

Raising Caring Boys

At sold out North Van DPAC parent education event author talks about how to ensure boys reach their various potentials

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It's a fact that boys and girls are different.

They dress differently, they act differently, and perhaps most importantly for their development, some people say they learn differently.

Surrey-based Barry MacDonald, a registered clinical counsellor, educator, and author, has developed key insights to providing guidance for to boys to achieve success in school.

MacDonald will impart some of his knowledge to audiences of parents and teachers at a sold-out presentation at Carson Graham secondary on May 3 and at the Kay Meek Centre on May 16, for which tickets are still available.

MacDonald has studied literature with topics ranging from the biological workings of the brain to cultural issues, in order to grasp the particulars of how boys feel, think, and learn.

MacDonald emphasizes that although many boys are hard-wired for movement and have difficulty self-soothing and relating to others, it is only a tendency.

"I offer brain-based research for parents to understand some of the tendencies in males. It's important not to get into a binary trap though," said MacDonald, meaning that he doesn't think that girls cannot also sometimes have similar tendencies.

As many a parent will be able to relate to, some girls can be closer to what MacDonald calls the "gender bridge," interested in activities like building and climbing.

In MacDonald's book, **Boy Smarts – Mentoring Boys for Success at School**, he cites examples of how the education system is not meeting the requirements of boys: they score lower in standardized language arts tests, more girls than boys make it onto the honour roll and fewer boys go to university.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that boys are struggling. We can't fix it until the concern is defined and acknowledged," said MacDonald.

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MacDonald said he believes that the problem is on several levels: biological, genetic, and most importantly cultural.

"There are a lot of powerful forces in culture today that put a gender straitjacket on boys," he said.

That straitjacket is related in a lot of ways to unhealthy ideas surrounding masculinity, like boys shouldn't ask for guidance, they shouldn't trust anyone, they need to win at all costs, and they need to be emotionally detached.

Instead, boys need to learn a healthy masculinity that's rational, patient, caring, courageous, and co-operative, and includes emotional awareness and expressiveness.

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MacDonald said he also believes in the need to channel testosterone.

"Boys are wired for launching projectiles and knocking down blocks. They tend to manage the social world by striving for dominance, where as girls tend to build alliances," said MacDonald.

MacDonald aims to provide parents and teachers with background information so that they will know how to best communicate with boys, who often hide behind a veneer of bravado.

"We just need some basic empathy," he said. "Mostly responses to boys need to be short and concise and then just wait."

MacDonald said that typically males communicate over time and it's best done

while involved in another activity. For example, even for adult men on the golf course, the story doesn't gush out in one spurt, but comes out slowly over time.

"We need to see our boys' strengths and not see them as problems," he said. "Instead of focussing on identifying potential bullies, we need to meet the learning needs of boys."

MacDonald is an experienced lecturer, and has given several talks on the North Shore in the past, in addition to international presentations in the United States, New Zealand, and Europe.

"I hope to bring humour, practicality and common sense," said MacDonald. "I want parents to leave thinking about individual needs of their son... rather than react to different ideas out there like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder."

MacDonald's seminar, Parenting Boys, at Carson Graham secondary on May 3, sold out 850 tickets in a week. This event was sponsored and organized by the North Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC).

There is no cost for tickets for MacDonald's May 16 presentation, Raising Successful, Caring Boys, at West Vancouver's Kay Meek Centre, but tickets are going fast. Online registration is required at www.sd45.bc.ca/news/raisingboys.html.

For more information visit MacDonald's website – www.MentoringBoys.com.