

# Boys on Target receives thumbs up review from Dads for Life



A person would easily be prompted to pick up *Boys on Target*. One is inevitably enticed by the endearing boy on the cover, dressed in red shorts and white singlet with a solid red star, grinning gleefully from behind a red Zoro-like eye mask. This superhero might well be the author's adorable mascot with an important task: helping parents, teachers and mentors understand, nurture, and raise boys into men of courage and compassion.

An educator and registered clinical counsellor, Barry MacDonald is an authority on boys and learning. A prolific writer and speaker, he shares insights on how to reach out to and comprehend the psyche of boys. The topics – ranging from gender identity, culture and expectations of schools, families and societies, gifts, skills and limitations of boys, sibling rivalry, school bullying, and success in school – make this book a useful guide for raising healthy and well-adjusted boys in today's society.

What distinguishes *Boys on Target* from other parenting books is MacDonald's focus on boyhood lessons, thanks to his extensive interactions with boys and their families. As such, information presented in the book is based on true accounts. In each chapter, MacDonald answers a common but significant question posted by parents or teachers.

MacDonald starts his first chapter by stressing that there is no "one-size-approach" that will fit all boys. He highlights two extremes – Rambo and Spiderman senses – of the gender matrix and characteristic make-up of boys.

Generally, boys who exhibit Rambo senses: + are very active and seek perpetual motion + knock out and fall asleep easily at night + have high pain thresholds + are less observant to or sensitive about people and things in their surroundings + prefer team sports, are less affected by noise, and are more competitive + prefer firm correction by adults + are not perfectionists.

On the contrary, boys who exhibit Spiderman senses: + often are able to sit still for longer periods + have difficulty falling asleep after stimulated play + are more sensitized to pain, surrounding environment and read body language cues better + prefer individual sports, quiet time and seek co-operative and personal relationships + react better to gentle correction + are perfectionists.

MacDonald states that education systems with a "one-size-fits-all" approach tend to set the boys up to fail. Such systems do not possess what is necessary to properly draw out a boy's inner world. He says (p 200): "Over the years I have met many boys who are labelled as bad, to only find out that these boys are sad."

He explains: "Mostly I have discovered that boys are discouraged and distressed as they struggle to express their unmet needs. Our job is look beyond their paltry achievement as well as their stormy behaviour and discover what is really going on. What is he trying to say?"

As such, MacDonald says that families and schools must learn to appreciate the uniqueness of each child and the spread of diversity in children. Caregivers and teachers must provide boys with a range of activities that meet their varied needs, and appeal to their gender matrix characteristics – from quiet reflection to rambunctious play.

Parents and adults would do much better by tapping on, rather than being reactive to or critical of boys' interests. For example, in the chapter *Hooked on Video Games!* MacDonald highlights the advantages for parents – creatures who are themselves often gripped by their own fear of the unknown or unfamiliar – to be open to learn from their boys about

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how to play video games. This would prove more effective in helping their lads from becoming harmed by gaming.

The book also discusses various approaches to help cultivate boys' inherent capabilities. As MacDonald puts it (p 215), "Knowing we are capable is the true source of self-esteem."

MacDonald asserts that adults who are able to help boys reach their highest potential, often have certain qualities. They: + listen hard + pay attention to the needs, sensitivities and sensibilities of boys + seek to explore what lies beneath learning struggles + are able to perceive and recast problems as learning opportunities + provide flexible learning environments + take time to talk and explain things to boys.

MacDonald explores other relevant themes: getting boys to read, as well as reaping benefits of being exposed to nature and outdoor discovery. He further examines the links between the success of boys in schools and at home, including traits of self-motivation, independence, resilience and learning the value of providing service to others.

If fathers are willing and able to stand close to and shoulder-to-shoulder with their boys, they may well hear them shout with one fist punching in the air – this quote traced to ancient Greek mathematician and scientist Archimedes: "Give me a place to stand, and I will move the Earth." And soon perhaps, the boys will rise ahead, above. Start moving your Earth by picking up your copy of *Boys on Target!*

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This article was first published for the **Dads for Life** movement. The movement was launched in 2009 to inspire and influence fathers to be good influencers in their children's lives... for life.

For more information on the **Dads for Life** movement, please visit: [www.dadsforlife.sg](http://www.dadsforlife.sg)

