

FOCUS

on Early Childhood Mental Health



*Pennsylvania Key
Early Childhood Mental
Health Consultation
Project
717-213-2063
micwal@berksiu.org*

Factsheet #17, 08/10

Letting Boys Be Boys

According to Michael Thompson, the author of *Raising Cain*, boys everywhere wrestle with each other and mock fight more than girls and are more active. Thompson also says that because of their higher activity level, "boys are likely to get into more trouble than girls. And they are not given enough opportunities to move around...because they spend too much time sitting and not enough time learning by doing, making and building things." The culture of many early childhood centers tends to favor girls more than boys, and there are very few male early childhood teachers. So it shouldn't be too much of a surprise that boys are more likely to flunk or drop out of school, they make up two-thirds of the students in special education, and are five times more likely to be labeled as hyperactive.

Given those facts, what can parents and teachers of active (perhaps even aggressive) little boys do to accommodate their natural tendencies and help create better outcomes for them in the future?

Tips for parents:

- Remember that aggressive fantasies and make-believe games are not the same as real aggression.
- Let your little boy play the games he wants to, as long as he doesn't hurt anyone.
- Limit the amount of violence your little boy sees on television and in movie and video games.
- Find appropriate places for boys to act out their games and be physically active.

Strategies for teachers:

- Recognize that some boys need physical activity to handle stress.
- Give boys lots of opportunities for physical activity and don't eliminate play time as punishment.
- Include physical activities as part of learning.
- Set clear limits and be firm with boys when they break the rules for safe play.
- Compliment them on what they do well.

Source:

"Understanding and Raising Boys," www.pbs.org/parents/raisingboys/. A DVD of the PBS documentary, "Raising Cain: Boys in Focus," is also available for purchase.

Other related FOCUS on ECMH factsheets:

"Understanding Aggressive Behavior," www.parecovery.org/documents/Focus_ECMH_Aggressive_Behavior_102709.pdf
"The Importance of Play," www.parecovery.org/documents/Focus_ECMH_Play_090709.pdf