

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

It Takes A Man To Raise A Boy

By Dr. John P. Splinter

The first time my dad took me hunting I was 10 years old. We were in Manitoba, Canada. It was cold – I slept in a sleeping bag. And I had a *real* gun, a Cooey 20- gauge single shot. We were hunting geese. Dad and the other guys had Browning or Winchester 12-gauges. If you're a hunter, you get the picture – no, I did not bag my quota. All I acquired on that day was a love for the smell of gun powder, and a sore shoulder. But I was with dad and I had a gun. No big game hunter on the Serengeti ever felt more like a man than I did on that day.

Dads are powerful in their sons' eyes. Assuming you had a dad, when you were a little guy, do you remember him picking you up like you were as light as a bag of potato chips? Did you ever pee at the same time and happen to glance over at him ~ Dad's plumbing was a lot bigger, right? *He* was bigger. He was more powerful. He was smarter (well, until you got to be 13.) He certainly had a lot more money than you. And until you got to be 15 or 16 you knew he could whup you with one arm tied behind his back.

Boys Generally Don't Like To Talk With Their Mothers About Sex

Did you ever talk with your dad about girls? Perhaps your mother tried to join the conversation, but if so, you knew the uncomfortable feel of her wandering into territory that was out of bounds for women. It was OK for her to tell you to treat a woman like a lady. No problem there. But if she ever said words like "breasts" or "masturbation" or "orgasm," you knew it was time to change the conversation to baseball or fishing. On the other hand, if dad used those words you were all ears.

So what was the difference? The difference is that it takes a man to communicate sexually on the same level as a boy. Sure, there are lots of single moms, and they do the very best they can with their sons. But for the most part, a young man doesn't get off on his mother talking with him about intimate sexual things. If mom were to say, "When I was a young girl, I used to look at boys' butts and wonder what they looked like with no clothes on," her son would probably roll his eyes and say, "Jeeeeezzz, mom, too much information!"

But if dad said, "When I was your age I used to look at girls' boobs and wonder what they looked like with no bra," his son would likely say, "Really, you too?" There's a kinship in sexuality shared only by men. Only males know what it feels like to accidentally brush against a girl's chest and suddenly start having an erection. Or to sit in class and see a girl in a skirt cross her legs, see the color of her underwear and feel like you just conquered Mount Everest. Then the stupid bell rings and the boy with the erection has to stand up and walk out of class somehow

without being embarrassed. Those sort of situations make absolutely no sense to a woman ~ but they're the grist of manly sexual awareness. Men understand this. Boys learn it naturally. But it takes a man to help a boy *interpret* male sexuality.

Boys Need Men To Help Them Understand The Value And Purpose Of Women

I have a dog named Max. Part of his self-understanding is that he's supposed to hump all other dogs in the county ~ male or female ~ it's a dog-dominance activity. We've had to help Max learn that his joy-riding isn't much appreciated while in human company. We've had to help Max appreciate other dogs as friends, not just hump-partners. That's a bit like the task of a man with a boy. Men need to *teach* boys the value and purpose of women. As adolescence and testosterone kick in, boys tend to look at girls like Max looks at other dogs ~ potential hump-partners. It takes a man to help a boy gain mature perspective. Unfortunately, in this area of learning most dads totally drop the ball.

Dads help their sons understand the value of women when they say things like, "Son, I want you to treat your mother, and all women, with respect." Dads help their boys gain control over male sexuality by actually talking about the idea that the boy's sexuality may be the toughest battle the boy will ever face in his life, and that God created women to be our friends, not just hump-partners.

Dads help their boys with the subject of masturbation, by talking about masturbation. It's not a "secret word" any more – boys and girls are mutually masturbating each other – and more than half the time these days they're doing it with their mouths. Some call it, "Giving a Monica," thanks to one of our former presidents. But if dad doesn't initiate this conversation with his son, then dad is setting his boy up for adopting the philosophy of this age, which has always been transmitted through conversations in locker rooms, where every 14-year-old is an expert.

Boys need men to help them understand value and purpose of women. *If you don't teach your son* how to value a woman as a human being rather than just something to screw, or fantasize screwing, then you have handicapped your son just as certainly as if you'd ripped off one of his arms. Worse, you've seriously compromised his ability to maintain spiritual integrity as his sexuality develops. Here are a few sentences to weave into conversations with your sons ~ NOT all at the same moment or in a single conversation:

- "Son, the greatest battle of my life has been to control and manage my own sexuality as a man. I'd imagine it's going to be your greatest battle as well."
- "Son, you'll be most wise if you can amp-down the sexual thoughts when they come into your head, because if you don't, they have the power to eat your lunch."
- "Son, most of the guys in your class are probably jacking-off, maybe even a couple times a day. But I'll be most proud of you if this is a battle that you fight against instead of caving in to. The more success you gain in this area, the stronger it will build your character."

- “Son, more than half of your friends will lose their virginity in high school. By the time these kids are 24, research finds that seventy-five percent of them will desperately wish they had remained virgins. I hope and pray that you will save everything you have, for your wife.”
- “Son, sex is fantastic, but it’s *amazingly powerful*. Until you get a ring on your fourth finger, stay as far away from it as you are able. You’re not going to lose anything, but you will save yourself a TON of grief. You’re going to see a lot of your peers crash and burn on this one.”
- “Son, it took me until I was 38 years old to begin to understand the breadth of difference between men and women. It’s not just how we’re built – it’s how we’re wired. I encourage you to pay more attention to how you’re wired differently than girls, and less at how you’re built differently.”

Boys Need Men To Help Them Set Boundaries With Their Emerging Sexuality

A message that dads are best equipped to give their sons, is that every boy and every man struggles with sexuality ~ and any man who says he doesn’t is probably a liar. When dad says this to a son, suddenly the boy is in a fraternity of co-strugglers. He’s not alone in his passion every time something wearing a bra walks past. He knows one of the great secrets of manhood ~ that male sexuality is about as tame as bull riding, and that *a defining mark of mature manhood is the ability to control the bull*.

Our culture today encourages sexual promiscuity. One almost can’t find a primetime TV program that isn’t saturated with sex. When was the last time you looked at the magazine section in a grocery store ~ and not just the “men’s” magazines ~ today women’s and teen magazines are *loaded* with sex talk. Everyone knows the Internet is the prime location for millions of pages of porn. Cell phones and “sexting” are a hot ticket for teens passing along nude shots of themselves or their friends. You can’t walk in most large shopping malls without passing Victoria’s Secret. In fact, research finds that kids today receive something in the area of 14,000 sexualized messages every year.

Dad, *that’s* what you’re competing with ~ and don’t forget it. In this culture you do not have a choice as to whether your son will become sexually awakened before his time. *Your only choice is who is going to help him interpret and guide him through the experience*. His sex education will either happen in the locker room and over the Internet, or here and there as you and he share a few moments together on a daily basis. If you rely upon public school sex ed programs to “educate” your son about sex, then you’ve lost the battle completely because sex ed isn’t mainly about gender plumbing, condoms, ovulation cycles and sperm count. It’s about chastity and values ~ but you’ll *almost never* hear a public school sex educator say this.

There is nothing more powerful than a dad’s hand on his son’s shoulder, saying, “Son, I know this is a tough battle. All men struggle with it ~ myself included ~ and it doesn’t go away just

because a guy gets married. But I'm here to be your dad and your coach, if you'll let me." Boys need the strength and wisdom of someone with whiskers. Here are some bullet points that may be helpful with your son as you encourage him to build his own sexual boundaries:

- When talking with a girl, focus your eyes from the neck up. (It's what old Job did.)
- If you catch yourself mentally undressing a girl, turn your eyes somewhere else.
- Pornography is not your friend – it wants to destroy you.
- Movies that lead your head toward sexual thoughts are trying to harm you.
- The sexual battle is mostly spiritual in nature – ask God for help when you're tempted.
- When you find yourself drifting into sexual thoughts, pray and ask God to help you change your focus. (Christ taught us to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation....*")
- Fill your mind with thanking God for all forms of beauty, not just pretty girls.
- Trust that God loves you and has a plan for your sexuality.
- When you see a beautiful girl, thank God for her friendship, not just her beauty.
- Masturbation will train your mind to do the wrong thing ~ it will lead you downward
- Your body will regulate itself by having orgasms while you sleep
- Don't worry about "losing" your sexuality if you maintain purity – the only things you'll lose are the risks that come with sex outside of marriage ~ risks like STDs, pregnancy, and ruining your ability to maintain a monogamous relationship in marriage

When helping your son build personal sexual boundaries, be sure to help him understand the underlying spiritual principle that God loves your son and will provide a woman for him to enjoy sexually, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Until that time, God instructs all of His sons to trust and obey. Part of this obedience involves sexual integrity. And it's very much in your son's best interests to obey God. Life works best when we trust and obey God.

When teaching about boundaries, don't just teach the negative message of "stay away." This is a mistake made by many dads, and many churches, who give the message, "Sex is dirty and evil, so save it for marriage." (Duh....) Rather, teach from a positive perspective. Teach that the better your boy can become at sexual integrity while he's between 12 and 24, the stronger his character will be as a man, and the more solid and enduring his marriage will be. Remember the research we cited a few moments ago, in which the majority of kids (75% actually) who are sexually active while in junior high and high school, *later deeply regret that they were*.

You can help your sons by being certain there's no porn in the house. Here are a few ways:

- Don't subscribe to the "premium" channels on TV ~ they mainly bring porn to the home.
- Block any TV channels that come with your package, if they show any porn.
- If you subscribe to *Sports Illustrated*, write them and tell them not to send the swimsuit edition to your home.
- If you subscribe to *Playboy* or *Penthouse* or any other porn, cancel your subscription.
- Clean out any videos, DVDs, magazines or whatever ~ that contain porn.
- Put porn filters on all home computers (we recommend either *Covenant Eyes* or *Safe Eyes*. Both are available on the net.
- Keep computers, cell phones and TVs out of your kids' bedrooms.
- Keep computers in rooms like kitchens, where people walk through frequently ~ and have the screens facing into the room rather than facing a wall.

Shoot For Building Internal Character, Not Just External Boundaries

As a dad, you want to help your son build internal character. When a child is young, one may have to use external boundaries such as, “If you do X then you will get a spanking.” But internal character is far stronger, and it is generally infused *through relationships*. In this case we’re talking about the father/son relationship. Let’s expand on this thought.

Research has found that if you build and maintain a strong relationship with your son, then he’s likely to adopt your value system. *Values are primarily transmitted through relationships, not through heavy handed use of power.* Here’s a chart to help dads shape the value system of their sons.

Using External Power	Using Relational Development
Son, if you get a girl pregnant, I’ll take away the keys to your car for a year.	Son, what do you think would be the life of a girl who gets pregnant in her teen years?
Son, you either treat girls and women with respect or I’ll knock your block off.	Son, all men struggle with learning to treat women with dignity and respect. My hope for you is that you learn how to do this well. I work at it myself, and invite you too.
Son, if my dad ever found out I’d touched a girl’s body he’d have killed me. Same goes for me with you.	Son, you’re (entering, in) a time of life in which “manhood” means “going all the way” with a girl. I want to talk with you about manhood from a different perspective.
Son, your curfew time on a date is 11:30, and if you’re not home by then I’ll assume you’re out doing no good and you’ll be grounded.	Son, I trust you. I’m not going to set a curfew, but I want you home at a reasonable hour, and I want you to waken mom and me when you get home. We’ll ask you where you’ve been and what you did. And we hope for honesty.
Son, if I ever find pornography in your possession, I’ll kick you out of this house.	Son, pornography of any kind is destructive to everything your mom and I hope for in you as a man. You will make your dad and mom really proud if you never even look at it.
Son, I don’t even want to hear you talk about sex until you’re married. If you do, I’ll change the subject.	Son, I’m certainly no expert on the subject, but I am a man and am married. I’d love to share a few things God has taught me in my lifetime.
Son, here’s a book about sex. Have it read by next Friday or I’ll cancel those Cardinals’ baseball tickets.	Son, sex is really powerful stuff. God tells us to guard our hearts above all else. My hope for you is that you’ll do that, because I love you.

Research has actually found that parents are far more likely to talk with their kids about avoiding drugs, cigarettes and alcohol, than to talk with their kids about sex. Yet sex is by far the greater risk to kids’ lives and futures, whether through pregnancy and possibly abortion, STDs, or depression leading to suicide. The Heritage Foundation discovered that kids who are sexually active and then break up, are far more likely to attempt suicide: Girls are three times more likely;

boys are eight times more likely. So these discussions between fathers and sons are more than just a suggestion made in passing. They can be critical to a son's survival during adolescence.

Boys tend to follow men's examples, if they respect them. Research finds that the #1 influence in a boy's life is still his parents. Peers are a strong #2 contender, but parents still lead the pack.

Boys Need Men To Help Them Understand And Channel Their Emerging Power

As testosterone begins to flow through a young adolescent's veins, his voice begins to lower, his testicles drop, he gains facial and body hair, his upper body gains size and strength, and he begins to have an active sex drive. Much of this physical development prepares a young boy for the use of power. The two most common arenas in which adolescence express this emerging power, are in sports and sexuality. Both arenas call for wisdom from older men.

In sports, the one with wisdom is called a coach. In some ways coaching is easier than parenting because the young athlete doesn't have a pre-existing history with the coach, and the wisdom being shared has to do with measurable objectives such as speed in a quarter mile, accuracy of a tennis serve, ability to run a pass route or execute a block, stance when hitting a baseball, etc. The coach will likely train and stretch the boy beyond what the boy could previously do. Much of the coaching task is to call forth and train the emerging power of the young adolescent.

In the arena of sexuality, a boy has no better potential mentor than his dad. This person has a history with the boy, knows and loves the boy, and hopefully has gained adult wisdom that he may share with the boy. Much of that wisdom is in regard to channeling, limiting and managing the emerging power of the young adolescent. There's a section of the Bible that paints this picture beautifully. The text involves instructions from Moses to dads, in regard to them teaching their sons about the ways of God. As you read this, picture a dad with his arm around his son's shoulder, taking a walk and having a deep father-son chat. The text is **Deuteronomy 6:5-9:**

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”

~ This speaks of *internal* application rather than forcing external rules.

“Impress them on your children.”

~ That's a key role of dads.

“Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

~ Values are best transmitted through repeated conversations within the father/son relationship.

“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”

~ Symbols are effective ways to reflect spiritual realities. (In our culture we may use a crucifix worn around the neck, a ring, a leather bracelet, etc.)

“Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

~ Use symbols in the home, too.

The most powerful motivation to keep a young man on the “straight and narrow path,” is that the young man desires to please God and his parents. Research has found that no motivation is stronger. No set of rules is stronger. No external force is stronger, no matter how intimidating. *A son will strive most diligently for the star toward which he sees his father reaching, if the father’s arm is around his boy’s shoulder.*

By contrast, it’s not hard to see that if a young adolescent is in trouble at school, or with the law, or gets a girl pregnant ~ dad’s influence is likely missing somewhere in the boy’s past. Dad may have been too busy at work for too many years. Dad may have been too worn out when he got home every day. Dad may have not been in the home at all. Dad may have been an alcoholic, or a totally negative man who alienated his son. Dad may have been a church-hound that gave his best shots to doing church, thereby leaving his son somewhere in the distance. For *some* reason, this boy has stepped away from the helpful boundaries that adolescent boys need to guide them.

I’m a dad, and as I write this section I have no desire at all to bash dads. Yet it is apparent to those trained in human dynamics, that when boys are out of control, it’s at least partially because dad has not been effective in raising, stabilizing, mentoring and guiding their sons. Dad, your legacy will have far more to do with the life of your sons than it will with the number of dollars you earned.

Summary

It takes a man to raise a boy. It takes a man to guide a boy’s emerging power. It takes a man to help a boy gain wisdom, set limits, and build character. It takes a man to help a boy build toward the future rather than leaping into self-indulgent moments of transient pleasure. It takes a man to help a boy see that girls were created by God to be friends and peers, not toys or ego boosters. It takes a man to challenge a boy to define his emerging manhood in terms of wisdom, integrity and control, rather than in terms of hitting a baseball the farthest, shooting a puck most accurately, running faster than other boys ~ or, spewing his sperm as far and wide as he can. And all of this is done through the relationship between the man and the boy.

If you’re a dad, then God calls you to be a man who is involved with your boy, for the purpose of raising your son in the ways of Christ, so that your son may grow up to be *successful by God’s definition of success*. It takes a man to raise a boy.