

The home / school relationship and dads

By Ian Lillico



In dealing with the improvement of outcomes for boys, it is essential that there is a close home/school partnership - stronger than anything else in the past. Schools that have an empowered parent body or a community focus are well equipped to tackle the issues surrounding boys' education in Australia.

Schools are now a major site of masculinity formation and parents must realize this and work in partnerships with schools to enable their sons to achieve and behave in an acceptable manner. Schools provide a daily avenue for boys to connect with their peers and this need for connection peaks at about 12 years of age. Ideas of masculinity are most formed in boys' first three years at High School when puberty strikes and the need for peer connectedness also peaks.

Family breakdowns and dysfunction have made school the only stability in many of our boys' lives and their relationships with their teachers is a critical determinant in their growing up into well-adjusted adults. Parents should work with schools to enable a form of Rite of Passage for their sons. Many schools (both private and government) and some individual families, are making progress in this area and realizing that some mark of transition from boy to man is an essential ingredient in reducing risk-taking behaviours by young males trying to prove they are men. They consequently act in safer manners and often live longer and more happily.

An extra special 13th birthday is sometimes used as a mini rite of passage where peers, family and friends are invited. Parents relate their son's qualities and talents - particularly dad if he is a part of the boy's life. The boy must also demonstrate some skill or skills in front of all those gathered and, after the event, the parents try to relate to their son in a more adult way.

The long adolescence that many boys have these days is attributable to a number of factors, particularly their relationship with their fathers. Men are hierarchical and put themselves in a pecking order - often unknowingly. When a father is present in a boy's life, the boy cannot be an adult at home because the father is. Schools can work with dads to give them strategies to help their sons grow into adults. The involvement of fathers in their son's schooling is paramount for boys to see that education and school are important.

