

August Notes from the Healthy Family Healthy Child Project

By Mark Kimball, HFHCP Project Specialist

Truth – Truth is the result of the trials and errors of life and the lessons we have learned. Sometimes it's like the wind because we can't see it but we can see the effect it has as it bends the grasses. Sometimes truth is a blend of old and new, yesterday and today. Man still cannot fly like the eagle does, but his understanding of how the eagle flies has given him the perspective of the eagle. That's the way things are.

In last month's article, I stated that during a meeting in Washington, D.C., I had been moved by the words used by a fellow grantee when talking to her male clients about parenthood. Those words were: "Remember – You are the first man your daughter will ever love and you are the example your sons will remember for the rest of their lives."

These words still resonate and touch me. They also caused me to write about raising daughters, a subject very dear to my heart. This month we will look at which sex is harder to raise, boys or girls.

I often have said to those who know me that I had to spend more time and energy on my two sons than on my two girls. I have found that other parents of boys are quick to say the same thing.

Forget the old poem about snips, snails and puppy dog tails. At some point it appears that things changed, as a single-mother friend of mine says, to "fights, forts and video games." She then stated, "And I am not sure how much more I can take, either."

Friends of mine who are the parents of girls, however, point out that they have to contend with fussier fashion sense, more prickly social situations and a far greater capacity to hold a grudge, to say nothing of the concerns that range from body image to math bias.

It's my opinion that boys and girls are each harder in different ways. Every child is an individual. His or her innate personality helps shape how life will unfold for that child, but parents as nurturers also play a role.

There are differences in how we handle boys and girls from day one. In most cases, we tend to talk and act more softly toward girls but are apt to throw boys in the air and roughhouse with them. One possible explanation for this is the fact that, generally speaking, their brains are wired differently (which is, by the way, my subject for next month's article). This might be a good place for some examples.

Discipline: Who's harder? Boys

During my years leading parent education groups in Eugene, I frequently heard the question, "Why don't boys seem to listen?" As it turns out, their hearing is not as good as a girls' hearing right from birth and this difference only gets greater as our kids age.

Girls' hearing is more sensitive in the frequency range critical to speech discrimination and the verbal centers in their brains develop more quickly. This means a girl is likely to respond better to discipline strategies such as praise or warnings like "Don't do that" or "Use your words."

Boys, on the other hand, tend to be more tactile. They may need to be picked up and plunked in a "time out" chair. They also are less verbal and more impulsive, which is especially evident in the toddler and preschool years.

These developmental differences contribute to the mislabeling of normal behavior as problematic, many experts tell us. Five boys for every one girl are diagnosed with a "disorder" (including conduct disorder, bipolar disorder, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, sensory integration disorder). It's my opinion that most often, boys may simply fall on the more robust end of normal. They need more opportunities to expend energy and aggression, as well as firmer limits.

Physical Safety: Who's Harder? Boys

One mother told me when talking about her four sons she was constantly fighting to keep her house a home rather than an indoor sports arena. In general, boys are more rambunctious and aggressive. Taking risks lights up the pleasure centers of their brains. Many parents find they either have to keep a closer eye on what a son is "getting into" or have more bandages available.

Boys, being natural risk takers, may need encouragement to slow down a little, but maybe girls need to be encouraged to take a few more risks, such as trying the bigger slide, swimming in the deep end of the pool (under supervision, of course) or climbing that tree.

Communication: Who's harder? First Boys, Then Girls

From birth, a girl baby tends to be more interested in looking at colors and textures, like those on the human face, while a boy baby is drawn more to movement, like a turning mobile. These differences also are seen when drawing, as girls tend to use a rainbow of colors when drawing, while boys lean toward blues, black and silvers.

In a nutshell, girls are rigged to be people-oriented and boys tend to be action-oriented. Because girls study faces so intently, they are better at reading non-verbal signals, such as expression and voice tones. Boys not only learn to talk later than girls and use more-limited vocabularies, they also have more trouble connecting feelings with words.

My daughters were more apt to share their feelings and details of events. My sons just did not see that as being important, it appears. I spent my days asking, "What happened then?" or "What did he say after you said that?"

Boys tend to hold eye contact for shorter periods of time than do girls. This can cause some parents to worry about autism, since doctors say this can be a red flag. This is another example of how the brain in boys is set up.

As girls get to be 8 or so, things can get harder. The flip side of being so adept at communicating is that girls exert a lot of energy on it. There can be a great deal of drama around who is mad at whom, who said what and why and more.

Self-esteem: Who's Harder? Girls

Developing a healthy self-image is critical to all kids. But as the more compliant and people-oriented gender, girls tend to grow up less confident and more insecure than boys.

Body image is a big part of self-esteem and though there is certainly body image dysfunction in boys and men, it remains mostly a female issue.

School: Who's Harder? Boys

In their early years, most boys tend to lag behind girls in developing attentiveness, self-control, language and fine motor skills. The relatively recent acceleration of pre-K and kindergarten curricula has occurred without awareness that the brain develops at different sequences in boys and girls. In many schools, music, clay work, finger painting and physical exercise – early-ed activities that once helped lively kids acclimate to school – are being cut out of the school day.

One area where girls do less well in school concerns spatial learning, such as geometry. Girls may use different parts of their brains to process space perceptions. The key is for parents to present both boys and girls with plenty of no-pressure opportunities to try out the areas that are challenging.

What is the bottom line? The general consensus seems to be that boys are more of a handful early on and girls are more challenging beginning in the pre-teen years.

You will find something at right I found on the Internet that's humorous yet accurate concerning boys. It comes from an anonymous mother in Austin, Texas, and is titled *Things I've Learned From My Boys*.

1. A king-size waterbed holds enough water to fill a 2,000-square-foot house four inches deep.
2. If you spray hairspray on dust bunnies and run over them with roller blades, they can ignite.
3. A 3-year-old boy's voice is louder than 200 adults in a crowded restaurant.
4. If you hook a dog leash over a ceiling fan, the motor is not strong enough to rotate a 42-pound boy wearing Batman underwear and a Superman cape.
5. You should not throw baseballs up when the ceiling fan is on. When using a ceiling fan as a bat, you have to throw the ball up a few times before you get a hit. A ceiling fan can hit a baseball a long way.
6. The glass in windows does not stop a baseball hit by a ceiling fan.
7. When you hear the toilet flush and the words "uh oh," it's already too late.
8. Brake fluid mixed with Clorox makes smoke and lots of it.
9. A 6-year-old boy can start a fire with a flint rock even though a 36-year-old man says they can only do it in the movies.
10. Certain Legos will pass through the digestive tract of a 4-year-old boy.
11. Play-Doh and microwaves should not be used in the same sentence.
12. Super glue is forever.
13. No matter how much Jell-O you put in a swimming pool, you still can't walk on the water.
14. Pool filters do not like Jell-O.
15. VCRs do not eject "PB&J" sandwiches even though TV commercials show they do.
16. Garbage bags do not make good parachutes.
17. Marbles in gas tanks make lots of noise when you're driving.
18. You probably do not want to know what that odor is.
19. Always look in the oven before you turn it on. Plastic toys do not like ovens.
20. The fire department in Austin, Texas, has a five-minute response time.
21. The spin cycle on the washing machine does not make earthworms dizzy.
22. It will, however, make cats dizzy.
23. Cats throw up twice their body weight when dizzy.
24. Eighty percent of men who read this will try mixing the Clorox and brake fluid.
25. Women will pass this on to almost all of their friends with or without kids.

My note: No wonder my mother had gray hair.

High School Students Encouraged to Enter "Traffic Safety Around Farm Equipment" Video Contest

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Seed Council and Oregon Farm Bureau are co-sponsoring a contest to create a video promoting safety while driving and sharing the roads with farm equipment. The contest is open to Oregon high school students or clubs.

Participants are encouraged to use this summer's harvest season while farm equipment is on the roadways to create a video.

"Our goal is to use this contest to create video ads to raise the awareness of

the general public when sharing the roads with large, slow-moving farm equipment," stated Nick Bowers, Oregon Seed Council Public Relations Committee chair.

"While other organizations have the resources and professional staff to create their safety message, we thought we would try a different approach and stimulate the creative minds of Oregon students," said Shawn Cleave of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Entries are due by Nov. 15. The first-place winner will receive a prize of \$1,000.

All videos will be featured at the Oregon Seed Council booth during the Oregon Seed League meeting in Salem on Dec. 6-7. Winners will be notified beforehand and prizes will be awarded at the league's annual banquet on Dec. 6.

For a complete list of contest rules, visit oregonseedcouncil.org and look for the contest rules on the link page or visit oregonfb.org.

Oregon Seed Council and Oregon Farm Bureau will retain all rights to use any or all video entries in the future.