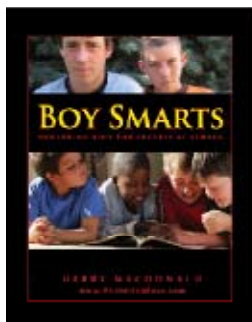


MENTORING WORKS!

FOSTERING HEALTHY MASCULINITIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



As we strive to become better parents or teachers, we can sometimes get sidetracked by becoming overly focussed on skills and techniques. We could even start thinking that disciplining a child and managing a classroom are more important than seeing the light in a child's eyes. While I would be the last one to discourage the development of practical skills, we can't afford to forget that the real crucible of change and growth is not technique, but the quality and warmth of our relationships.

Parenting and teaching entail more than sharing what we know. We also share who we are.

Think back to your childhood or adolescence. Was there someone along the way who provided guidance when you were uncertain of what path to take? Who offered understanding and compassion, along with wise advice and strategy? Who helped you to accept and even build on your shortcomings, appreciate your strengths, and embrace a more positive vision of yourself?



Wise and caring adults can help children find resilience in the face of frustration and loss. Frequently I hear from adults in counselling how a loving parent, a compassionate grandparent, or a kind adult friend made all the difference, gently supporting them and nudging them toward success.

At times we have the privilege of being mentors to our children, our students, and other young people in our communities. Mentoring relationships may be structured or informal. Perhaps you have mentored a neighbour kid who was cleaning your garage, but needed some guidance on how to care for tools. Maybe you encouraged your son's friend who was feeling defeated in the wake of family conflict, or showed him how to organize an essay for school.

Mentors can be male or female, young or old—and they may even seem like ideal figures to the young people who need them. Of course, as we mature, we inevitably learn that all humans, including parents and teachers, are imperfect, but there are also times when we need wiser, more experienced people to look up to, even idealize. Young people may learn skills from mentors, but more importantly, they may internalize the mentor's values in a deeply personal way, absorbing the strength and encouragement that they need to take the next step.

In a perfect world we might imagine a mentor would be around for the long haul—consistent, stable,

good-humoured, and unflaggingly wise. In the real world mentorships may be serendipitous and transitory, with mentors showing up briefly at the right time for whatever reason.

In a youth-oriented culture where even middle-aged adults may be striving to look like teenagers, in a culture where many young people spend more time interacting with technology than with people, it can be hard for children to find elders they can look up to and learn from. They may not even realize what they are missing out on. Of course, some children find comfort by allying with peers who are struggling with similar issues—the pain of not fitting in, of losing certainties they had counted on, of failing. With peers, young people may find relief knowing they are not alone. But peers do not have the skills or perspective that more experienced and caring adults can provide at critical times.

I am inspired to focus on the value of looking for mentoring opportunities of any kind this month, as it is the 100th anniversary of *Big Brothers Big Sisters*—an exceptional mentoring agency in our culture that has helped thousands of children find hope, inner strength, and resilience.



TWO BOOK SPECIAL

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A recent five-year study by the *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health* assessing the effectiveness of mentoring by a Big Brother or Big Sister is worth celebrating. Research confirms what we know anecdotally and intuitively—mentoring helps kids stay on track, envision a positive future for themselves, and take steps toward realizing their goals. Consider these findings:

- *Boys with Big Brothers are three times more likely than unmentored boys to be free of anxiety related to peer pressure.*
- *Mentored boys are twice as likely as unmentored boys to believe that doing well in school is important.*
- *Mentored boys are twice as likely as unmentored boys to refrain from such negative behaviours as lying, cheating, bullying, and angry acting out.*

While I didn't have a Big Brother growing up, I did benefit from unexpected mentoring from men and women from time to time. With fondness I can still recall the positive impact that a scouting leader had on me years ago. He must have recognized that I was lacking in preparation for our group's winter survival camping trip as he took time to help me borrow equipment and showed me how to use it. I didn't talk with him about my shyness over being the only boy without fatherly input. He just seemed to understand.

The memory of this early adventure has been indelibly imprinted: travelling to the outskirts of Edmonton on an exceptionally icy January morning to learn about making a shelter from tree branches; boring a hole to ice fish; starting a fire without a match; cooking freshly caught fish in an open fire; and later using the big rocks surrounding the fire to keep warm throughout the night. As I learned respect for the environment and developed more resourcefulness, I also caught a glimpse of how a

kind, considerate man conducted himself. The scout leader provided a model of manhood that I wanted to emulate.

It is now some 45 years later since that chilly camping trip, and I have come to more fully appreciate the everyday mentoring that men and women provide to boys and girls everywhere.

As a practical take away this month, I offer you the following poem written by Boysen Hodgson and posted on *The Mankind Project* website, fostering a new version of healthy masculinities for the twenty-first century. I also invite you to consider your own role—big or small—in guiding boys into healthy manhood.

Until December 31 register one person and bring a guest for free!

Register today!

BOY SMARTS ACTION TALK



Vancouver

February 1, 2014

Edmonton

March 8, 2014

Calgary

March 15, 2014

Ottawa

May 3, 2014

A powerful workshop for Parents & Teachers

Healthy Masculinities for the Twenty-first Century...



He cleans up after himself.
 He cleans up the planet.
 He is a role model for young men.
 He is rigorously honest and fiercely optimistic.
 He holds himself accountable.
 He knows what he feels.
 He knows how to cry and he lets it go.
 He knows how to rage without hurting others.
 He knows how to fear and how to keep moving.
 He seeks self-mastery.
 He's let go of childish shame.
 He feels guilty when he's done something wrong.
 He is kind to men, kind to women, kind to children.
 He teaches others how to be kind.
 He says he's sorry.
 He stopped blaming women or his parents or men for his pain years ago.
 He stopped letting his defenses ruin his relationships.
 He stopped letting his libido run his life.

He has enough self respect to tell the truth.
 He creates intimacy and trust with his actions.
 He has men who he turns to for support.
 He knows how to roll with it.
 He knows how to make it happen.
 He is disciplined when he needs to be.
 He is flexible when he needs to be.
 He listens from the core of his being.
 He's not afraid to get dirty.
 He's ready to confront his limitations.
 He has high expectations for himself and those he connects with.
 He looks for ways to serve others.
 He knows he is an individual.
 He knows we are all one.
 He knows he is an animal and a part of nature.
 He knows his spirit and his connection to something greater.
 He knows future generations are watching his actions.
 He builds communities where people are respected and valued.
 He takes responsibility for himself.
 In times of need, he will be his brother's keeper.
 He knows his higher purpose.
 He loves with fierceness.
 He laughs with abandon, because he gets the joke.

- written by Boysen Hodgson



Thanks also to all who take the time, in whatever capacity, to help boys and girls to find more confidence, security and joy in this world.

And for those who are seeking additional practical ways to help boys grow into men of courage and compassion, check out the last chapter in my book *Boys on Target: Raising Boys into Men of Courage and Compassion*. If you haven't been to a *Boy Smarts Action Talk* workshop in a while, remember that these workshops are always being refreshed, and are offered in various places throughout the school year. •••

Barry MacDonald

MentoringBoys.com

Hats off to **Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada** for helping thousands of children find hope, inner strength, and resilience. A special thank you to the men and women who voluntarily extend their time, their skills, and their hearts as Big Brothers and Big Sisters to children in need of adult guidance.



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Do you have a story about mentoring a boy to overcome an obstacle or a hardship?

Perhaps you are a father, a mother, a relative, a teacher, a pastor, a coach, or a friend who has experienced success in a small or big way at reaching out to a boy and helping him become more courageous or more compassionate.

In whatever capacity you provide mentoring, consider taking a moment to write me about your experience.

Next month, I look forward to featuring a few of these stories with the hope that our collective storytelling will inspire us all to envision a kinder and more resilient manhood.

As an incentive, I will ship a complementary copy of either *Boy Smarts* or *Boys on Target* (your choice) to the first 10 people who send me a 300 to 500 word story before December 20th.

Please send your story as email text (not as an attachment) to **info@mentoringboys.com**.

Also note that this offer only includes shipping to a Canadian address.