

# I Understand My Son Better, Thanks to Workshop

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A couple of weeks ago, my sister called to ask if I would be interested in attending a workshop about mentoring boys.

Although I have a son who is seven, I wasn't entirely sold on the notion that I needed a four-hour workshop about how to help him succeed. After all, I thought, isn't he right on track?

Despite my own confidence about my son, I decided to do some research on the workshop.

Barry MacDonald, who is an educator and a registered clinical counsellor, runs the Mentoring Boys.com workshops in many regions across Canada, for both parents and educators. He has also authored two books, including **Boy Smarts** (published in 2005) and the more recent **Boys on Target**.

I was intrigued to hear his point of view, so I decided to attend his workshop.

When MacDonald took the stage, he initially pointed out one of the main issues that harm boys from a young age. It's that parents tend to see them all one particular way. It turns out, there is a gender matrix that shows a whole rainbow of different types of boys who range from the "Spider-man" type boy (extremely sensitive who feels and internalizes a great deal) all the way to the opposite end of the scale with the "Rambo" type boy (who is

very high-strung and is constantly taking chances, and keeps parents on their toes). There is also a mid-range to the scale, which is a combination of these two extremes.

How we as parents respond to each type of boy in the gender matrix will affect the way they see themselves. If we know how to respond to a certain type of boy in the matrix, we can influence a better outcome. Instead of using blame or shame as a way to interact with our son when things go off-track, a parent needs to respond to the type of son they

have with understanding. A parent cannot force their son to be a certain way.

There are also different learning styles for boys.

A teacher in the audience advised he was having difficulty with a hearing-impaired 13-year-old boy who has become despondent and less engaged in learning.

After a few back-and-forth questions between him and MacDonald, it turned out that the communication between the school and the parents was failing him. It wasn't the boy's fault, but rather the way he was being taught.

His parents didn't want to use sign language at home, and his school was using a method of teaching that didn't work for the type of learner he was. Neither truly had a good picture of what was going on. However, as a result, the boy was becoming more and more isolated.

It's a pattern that MacDonald was very quick to pick up on - and one that he sees too often.

Some boys are visual, while others are auditory learners. The ones who are visual thrive on using the visual/spatial side of their brain. They love concepts and have an intuitive understanding of steps involved without being told. They may struggle with converting pictures into words on paper, but they love to solve problems. And yes, they also love and excel at video games.

The auditory learners are the ones who learn mostly through being told how to do something. They wait to be shown how to solve a problem, and are able to express their thoughts more clearly, both verbally and on paper.

Neither learner is better than the other.

Parents and teachers just need to figure out where each boy is on the spectrum, appreciate their

weaknesses and discover the best method to teach them.

In short, we need to be advocates for our sons and work hand-in-hand with the school system.

I not only walked away from MacDonald's Boy Smarts workshop with a better understanding of my son, but also a deeper respect and appreciation for the boy he is, as well.

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