



BOYS IN CRISIS

By Don Smarto

For several decades, many boys in our society have been in trouble. Teachers are challenged. Parents are worried. Social scientists have documented their struggle. One indication of this crisis is the alarming number of violent school shootings during the past fifteen years. Almost all the shooters were young males. Consider some of these statistics:

- 95% of youth in juvenile court are boys
- 94% of state and federal prisoners are male
- 98% of prisoners on death row are males
- 95% of males on death row express hatred for their fathers
- Boys are six times more likely to have learning disabilities (compared to girls)
- Boys are three times more likely to be drug addicts
- Boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed as emotionally disturbed
- Boys are at greater risk for schizophrenia and autism
- 80% of suicides involve young males
- Suicide among young black adolescent boys has increased 165% in 12 years
- 2/3rds of those in special education in high school are boys
- 71% of school suspensions are for boys
- Many boys spend less than 20% of their time with men (fathers)
- Boys without fathers are twice as likely to drop out of school
- Boys without fathers are twice as likely to go to jail
- Boys without fathers are four times more likely to have behavior problems

Clearly, many parents are working, exhausted, and unable to parent properly. The lack of supervision and the disinterest of some fathers is a chief problem contributing to delinquency.

Another factor is the violence in movies, video games, television, and music lyrics. 57% of television shows contain violence but more disturbing 85% of HBO and Showtime on cable contain violence with 71% of perpetrators unpunished. Television has become an “electronic baby sitter” with children watching at least four hours of programs per day. They need social stimulation and interaction with parents.

Perhaps the greatest factor affecting young males is what Frank Peretti called the “wounded spirit”. Without spiritual development, many boys feel unloved, unwanted, and without value. Resentment, bitterness, and anger may be symptoms of self-hatred.

Listening, sharing, mentoring, and affirming troubled boys is the beginning. But if they are incarcerated, we must also welcome them into our churches and neighborhoods. In prison ministry, we sometimes forget that the goal is not to make converts but *disciples*, disciples who will follow Christ and lead others to him.

Perhaps this generation of iPods, cell phones, and PCs, have more material blessings than any generation in history. We are a nation of opulence. But many experience spiritual poverty. Our boys don't need more toys, they need to know they are children of God. Dr. Francis Schaeffer said "The dilemma of modern man is simple: He does not know why man has any meaning."

"Boys are experiencing a crisis of confidence that reaches deep within their soul. Don't let anyone tell you that boys do just as well without the influence of a man to guide their journey."

Dr. James Dobson

"Most people overlook a child's heart when it is buried in pain. Take the time to give a wounded child your love. Love is very powerful."

Dr. Tony Campolo

References for BOYS IN CRISIS by Don Smarto

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