

Smart Boys need Smart Parents – MacDonald shows how

Langley Times – Natasha Jones
May 5, 2006

For the more than 200 people who attended Barry MacDonald's forum on mentoring boys, the discovery of why boys will be boys proved to be a kind of awakening, a road to discovery for parents of sons.

At a forum at the Chief Sepass Theatre in Fort Langley on May 2, MacDonald used humour and compassion to explain the differences between the genders, the idiosyncrasies of boys, their uniqueness, and offered practical examples of how parents can help their sons when the pathways of life become rocky or uncertain.

When troubled, a boy will often stand, fidgeting and shifting from side to side. Far from a pose that admits guilt, the movement simply shows he's processing information, MacDonald said. And any parent who wants to connect with a son would be well advised to do so when the boy is moving — talk on walks, in the car, anywhere the boy is not sitting still.

Movement is one of many factors that separate boys from girls, and it begins in the womb where males are more active and restless than girls. That difference could be explained by serotonin, the "calming" hormone: the female fetus produces more than the male.

Parents of boys and girls will notice that once they learn to stand, girls will be happy to stay standing. But boys? More often than not, they'll run instead of walking. Thus, said

MacDonald, "movement is what helps boys make sense of things."

He showed how movement allowed Billy Elliot to remove the gender barrier. MacDonald used the movie character to illustrate what is possible when that happens. Billy Elliot is the story of an 11-year-old boy who, while taking boxing lessons at a community centre, becomes captivated by ballet.

Billy Elliot
symbolizes
what is possible
for boys

He defies his widowed father, who is repulsed by the thought that his son wants to enter what is traditionally a girls' arena. Eventually, the father, and Billy's equally repulsed older brother, embrace Billy and his passion. "Billy Elliot symbolizes what is possible for boys," MacDonald said.

He recommended that parents have weekly chats with their sons — in a moving vehicle. Noting that connections in relationships come more easily to girls, he encouraged parents to "keep the love bond strong," especially if there has been a disagreement with their boys.

Kids need to argue and fight in order to learn how to resolve conflict...

And talking of disagreements, MacDonald urged parents to resist becoming involved in disputes between their children. “Kids need to argue and fight in order to learn how to resolve conflict,” he said. When parents step in, they only whelp to sustain the argument.

MacDonald urged parents to not only keep open the channels of communication, but to become involved in their children’s lives. Too many children today are being raised by appliances, he said, adding that surveys show half of today’s children have a TV in the bedroom.

“We live in a very busy culture,” MacDonald said, but failure to make communication part of it can lead to trouble, including depression.

“Drug use is often just self-medicating,” he said. “Parents need to be available.” At the same time, “we need to respect their need for independence, for space.”

MacDonald promised the audience that he would offer options for better parenting. They left with a number, including ideas for defining and adhering to boundaries. “Most of us are too loose with our kids and don’t give them enough structure,” he said. That includes monitoring Internet use, he added.

Despite the obvious and not easily apparent differences between the genders, MacDonald urged parents to “celebrate who boys are and understand that they are not the problem.”

...**Boy Smarts**, a book that every parent with a son would be well served to possess

- The event was a fundraiser for the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Langley.
- Last year, MacDonald was identified by The Vancouver Sun as one of ‘25 influential people to watch’ for his theories on mentoring boys. Those theories are explained in detail in MacDonald’s book, **Boy Smarts**, a book that every parent with a son would be well served to possess.

It is available online at
www.mentoringboys.com