

Are the Children Well?



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Standing Up for Boys: Parents and Teachers as Advocates By Stephanie Meegan

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Why do we need to stand up for boys? Two compelling reasons are provided by Barry McDonald, the author of *Boy Smarts* and *Boys on Target*:

“Boys are half our future.”

“It is better to build boys than mend men.”

Although every child is unique, young boys often require extra time and mentoring to learn how to focus their vitality and channel their exuberance constructively. By deepening our understanding of boys’ developmental and educational needs, we can help them thrive. Here are some practical ways to build on boys’ strengths and tap into their potential.

Let Them Stand

In a [Boy Smarts Newsletter \(Feb. 2014\)](#) Barry MacDonald encourages parents and teachers to “Beware the Chair”. He points out that many daily activities can be done standing and this habit engages the muscles in the lower part of the body.

Standing is a non-sedentary activity that also increases both metabolism and brain activity.



Schools are beginning to provide standing desks or higher tables that serve as “standing stations.” At home, try having them stand at a

higher surface such as a kitchen counter or island when doing homework. Letting them stand helps some boys and girls to focus better and stay engaged longer.

Let Them Move

Boys are more likely to fidget and be distracted when they are anxious, experience boredom or perceive a threat.

A body in motion stimulates blood flow, gets more oxygen to the brain and helps relieve stress.



Physical movement also helps boys to process and store information. In addition to recess, many elementary teachers routinely incorporate short “deep breathing and movement breaks” to help students reset their bodies and brains for optimal learning.

Let Them Wrestle

Outside of school, horseplay allows rambunctious contact without harm. A good way for young boys to learn the “rules” of harmless roughhousing is for a parent to tussle with them and model how to stop when asked. When siblings horse around, parents can coach them, clarify limits and promote fair play. For young boys these exuberant “puppy piles” are often a wonderful way to show genuine affection and build positive connections.

Let Them Read

Boys are often drawn to exciting stories, full of dangerous exploits, heroes and villains, mysterious plots and tests of courage. Books and storytelling can also include challenges to loyalty, moral dilemmas, and vicarious risk-taking. *Encouraging boys to explore both real and fictional worlds through reading can stimulate curiosity, broaden horizons, test problem solving and build their confidence.*

Let Them Expand the Boy Code

Boys can become confused, discouraged, isolated and angry when they feel forced to hide behind tough guy masks. Ironically, girls no longer have a truncated notion of what it means to be a woman. But boys do not always have the same freedom. Dr. William Pollack, author of *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, encourages parents to challenge masculine stereotypes and enable boys to discover their true selves. Pollack explains that “real boys” hunger for support in developing their natural capacity for compassion and justice.

It is up to parents, coaches, teachers and other allies to model respect for, and support of, a full range of healthy masculinity.

Let Them Have Adventures

Take boys (and girls) on a nature scavenger hunt, make a snow fort, create a terrarium, play flashlight tag, dig for fossils, explore a pond or creek, sleep outdoors, plant a vegetable garden, create a backyard obstacle course, or cook over a campfire.



Let Them Play

Growing up with two older brothers in a neighborhood with few girls, my natural habitat was boy-land. Afternoons after school and school vacations provided ample opportunities to gather for free-play. All of us enjoyed coming up with activities, moving our bodies, and having adventures. *This is when we learned to take turns, divide into teams, work through conflicts, stick-up for underdogs, experiment, play fair and use our imaginations.*



The Documentary Film “If They Had Known” Discusses the Dangers of Mixing Prescription Drugs and Alcohol

Dangerous combination of prescription drugs and alcohol

Clay Soper was a rising sophomore at the University of Denver in Colorado, a popular and charismatic 2014 graduate of Winchester High School in Massachusetts, and “everyone’s friend.” A good student, great athlete, handsome and funny, amazing skier, loving son and devoted brother...he had it all. Until he made a terrible choice, a fatal decision of combining alcohol with the prescription drug, Xanax.

The documentary film, “If They Had Known,” is a heart-wrenching, powerful, plea from Clay’s family and friends to learn the risks of drinking and mixing prescription drugs. His parents, Geoff and Genny Soper, have tried to channel their grief over losing their oldest son into educating as many young people as they can about the deadly consequences. Their hope is that every high school student in the country sees this documentary and that it is shown at every college campus. They want to share Clay’s story to save others.

The idea was developed after Clay’s death on July 18, 2015 to start a dialogue, done from the view of the youth, to share that “this could happen to any kid.” The Sopers commissioned Emerson College professors Lauren Shaw and Bob Nesson to produce the documentary, which took over a year and half of interviewing Clay’s friends who were with him the night he died, his family, high school and college friends, and fraternity brothers. Experts were also consulted and interviewed to gather relevant scientific / medical data and the hope is that it will save lives.

This could be any kid

Clay’s mother, Genny Soper, addresses the camera directly in the trailer for the film, blue eyes overflowing with tears. “He was not an addict,” she says. “It wasn’t substance abuse. He made a bad decision. He died because of what he and his friends didn’t know.” Clay

was home in Winchester after finishing his freshman year at the University of Denver and on a hot July night, he and his friends drank beer and took Xanax before heading out to a party. At the party, he appeared very drunk, so his friends put him to bed to sleep it off. They didn’t think to call 911 until it was too late. The results of this documentary will leave you in tears.

“Taking alcohol alone is already a central nervous system depressant,” Beresin says. “When you add other drugs, particularly benzodiazepines such as Xanax or Klonopin, or opioids or sedatives, the liver can’t process it all and body functions start shutting down.” - Dr. Eugene Berensin, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Harvard Medical School

The risks of alcohol and prescription drugs

Youth are highly vulnerable to impulsive and potentially very dangerous behaviors. The brain is not fully developed until close to the age of 26, making teens and adolescents far more likely to be impulsive and act based upon emotion and drive, seeking immediate gratification.

As the film reveals, there are many medications prescribed for anxiety, depression and ADHD that should never be mixed with alcohol. Putting warning labels on prescription bottles is often not an effective deterrent; it is imperative that other methods are used to ensure this information is widely known.

We can get the word out

Clay’s father, Geoff Soper, wants to share the

lessons of his son’s death. In an interview on [WCVB-TV Chronicle aired in December 2017](#), he stressed that everyone should see this film; it could save their life or someone they know.

Yes, it’s gut-wrenching and honest, and it shows underage drinking and drugs. For some school districts previewing the documentary, there were concerns about whether the content was appropriate. For Worcester County District Attorney and father of three teenagers, Joseph D. Early, Jr., the reasons for showing the documentary far outweigh the concerns.

“It’s not a Scared Straight Program,” he said of the documentary and its numerous discussion resources. He wants kids and parents to know that seemingly innocuous pills from the family medicine cabinet, taken with beer or vodka could kill them. The district attorney’s office purchased the rights for the film for a year and [intends to share it widely](#).

TTC has a variety of resources on how to prevent prescription drug abuse and strategies for safeguarding medications. [Click here for more information](#).



DID YOU KNOW? Boxford, Topsfield and Middleton offer **safe disposal of prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications**. Drug disposal boxes are located at the police stations in all three towns. For the safe disposal of needles, currently the Topsfield fire station and Middleton transfer station have sharp collection receptacles. Medications and sharps can be turned in at any of these locations at any time. In addition, April 27, 2019 is **National Rx Take Back Day**, which is sponsored by the DEA and allows for safe and convenient disposal of prescription drugs, while also educating the public. (Local locations will be made available after April 1.)

How Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms Can Impact Our Youth

The big question: How to stay positive?

Given the 24-hour news cycle, the relentless nature of our social media feeds, and access to information whenever, wherever, and however we want it, it can often feel like we live in a frightening world, where dangers and problems seem pervasive and overwhelming. This comes into particularly sharp focus when we consider the issues and risks that our youth are faced with on a daily basis.

Enter the science of the positive.

That sounds good, but what does that actually mean? It means that you can change the lens through which you view the world, and, while acknowledging and addressing the concerns, grow the positive by first recognizing where it exists and then, with intention, growing it. How? By shining a light on all the good, positive behaviors that exist in any community. This then allows us to strengthen “protective factors” for our youth by growing the positive that already exists.

Sounds like social-work jargon - How does it relate to keeping kids safe?

The term “protective factors” may sound like something out of a “Law & Order” re-run, but it’s much more concrete. Protective factors include many things that may already exist for our youth, such as caring adults, strong families, mentoring teachers, clear boundaries, safe, healthy communities, a sense of belonging, and community connections.

Half empty, or half full?

It’s easy to make sweeping assumptions about youth and spread the negative; simply listen at the lacrosse field when a concerned parent may proclaim, “Every kid in the 8th grade is vaping!” Yet the truth is that the vast majority of our youth are not vaping (the 2018 Monitoring the Future Survey indicated 82 percent are not using) and most are making healthy choices.

Are we concerned that vaping rates are on the rise? *Yes.*

Are we concerned that youth are at risk if they engage in this behavior? *Absolutely.*

Do we need to educate ourselves and kids about the health risks of vaping? *Absolutely.*

As parents, caring adults and communities that care deeply about the health and well-being of youth, we absolutely are concerned about youth vaping.

“Positive Community Norms is all about balancing concern (the very real dangers and harm that our communities face) with hope (the equally real sources of strength and positive change that exist in our communities, too).”

– Jeff Linkenbach, Founder,
[The Montana Institute](#)

Is everyone doing it? *No.*

Do we need to promote the healthy norm that most kids do not vape among ourselves, our kids and our community? *Absolutely.*

Positive Community Norms: Empowering our youth to be part of the majority

So, what difference does educating kids about the norm make? By highlighting the positive norm, we are encouraging, and in turn, promoting, the healthy behavior. It may sound simplistic, a sort of childish “turn that frown upside down” mindset, but research unequivocally shows that highlighting the positive works! Why?

Not surprisingly, youth tend to conform to the perceived norms of their peers, or feel social pressure to do so—which can be a problem when they are considering risky behavior.

Here’s why: if youth misperceive that more of their peers are drinking, smoking and engaging in risk behaviors than actually are, studies show they are more likely to do the same. These misperceptions reinforce the belief that “everyone else is doing it” which can be a powerful influencer.

Studies show that when communities are repeatedly exposed to consistent, positive, data-based messages promoting the actual, prevalent, and positive behaviors of youth (i.e. norms), perceptions begin to shift from “everyone is doing it” to the more accurate perception that “NOT everyone does it”. If we change perceptions, we change behavior. Healthy kids equal a healthy community.

What’s in a Norm?

Merriam-Webster defines NORM:

1: an authoritative standard: model

2: a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior

Dr. Jeff Linkenbach defines SOCIAL NORMS:

Behaviors or attitudes held by the majority of people in a community or group.

For example, if most people in a community do not smoke cigarettes, then NOT smoking is the norm. If most people do not approve of others smoking, this, too, is a norm. Not smoking is normal and perhaps even expected in this population, and thus would be considered a social norm in that community.

ASSET CORNER

Caring Adults = Protective Factors

Developmental relationships are a protective factor for youth!

When youth are engaged in developmental relationships

with caring adults in their

families, neighborhoods, schools and communities they are more

likely to grow into healthy,

caring, responsible adults. How

do you show the young people

in your life you care?

[Here are some ideas!](#)

The Rise of Vaping and Effects on the Teenage Brain

The dramatic increase in the use of e-cigarettes (vaping/juuling) is creating a new generation of nicotine addicts, far surpassing conventional cigarettes among youth. (Surgeon General's Report, 11/2018.)

Coolness Factor

Decades ago, the Marlboro Man and glamorous celebrities made smoking look cool and sophisticated, and the advertising industry reaped the benefits of the "cool" factor. Fortunately, scientific research prevailed, and the dangers of cigarette smoking, addiction, and related diseases were widely publicized, forcing changes in packaging, sales and warnings; ultimately leading to a decrease in cigarette smoking. Yet when one problem fades, another quickly surfaces, as is the case with vaping/e-cigarettes. And the ramifications and long-term health effects of this escalating epidemic are going to be quite dramatic with dire consequences.

While e-cigarettes originally emerged as smoking cessation devices, several companies capitalized on the sleek technology of vaping devices as the new "cool" factor, luring impressionable youth with their hip marketing. Packaging for these products frequently resembles that of smart phones and other popular devices, upping the familiarity and the lure of cool tech. After years of decline in tobacco use, e-cigarettes have emerged as the new trend for our youth and the industry is targeting the population most at risk for addiction--teenagers.

Effects on the Developing Brain

The adolescent years are times of rapid and essential brain development, which continues through age 25. While many youth believe there is NO nicotine in vape, or that there are only small amounts that are not harmful, the truth is that ALL e-cigarettes contain nicotine, as well as other harmful chemicals. The fact is that nicotine in any quantity is harmful and highly addictive; it can harm the adolescent brain and can further disrupt attention and learning. (Letter from Dr. Scott Gottlieb, FDA Commissioner, to School Superintendents, Nov. 2018)

Nicotine use can also affect mood and impulse-control. In addition, it has been found that nicotine use during these years of rapid brain development can increase the risk for future addiction not only to smoking, but to other substances as well. Studies show that youth who

vape are more likely to use other tobacco products in the future and are more likely to



engage in other risky behaviors. (Center for Disease Control www.cdc.gov/tobacco/information/)

Rapid Rise in Popularity

Seven years ago, e-cigarettes were relatively unknown, but today the FDA estimates that 10.7 million youth aged 12-17 are at risk for using e-cigarettes. And of even greater concern is the huge increase in use in just one year; the 2018 National Youth Survey showed an increase of 78% from 2017 to 2018 among High School students and a 48% increase in Middle School students. That is just in one year! (www.e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov)

So How Do We Protect Our Youth? So how do we reverse this alarming trend? Talk to them. Truly listen to them. It is imperative that parents, educators, medical professionals and other adults recognize these products, learn about them and the potential risks, and work together to steer our youth to make good and healthy decisions. It may seem daunting, but for the safety and well-being of the next generation, we must educate ourselves and take on the profit-hungry business with logical and scientific facts. Parents talking with their kids about risky behaviors remains the #1 deterrent factor. The earlier that our youth start using e-cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs, the greater their risk for developing dependence or abuse, and causing brain damage, and risk for significant harm.

So talk to them early, and often.

They are listening!

YAY FOR YAAB!

Members of our Youth Action Advisory Board and their friends attended Topsfield Board of Health meetings this winter and put forth an initiative to ban flavored tobacco products in stores selling to youth under age 21. They spoke knowledgeably and passionately on the subject, and ultimately convinced the Board to vote for the restriction.

In April, they'll be attending **Kick Butts Day** in Boston sponsored by the 84 with high school teens throughout the state.

VAPING 101: Learn the Lingo

Vaping: Inhaling the water vapor produced from a battery-powered, electronic device which heats a flavored liquid contained within the device.

E-cigarette: The battery-operated or electronic device that simulates the act and sensation of smoking. Other names include: e-cig, vape pens, e-hookahs, tanks, vapes, mods, e-pipes or ENDS (Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems).

JUUL: (Pronounced "Jewel") The brand name for a rechargeable vaping device resembling a USB stick, about 3 inches long. JUUL is the fastest-growing e-cigarette start-up that is currently valued at \$15 billion. (Bloomberg.com 2018). JUUL has captured more than two-thirds of the e-cigarette market and JUULs are extremely popular among teenage users. Some other brands include BO and BLU and Suorin.

JUUL pods: Inserts for the JUUL device that contain flavored nicotine liquid. All JUUL pods contain nicotine levels equivalent to **a full pack of cigarettes**.

E-juice: (also, e-liquid, juice, nic juice, smoke juice) Liquid that is put into refillable vaping devices. E-juice comes in over 8,000 flavors and contains different nicotine concentrations. Non-nicotine flavored e-juice is available but still contains trace amounts of nicotine in addition to harmful chemicals, such as diacetyl, benzene, and heavy metals.

Nicotine or Nic Salts: E-juice that is nicotine mixed with benzoic acid, a preservative used for food and in the manufacture of cosmetics, dyes, plastics, and insect repellent. Nic salts can have higher nicotine concentrations with less harshness when inhaled.

Dripping: Placing e-juice directly on the coil of the electronic vaping device producing thick clouds of nicotine vapor, enhancing the flavor of the e-juice. [More info/resources here](#)