

Raising BOYS

Developing common interests helps mothers and sons reconnect.

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Karolyn Donnelly and Ryan, 9, have found a common interest in video games – Karolyn more latently.

Brian Giebelhaus photos

Karolyn Donnelly grabs a controller and takes a seat on the couch close to her nine-year-old son, Ryan.

She lets him choose the video game they are about to play – after all, he was playing there first.

Mother and son spend the next 10 minutes or so pitting their wits against each other.

It may only have been 10 minutes out of her busy day, but for Karolyn, that precious time with her son was so much more than a video game.

She was connecting with Ryan on a level that a year ago would not have been possible.

Karolyn was one of more than 220 moms who attended the renowned Barry MacDonald Boys Smarts presentation at Peace Arch Elementary.

“Even though I’ve seen Barry MacDonald present before this was another incredible presentation,” Karolyn said.

“One of the things I took away this time was to play a video game with your son if he asks you.”

So the very next day after MacDonald’s event, she surprised Ryan by saying, “Hey, yeah, let’s have a game.”

Author and professional speaker MacDonald has been touring for years with his unique and inspirational brand of wisdom and theories on how to raise boys.

For example, he strongly believes boys think better when on the move and should be free to fidget in a classroom environment.

“I went to see Barry three years ago because I was connecting with my older daughter, Erin, so much better than Ryan,” Karolyn said.

“At times I felt inadequate in terms of communicating with him. I just wanted to connect with him on a level higher than basic interaction.”

Karolyn told how this time around she went home

from the presentation with more in-depth strategies on nurturing her son.

“Movement for boys when thinking is paramount and I’ve got to stop telling him to sit down,” she said.

“I will also think about my personality and how that might affect him.

“Boys are very visual and he won’t like to hear me talk all that much. I will definitely try to remember not to repeat myself to him as it’s falling on deaf ears.”

However, MacDonald’s message was loud and clear in Karolyn’s ears.

“We can very easily be involved in his life. All I need to do is think about what interests him so I can relate to him on a better level,” she said.

“Basically, Barry empowers you to get involved in your son’s life in ways you never thought possible.”

And something a little extra and, perhaps, unexpected transpired from MacDonald’s latest presentation.

“All of this will help me communicate better with my husband as well, not just Ryan, as it’s really a male thing.”

Debra Grant was another South Surrey mom who felt she was missing out on her son Andrew’s growing years.

“I think any parent who has the opportunity to learn something new about parenting should take it,” Debra said.

“The presentation showed there is more than one way to achieve a breakthrough with our sons.”

As well as 11-year-old Andrew, Debra has a seven-year-old daughter, Catherine.

“There is a big difference between them in terms of me being in touch with them emotionally and conversing with them,” she said.

“In society we teach our boys to be strong men, but as parents we should be helping them to grow emotionally.”

As a result of hearing MacDonald’s insights, Debra will be taking walks with Andrew and their family dog when the time calls for serious chat.

“Keep them on the move is the way to go and talk to him while moving,” she said.

“By my own admission, I talk way too much so I will be trying to keep it short and sweet.”

The Boys Smarts event earlier this month was one of several organized throughout the year by the Peace Arch Elementary Parent Advisory Council.



“The evening was a great success. An audience of over 200 made it, and received Barry’s presentation very well,” Lisa Landon, of the Peace Arch Elementary PAC, said.

“A lot of positive comments were overheard and this was all about bringing an opportunity for parents to take advantage of an important resource. We were really happy to provide them with this service.”

MacDonald himself is content in the knowledge he’s helping others to help themselves.

“There’s so much information out there not reaching parents to help raise their boys,” the South Surrey counsellor said.

“The organization of a boy’s environment, be it at school or home, affects how they learn and grow.

They can get very frustrated and that frustration is usually interpreted wrongly,” says MacDonald.

Using humour to “soften the edges” is a tool employed by MacDonald in his presentations.

“The humour makes it easier for parents to swallow difficult issues and relate to the insights,” he said.

“And it’s not just all about boys. A lot of the information relates to men as well, so everyone at home can benefit.”

MacDonald’s next South Surrey presentation is at Elgin Hall on Nov. 24 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Early-bird ticket information is on the website **MentoringBoys.com**



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