *Conner's Rating Scale* last week, I checked it out with his preschool teacher who was alarmed and explained that it is often the way schools screen kids for hyperactivity and other difficulties. She found that Aiden was more active than most boys but that she was able to redirect his energy and help him to calm himself whenever he would get worked up.

When I told her that Aiden started sucking his thumb since starting kindergarten in September she suggested that I tell his teacher and contact you. She was successful with Aiden for two years and says that it is critical Aiden believes that his teacher cares about him and likes him. I am worried that if my son continues with so many timeouts that he will get turned off schooling. What do you think?

Rebecca, Surrey



*Dear Rebecca,*

Boys like your son Aiden provide teachers with many cues that something else is needed. While some boys are able to sit for lengthy periods of time, energetic learners need to move to activate their learning. I have written extensively about this in *Boys on Target* and encourage you to read the chapter entitled *When Sitting Still is Not Enough*.

In this chapter I remind parents and teachers that learning involves the body as well as the mind, and that kinesthetic learners in particular learn best when they can use movement. Creative teachers can capitalize on some students' high energy levels by seeing energy as a resource, and helping to channel it in appropriate, and sometimes helpful ways.

As different classroom interventions are needed for different children, I also explain that timeouts are rarely effective but tend to build resentment between student and teacher. To seek authentic solutions I offer a checklist of 28 questions for parents and teachers to collaboratively determine what will work best for a particular child, for example: "What are non-distracting ways that students can be active while working at their desks?" or "Are kinesthetic learners ever held in at recess or lunchtime when they need the activity most?"

I emphasize that those children who struggle with attention, focus, or ADHD challenges often become creative and resourceful learners out of necessity. With maturity, these children develop wonderful traits such as creativity, divergent thinking, inquisitiveness, spontaneity, intuitiveness, resourcefulness, humour, and resilience. As they develop self-confidence in their approach to living, they experience success as adults by choosing careers that build on their unique strengths and abilities. In this way their drive for excitement and stimulation can lead them to success in business, innovation, entertainment, sports and public speaking.

In my experience most teachers know that authentic discipline is not merely a short-term timeout event, or that compliance is the primary goal, but that discipline involves a mentoring process for students to become increasingly self-aware and sensitive to others around them. Teachers also appreciate that while it's harder to reach some students than others, it's possible to engage almost any student when they tap into their innate interests and strengths to help them learn.

Indeed, adult perspectives make all the difference in how well these students learn, and how they feel about themselves.

Moreover, recent research indicates that the quality of a relationship between a teacher and a student may have a profound effect on a learner's behaviour. Evidence suggests that having a good relationship with a teacher can help reduce aggressive behaviour among first-graders and may even protect them from other students' aggression.



Researchers from the *University of Quebec at Montreal* collaborated with colleagues from the *University of Alabama*, and *University College Dublin* and published their findings in the September/October 2011 journal *Child Development*. The study found that children who were genetically vulnerable to being aggressive were more likely to be victimized by their classmates than others. However, these children were protected from acting aggressively and being the target of other children's aggression if they had a relationship with their teacher that was warm and affectionate and involved open communication.



“Children’s relationships with teachers and with peers in school play a critical role in shaping their social-behavioral development,” notes Mara Brendgen, the lead Montreal researcher. “Our study found that a good relationship with the teacher can protect genetically vulnerable children from being aggressive and, in consequence, from becoming the target of other children’s aggressive behavior.”

It is essential that you meet with your son’s teacher to help her better understand his personality, his likes, and his needs. Let her know that you are worried that the stress of all-day kindergarten along with the expectation to sit for lengthy periods of time is stressful for your son. Explain that Aiden is not developmentally ready for this expectation. Bring along with you photos and stories to

help her appreciate another side of Aiden that she has yet to discover. In a tactful way, you might even share with her examples of how the warmth of the pre-school teacher was able to help Aiden regulate his emotions and settle himself when he would become overly frustrated and prone to hyperactivity or aggression.

In *Boy on Target* I say: “Accepting boys for who they are and not who we want them to be does not mean we allow a free-for-all. However, we recognize that the unflinching enforcement of rules does not create inner responsibility or self-discipline. When boys act out, transformative teachers know well that boys learn respect for self and others when they experience respect first-hand. Turn-around teachers commonly attribute the best possible motive to behaviour, knowing that rebellious and antisocial behaviours are probably flawed strategies of adaptation that worked for some reason at some point, but have become maladaptive.”

Aiden is young and needs to believe that his teacher cares about him, that she appreciates he is an amazing learning sponge with unique ways of seeing the world. As you collaborate with his teacher trust that together you can build support, empathy, and a creative vision to help Aiden find his way. •••



Barry MacDonald  
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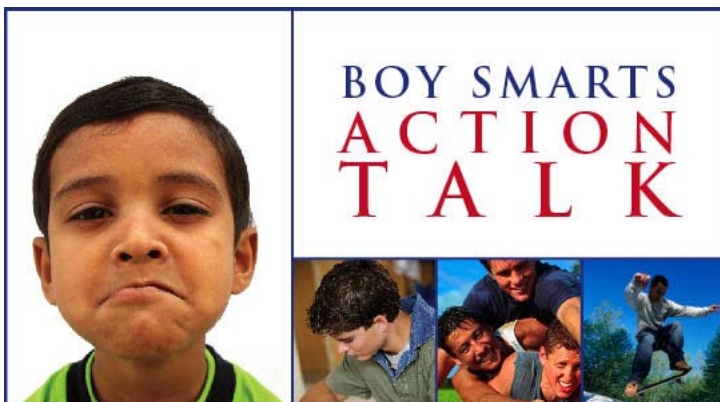
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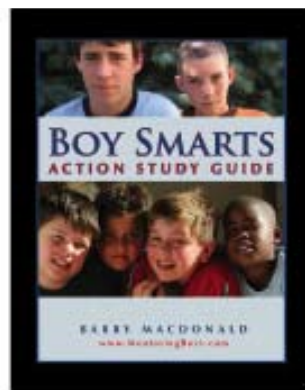
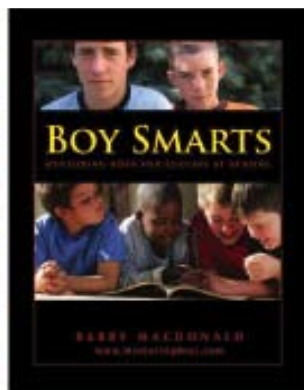
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