

Presentations for Parents

Here is the description of the parents' presentation which focuses on boys:

Boys Adrift: *What's going on with boys today?*

When *Call of Duty: Black Ops* went on sale on November 9 2010, it sold more than \$700 million worth of product in its first seven days. Boys and young men stayed home from school, and/or stayed up past midnight, to play the game. For a growing proportion of boys, video games both stimulate and satisfy a primal need, the need *to seem heroic in their own eyes*. For these boys, doing well in video games is often more important than earning an 'A' instead of a 'B' in Spanish; for some boys, the games are more important than girls. For other boys, the video games may be less important, but online worlds – including online pornography – acquire new significance and meaning, beginning in middle school, displacing activities in the real world.

This presentation begins with a review of evidence demonstrating that **in almost every demographic group today, boys care less about academic achievement than their sisters do**. Working hard to get straight A's has come to seem unmasculine in the eyes of many boys, though not all; we will discuss the exceptions. This phenomenon is equally true of White males and Black males, affluent and low-income; it is just as true in Texas as it is in California or Virginia or New York. However, the gender gap in motivation *manifests* differently depending on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

This negative attitude towards school begins early. In this presentation, we try to understand why it is common today to find 9-year-old American boys who say that "school is a stupid waste of time". Forty years ago, it was unusual to find such boys in the United States (see *Boys Adrift*, chapter 2, for more on this point). American popular culture today disrespects academic achievement for boys. Once that point is understood, the next question then becomes: **What can parents do about it?** What are some strategies which other parents have employed to turn their sons around?

Some of the concrete questions answered in this presentation include:

- "How much time spent playing video games is too much time?"
- "What video games are OK, and which are not OK? How can I **enforce** my decisions, when my son can just go to his friend's house and play any game he wants to?"
- "What should I do if the school says they think my son has ADHD? What kind of evaluation is appropriate? What are the risks of medications? What treatments are effective?"
- "How can I assess whether my school is 'boy-friendly' – and what can I do about it, anyhow?"
- "I'm a single Mom. **How can I find strong male role models for my son?**"

On the next page is the description of the parents' presentation which focuses on girls' issues:

Girls on the Edge: *The four factors driving the new crisis for girls*

This presentation begins with an overview of the four factors facing American girls today:

- **Sexualization of girlhood:** Girls today are being pushed to present themselves sexually at younger and younger ages. Forty years ago, the clothes on sale for 6-year-old girls were quite different from the styles marketed to young women; today that difference has been erased. Why is that a problem, and what can parents do about it?
- **The cyberbubble:** The majority of American teenage girls now have a Facebook page; many girls now have some kind of social networking page as early as age 10. The average teen girl now sends and receives more than 4,000 text messages a month, more than 130 a day, every day. How is the new world of texting and Facebook changing the lived experience of girls today?
- **Obsessions:** Why are so many girls anxious and/or obsessed about their grades, or their weight – in 3rd grade?!? Why are so many girls obsessed with being perfect? Why are so many girls so anxious?
- **Endocrine disruptors:** how are substances such as BPA and DEHP contributing to the accelerating tempo of sexual development – and why is that a problem? What do parents of girls need to know about this issue, specifically in regard to certain skin creams, lotions, and shampoos?

In pulling together these four factors, we will also consider why so many girls are suffering from “anorexia of the soul” (see pages 75 – 85 of *Girls on the Edge*). These girls can tell you a great deal about what they are *doing*, but not so much about who they *are*.

Once we have defined the problems, the main focus of this presentation is on practical strategies and solutions, with an emphasis on creating and strengthening bonds across generations. The main objective of this presentation is to start a conversation.