

# Boys need help!

Oceanside Star, Brad Bird, October 23, 2008

Barry MacDonald wants your boy to succeed, but says he may be facing an uphill battle.

Not only is he wired differently than most girls, which affects how he learns and deals with stress, he's also immersed in a culture of violent video games, provocative sexual ads, and shifting rules.

Forget Beaver Cleaver of 1950s' TV fame; today's male is watching foul-mouthed men in Trailer Park Boys or Kenny vs. Spenny.

John Wayne? Nope, says MacDonald. Thin half-naked males in ads for briefs now define manliness.

Playboy books? You kidding? A lot of the women in everyday media show a lot of skin, or are placed in compromising poses.

He recently talked to some Grade 7s who had been Googling bestiality and comparing notes.

"Everything has heated up and changed," said teacher and author MacDonald, addressing more than 100 people in Parksville's Chrysler Theatre Wednesday during a presentation hosted by the Parent Advisory Council of School District 69.

The author of **Boy Smarts: Mentoring Boys for Success at School** has made hundreds appearances across Canada, the U.S. and as far afield as India and Belize. He lives in B.C.

It's a challenge for parents and teachers who are advised to go back to basics when dealing with boys to consider their genetic makeup, behavioural tendencies and need for supervision.

Alarmingly, he said, fewer than 50 per cent of parents supervise what their nine- and 10-year-olds see on the Internet. The percentage drops as children get older.

And he's not anti-Internet or video games, far from it. "These games involve kids in complex problem-solving," he said, and can help young minds -- but discretion is

required, which is where parents and teachers come in.

"All emerging technologies are helpful to brain development," he maintained, "but you need to use them with caution and with support."

Get beyond the stereotype that boys learn in some ways and girls in others, he said. He talked about a behavioural continuum, a long line which at one end had mostly boys he called Rambos, who don't talk much, have a lot of testosterone and prefer to build and destroy at play. At the other end are the Spiderman types, who talk a lot more and are more sensitive.

Where your son or daughter is on this Rambo-Spiderman line isn't completely their choice, he said -- and we as adults need to accept that sensitive boy or girl, or the super-active child, as biologically programmed to be so [though others say food choices can also influence calmness or aggressiveness].

In the classroom, sitting at desks has been replaced by standing in some parts of Australia, he noted. And, because kids are into electronic communication, classrooms so-designed are more likely to engage pupils than ones that are not.

Even some schoolyard rules tend to fail boys, an example being the banning of snowball throwing in B.C. In Alberta MacDonald visited a school where they teach kids how to do it safely and also structure snowball fights, he said, examples of working with children, boys especially, who are more active.

"Our challenge is not to squelch a child's spirit but to work with it, structure it, and guide it," he told an appreciative crowd.

His newsletter is available at [www.MentoringBoys.com](http://www.MentoringBoys.com).