



DADS &
SONS

*Timeless wisdom
and reflections on teaching,
guiding, and loving your son—
his whole life long*

DR. JAMES DOBSON

PRESENTED TO

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FROM

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DATE

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Dads and Sons

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*The Wonderful
World of Boys*

Greetings to all the men out there who are blessed to be called dads. There is no greater privilege in living than bringing a tiny new human being into the world and then trying to raise him or her properly during the next eighteen years. Doing that job right requires all the intelligence, wisdom, and determination you will be able to muster from day to day. And for fathers whose family includes one or more boys, the greatest challenge may be just keeping them alive through childhood and adolescence.

In case you haven't noticed, boys are different from girls. That fact was never in question for previous generations. They knew intuitively that each sex was a breed apart and that boys were typically the more unpredictable of the two. Haven't you heard your parents and grandparents say with a smile, "Girls are made out of sugar and spice and everything nice, but boys are made of snakes and snails and puppy-dog tails"? It was said tongue-in-cheek, but people of all ages thought it was based on fact. "Boys will be boys," they said knowingly. They were right.

Boys are usually (but not always) tougher to raise than their sisters are. Girls can be difficult to handle too, but there is something especially challenging about boys. Although

individual temperaments vary, boys are designed to be more assertive, audacious, and excitable than girls are. Psychologist John Rosemond calls them “little aggressive machines.”¹

One father referred to his son as “all afterburner and no rudder.”

Not unlike other boys, our son, Ryan, encountered one dangerous situation after another as a boy. By the time he was six, he was personally acquainted with many of the local emergency room attendants and doctors. And why not? He had been their patient repeatedly. One day when he was about four, he was running through the backyard with his eyes closed and fell into a decorative metal “plant.” One of the steel rods stuck him in the right eyebrow and exposed the bone underneath. He came staggering through the back door bathed in blood, a memory that still gives Shirley nightmares. Off they went to the trauma center—*again!*

What makes young males act like that? What inner force compels them to teeter on the edge of disaster? What is it about the masculine temperament that drives boys to tempt the laws of gravity and ignore the gentle voice of common sense—the one that says, “Don’t do it, Son”?

Boys are like this because of the way they are wired neurologically and because of the influence of hormones that stimulate certain aggressive behavior. You can't understand males of any age, including yourself, without knowing something about the forces that operate within.

We want to help you raise “good” boys in this postmodern age. The culture is at war with the family, especially its youngest



and most vulnerable members. Harmful and enticing messages are shouted at them from movies and television, from the rock-music industry, from the advocates of so-called safe-sex ideology, from homosexual activists, and from the readily available obscenity and pornography on the Internet. The question confronting parents is, “How can we steer our boys and girls past the many negative influences that confront them on every side?” It is an issue with eternal implications.

Our purpose in this regard will be to assist you as you “play defense” on behalf of your sons—that is, as you protect boys from immoral and dangerous enticements. But that is not enough. You also need to “play offense”—to capitalize on the impressionable years of childhood by instilling in your sons the antecedents of character. Your assignment during two brief decades will be to transform your boys from immature and flighty youngsters into honest, caring men who will be respectful of women, loyal and faithful in marriage, keepers of commitments, strong and decisive leaders, good workers, and secure in their masculinity. And of course, the ultimate goal for people of faith is to give each child an understanding of Scripture and a lifelong passion for Jesus Christ. This is, I believe, the most important responsibility for those of us who have been entrusted with the care and nurturance of children.

So buckle your seat belt.
We have a lot of interesting
ground to cover.





This Is What Boys Do

In an article entitled, "What Are Boys Made Of?" reporter Paula Gray Hunker quoted a mother named Meg MacKenzie who said raising her two sons is like living with a tornado. "From the moment that they come home from school, they'll be running around the house, climbing trees outside and making a commotion inside that sounds as if a herd of elephants has moved in upstairs. I'll try to calm them down, but my husband will say, 'This is what boys do. Get used to it.'"²

I was one of those boys who lived on the edge of disaster. When I was about ten, I was very impressed by the way Tarzan could swing through the trees from vine to vine. No one ever told me, “Don’t try this at home.” I climbed high into a pear tree one day and tied a rope to a small limb. Then I positioned myself for a journey to the next tree. Unfortunately, I made a small but highly significant miscalculation. The rope was longer than the distance from the limb to the ground. I kept thinking all the way down that something didn’t seem right. I was still gripping the rope when I landed flat on my back twelve feet below and knocked all the air out of the state of Oklahoma. I couldn’t breathe for what seemed like an hour (it must have been about ten seconds) and was sure I was dying. Two teeth were broken and a loud gonging sound echoed in my head. But later that afternoon, I was up and running again. No big deal. The next year I blew the most beautiful blue stuff all over the ceiling of my room with my chemistry set.

Does my behavior sound familiar? If you host a birthday party for five-year-olds, the boys will probably throw cake, put their hands in the punch bowl, or mess up the games for the girls. Why are they like this? Some would say their mischievous nature has been learned from the culture. Really? Then why

are boys more aggressive in every society around the globe? And why did the Greek philosopher Plato write more than 2,300 years ago,

*“Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable”?*³

One of the scariest aspects of raising boys is their tendency to risk life and limb for no good reason. It begins very early. If a toddler can climb on it, he will jump off it. He careens out of control toward tables, tubs, pools, steps, trees, and streets. He makes “guns” out of cucumbers or toothbrushes and likes digging around in drawers, pill bottles, and Mom’s purse. And just hope he doesn’t get his grubby little hands on a tube of lipstick.

A boy harasses grumpy dogs and picks up kitties by their ears. He loves to throw rocks, play with fire, and shatter glass. He also gets great pleasure out of irritating his brothers and sisters, his mother, his teachers, and other children. As he gets older, he is drawn to everything dangerous—skateboards, rock climbing, hang gliding, motorcycles, and mountain bikes. At about sixteen, he and his buddies begin driving around town like kamikaze pilots on sake. It’s a wonder any of them survive. Not every boy is like this, of course, but the majority of them are.

A study by Canadian psychologist Barbara Morrongiello showed that females tend to think hard about whether or not they could get hurt, and they are less likely to plunge ahead if there is any potential for injury. Boys, however, will take a chance if they think the danger is worth the risk. Impressing their friends (and eventually girls) is usually considered worth the risk. A related study by Licette Peterson confirmed that girls are more fearful than boys are. For example, they brake sooner when riding their bikes. They react more negatively to pain and try not to make the same mistake twice. Boys, on the other hand, are slower to learn from calamities. They tend to think that their injuries were caused by “bad luck.”⁴ Maybe their luck will be better next time.

Besides, scars are cool.



Why do boys tend to be
competitive, aggressive,
and assertive?

The answers can be found . . .

