

The 5 Most Important Aspects of *Raising Boys*

By: James C. Dobson

I am honored to have been asked by my friends at the American Association of Christian Counselors to share what I feel are the five most important aspects of raising boys. Without a doubt, this is a critical question, especially for fathers in the 21st century. Since I have devoted an entire book to this subject, I would like to offer a few thoughts taken directly from *Bringing Up Boys*.

Discipline

It cannot be stated more plainly: boys need structure, they need supervision, and they need to be civilized. When raised in a *laissez-faire* environment that is devoid of leadership, they often begin to challenge social conventions and common sense. Many often crash and burn during the adolescent years.

Self-discipline is a worthwhile goal, but it rarely develops on its own initiative. It must be taught. The notion of effortless parenting by busy moms and dads is destined to fail—especially with tough-minded males who dearly love fun and games.

Model Masculine Behavior

Between three and five years of age, a boy will gradually pull away from his mom and sisters in an effort to formulate a masculine identity. It is typical for boys during those years to crave the attention and involvement of their dad and to try to emulate his behavior and mannerisms.

My point is to urge those of you who are young fathers to provide that modeling on which your boys can build their masculine identities. As you carry out the traditional roles of protector and provider, your sons will observe who you are and thereby learn to serve in a similar way when they are grown.

Protect and Defend

Both mothers and fathers must make every effort to “play defense” on behalf of their sons—that is, to protect them from the immoral and dangerous enticements of our culture. But that is not enough.

Parents also need to “play offense”—to capitalize on the impressionable years of childhood by instilling in their sons the antecedents of character. Their

assignment during two brief decades will be to transform their boys from immature and flighty youngsters into honest, caring men who will be strong and decisive leaders, secure in their masculinity. And of course, the ultimate goal is to give each child an understanding of Scripture and a lifelong passion for Jesus Christ.

Love Their Mother

As we have already noted, boys watch their dads intently, noting every minor detail of behavior and values. If you blow up regularly and insult your wife, your boys will treat their mother and other females disrespectfully.

Fortunately, the converse is also true. If you are honest, trustworthy, caring, loving, self-disciplined, and God-fearing, your boys will be influenced by those traits as they grow older.

Stay Close

In researching *Bringing Up Boys*, I kept arriving at the same disturbing conclusion: boys are in trouble today primarily because their parents, and especially their dads, are distracted, overworked, exhausted, disinterested, or simply unable to cope. This “routine panic” is detrimental to everyone in the family, but your son may pay the highest price.

Never assume for a moment that you can go off and “do your own thing” without serious consequences for him and his sister. It is my conviction that those who choose to bring a child into the world must give that boy or girl the highest priority for a period of time. Before you know it, he’ll become a young man who will pack his bags and take his first halting steps into the adult world.

Then it will be your turn. By all expectations, you as a parent should have decades of health and vigor left to invest in whatever God calls you to do. But for now, there is a higher calling. Raising children who have been loaned to us for a brief moment outranks every other responsibility.