

Boys and their Masks

“Most teenage boys (and girls) show a front to their real selves. The mask is their protection against bullying and breaking the peer group rules by not showing emotion, acting cool and looking tough. We must not communicate with these masks because these are not our kids – they are hidden behind those masks. We must let them know that it is them we want to talk to and not the characters they are trying to imitate – the tough guy heroes they watch and mimic from the media.

Good communication occurs when we remove our masks as well - whether we are parents, teachers or school administrators. If the boy has given us the privilege of seeing his real self, we must respect him by letting him see us as we really are, also. Once he rejoins his mates, however, the mask comes back on. However, once he has opened up to us and we have resolved the situation together, we know the real boy in him and henceforth see through the mask he wears – and he knows it.

Contrary to what many people believe, boys are very vulnerable and sensitive and to protect this vulnerability they put on armour to cope with their daily tasks of living and being accepted by their peers. A soft interior requires a hard shell to protect it. The masks our boys are wearing at present are pretty tough as their inside is much softer than at any time in history. Our young boys and men of today are much less hard than their forebears and many anthropologists and medical researchers are claiming that our two genders are (in some ways) growing closer together.

Whatever the cause, we must help our young men take their masks off in a safe environment. If the environment of the school, playground, shopping centre, home etc is not safe the boy does not show his true self, but keeps up pretence that he is someone else to protect his vulnerable inside. Drama is an excellent way for boys to take off their mask without fear of ridicule as the environment is created and safe. Even moreso, they can put on a different mask and experiment with different behaviours without fear of ridicule from their peers. This is why role playing at all ages, engaging in fantasy play, and the like, are important elements of our boys' growth and must not be devalued or inhibited – they desperately need it.

Masks get boys into trouble because people believe they are real. Many people see boys with their masks on and think they are toxic and inherently bad. Many older people believe that our younger generation is awful and at every opportunity I tell them otherwise. We must tell our boys to remove their masks when they see an older person, turn to them with a genuine smile and say good day! It's good for them and very good for our older generation who only see the very small percentage of young people on the media that get into trouble – not realising that the vast majority are really nice kids.

We must teach, and give, our boys emotional intelligence if they are to have a job in the future. The new jobs being created in society will require more emotional intelligence than previously and girls seem to be innately more emotionally intelligent than boys. For boys to move from the back line to the front line in our fast food and other outlets they need to respond emotionally to customers' needs and practice removing their masks – or the customers will flee! This is where the Boys Forward concept was born.”