

Raising Boys- Seek to discover their strengths and talents

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The 11-year-old son of a coal miner longs to become a ballet dancer. His dad wants him to be a boxer.

This is the premise of the heartwarming, Oscar-nominated movie called *Billy Elliot*, a story that in many ways encapsulates author Barry MacDonald's philosophy - that sometimes cultural expectations get in the way of boys finding their true selves.

MacDonald, who is offering his tips on parenting boys at a seminar in New Westminster this month, believes that every boy (and every person) has unique talents and gifts within them.

It's just that sometimes they require nurturing, encouragement and probing in order to surface.

What drew MacDonald to focus on championing boys was that, in his 25 years as a counsellor and educator in the Metro Vancouver school system, MacDonald noticed that the majority of school suspensions and expulsions involved boys.

Boys often struggle academically and socially in school, and that struggle can sometimes

extend into society, where men commit 99 per cent of violent crime.

In schools, MacDonald saw parents and teachers focusing on the problem instead of finding the solution by uncovering a boy's innate strengths and possibility.

"They didn't appreciate that beneath this boy swearing and yelling and pushing and shoving is somebody that has a talent, and we often don't take the time to find out what those talents are," said MacDonald.

He urges parents to find and focus on what their son's interested in and what they are good at - and to understand that might not be what is expected.

**"Don't fight with them
but don't give in,"
MacDonald says.**

That was the case in *Billy Elliot*, where the boy ballet dancer finds fulfillment and success - the very thing most parents want for their children.

MacDonald encourages boys, especially adolescent boys, to think about how to use their talents and their passions in life, and ultimately, to think about what they can contribute to others.

"Even boys that have been in lots and lots of trouble, I've learned, really care about the future and care about others. We just need to take the time to find out."

Disciplining a boy is a balancing act because parents need to do it without diminishing his spirit.

"A line I often use is 'don't fight with them but don't give in,'" MacDonald says.

MacDonald will address a number of his parenting ideas in his upcoming seminar called *Boy Smarts: Effective Strategies for Parenting Boys*.

He will also discuss the unique needs of boys, why boys struggle to express emotions, how to talk to boys so they'll listen and how to help boys become courageous, caring and ethical men.

To hear more of MacDonald's ideas, visit his website at www.mentoringboys.com or pick up his book, *Boy Smarts - Mentoring Boys for Success at School*.

The F.W. Howay Community School parent advisory council is organizing MacDonald's visit to New Westminster on Feb. 26.

The event costs \$15. For a registration form, visit the school district's website at www.sd40.bc.ca.

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