

insights



Secrets of managing boys' behaviour

by Michael Grose

Boys are behaviourally more challenging for parents than girls. Their physical nature, their boisterousness and their propensity to push boundaries can be challenging, particularly if parents are used to managing girls.

There are some basic rules to follow when managing boys. If you follow these then I believe you'll successfully raise a boy who is eager to cooperate with you, will adapt to most of the social situations he encounters and, importantly, will treat others with dignity and respect. In a nutshell, a well-behaved boy!

1. Boys like rules, limits and expectations

Boys like to know who's in charge and what the rules are. They also like to know that someone will enforce those rules. They are hierarchical by nature too, so don't be too wishy-washy about who's in charge. You don't have to use the same authoritarian methods as your parents may have used, but don't be afraid to take a firm lead with your sons.

2. Boys learn from consequences (natural and logical)

Boys are more likely to be heuristic learners than girls. That is, they are more likely to learn from experience. Parents then need to allow boys to experience the consequences of their poor choices so they learn not to behave in those ways. Protecting boys from their poor choices doesn't develop responsibility or independence. Telling them they need to improve their behaviour doesn't work either. Let them experience the negative consequences of poor behaviour and they will be more likely to change their ways. It just takes a few negative experiences before they learn.

Boys will cop most of your discipline as long as it's fair and reasonable. However, fairness is not only about being even-handed with your discipline. Particularly when implementing consequences, fairness is about being just, about not going too far with your consequences and about respecting their dignity: the three Rs of discipline:

Related: the consequence is related to what they have done. (Late home so don't go out next time.)

Reasonable: you don't go too far with a consequence. ("You're grounded for a day" rather than "You're grounded for a month.")

Respectful: boys maintain their dignity throughout the discipline process. (Consequence given in a friendly, calm way.)

3. Boys love consistency

Boys love consistency in their parents – it makes them feel that they are in control. On the other hand, parents who exhibit extreme emotional highs and lows can make life difficult for boys as all the boys' energy is consumed

dealing with fear or the uncertainty of life. In a behavioural sense, boys also like to know that their parents mean what they say and say what they mean. Again, they like to be able to predict their parents' reactions, which gives them a feeling of control. Follow through with consequences rather than just threaten or shout. They'll respect you for it and know that you love them.



4. Manage visually

Use boys' heightened visual awareness to advantage by using lists, checklists and rosters to do the managing. In particular, most boys and all kids on the autism spectrum like the constancy and consistency of visual messages and reminders that support and reinforce verbal communication.

5. Teach them how to cool off

Methods such as time out, cuddling and comforting are useful to help young children learn to cool down. As boys move into school age and beyond, help them understand the triggers that can lead to anger, then discuss various

methods to help them regain some calm. Deep breathing, getting some exercise or thinking about something different are simple ways of relaxing. Work out some ways with your son that will help him stay cool and in control when he needs to.

6. Get them to reflect on what they've done

If a boy misbehaves, never ask him "Why?" He usually won't be able to tell you. Instead, get him to revisit the moment of poor behaviour and try to get a window into his thinking or motivation at the time. "What were you thinking about when you did ?" "What was going on to make you want to do that?" "What will you do differently next time?" This type of question helps ensure that boys learn from their experiences so they behave differently the next time they are in a similar situation.

7. Encourage boys to repair and restore relationship breakdowns

Many boys naturally move on after conflict. This is often perceived as a strength or a positive compared to girls who can make conflict linger far longer than necessary. However, boys can often neglect repairing relationships as a result, which can lead them to be perceived as callous or uncaring. Following conflict with a sibling or a friend, encourage boys to make amends with the aggrieved person, either with an apology or an act of kindness. Alternatively, consider sitting down with both 'sides' to discuss what happened, what they might do differently next time and, in some cases, so that your boy can listen to how the aggrieved person felt about what happened. Some boys need assistance to develop the empathy to see how their remarks or behaviour can adversely impact others.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's the author of 10 books for parents including Thriving! and the best-selling Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It, and his latest release Spoonfed Generation: How to raise independent children.