TIPS ON HOW TO BUILD BONDS WITH BOYS

By Helen Splarn

Steve Biddulph, author of Raising Boys and Generation Next speaker talks about the importance of giving boys different bonding experiences as they grow. He says that boys experience 3 main developmental stages as they go through life:

0-6 years old: bonding with mum and learning to love

A recent study published in the journal Child Development found that boys who have a close and loving relationship with their mothers during these years are less likely to have disciplinary issues as teenagers.

Building bonds:
1. Make sure he knows he is loved, with cuddles, hugs, eye contact and setting firm limits. This will give him inner security and confidence for the rest of his life.
2. Talk to him and show him new things, this helps develop the brain and encourages socialisation which is important when he starts preschool or school.
3. Build in him a love of life, play games, share sports like swimming, kicking a ball around, explore nature and enjoy the world around him. This will build resilience skills that he will need as he begins to go into the world.

6 – 13 years old: bonding with dad through play and sharing experiences

The study also observed that ‘At the other end of the scale children tended to have greater behavioural problems when their fathers were more remote and lost in their own thoughts, or when their fathers interacted less with them’, said lead author Christopher Trentacosta, an assistant professor of psychology at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Building bonds:
1. Dads and sons can enjoy playing sports together or take up a shared hobby. During these times talk to your son about your own childhood experiences, the difficulties and successes. At this age they are eager to listen to what their fathers have to say and learn from them.
2. If work permits, it is best for dads to try not to spend extended periods of time away on business trips. Be at home and be available.
3. Single parents – try to include an uncle, best friend or coach into your son’s life. If they have an example of a ‘good man’ then they will learn the skills they need from them.

13 – 21 years old: bonding with a mentor helps him become part of the community

Steve Biddulph explains that parents need to: ‘organise some good mentors in their son’s live or he will have to rely on an ill-equipped peer groups for his sense of self. The aim is for your son to learn skills, responsibility, and self-respect by joining more and more with the adult community’.

Building bonds:
1. As boys become more independent they are less inclined to listen to their parents. However they are usually willing to take note of a trusted mentor, this could be an uncle, someone who teaches them a hobby or the boss at their weekend job. Put them in contact with mentors who are good role models, allow them to experience their freedom and have more contact with other men in their lives.
2. In traditional societies this is the time when young men would pass through initiation ceremonies conducted by the elders of the community. Young boys would become young men and learn essential lessons about life during these ceremonies. For our young men today we need to re-create this ‘rites of passage’ using the community and network we have around us.

*Raising Boys (author Steve Biddulph) Writer Helen Splarn. Editor Dr Ramesh Manocha.
Source: Child Development (Journal, USA), Raising Boys (Steve Biddulph).