

Dear Parents

I got a very good response from one mother to my last email about the strong protecting the weak in which she pointed out that it was also the mothers who often did the protecting in families and are the ones who have to be strong. She is, of course, absolutely right. I do not know how many times I have seen this over the years but time and again in families it is the mothers who carry the families and remain strong. The single parent (usually a mother) is becoming a more and more common phenomenon in our world and I have been struck so often by the incredible strength and courage shown by these women – especially when their sons are in their teenage years. And, even in families with a Father, I have noticed that it is often the mother who is strong and stands in defense of her family in difficult times. So whilst men are usually physically stronger (and it is in this that I see their need to protect) I do not think that men are also necessarily emotionally or mentally stronger. To claim that would be patent nonsense as you could easily see by visiting my home!

Crime and violence

On a different matter it was suggested to me that I write something about the violent crime which has been happening and its affects on our boys. I suppose this falls into two main categories; firstly those boys who read and /or hear about it but have never experienced it and, secondly, those who experience it either towards themselves or witness some of their family being held up etc. In the first instance I think boys do not suffer nearly as much as us adults. We worry about violence and crime and the need to protect our families and possessions. Most boys do not worry at all. They probably know they ought to worry and some will talk like adults about it all. However, this is mostly them just repeating what they have heard adults say. They themselves largely believe themselves to be both invincible and immortal – although, of course, they are sensible enough to deny believing either of these. This gives boys some of their special charm and allows old men to send them (all excited) to war and horrible deaths. So when you talk to your son about crime and the dangers of violent criminals he may nod his head and look earnest but I wouldn't bet on the fact that you have convinced him that he is actually in danger. However, things can (and probably will) be dramatically different once he, or someone close to him, has been a victim of a crime which involves violence or the threat of violence. The worst thing for the boy here is his sense of helplessness. Every boy (or almost every boy) imagines himself as a hero and yet at the crime scene he is not able to do what he imagines and his helplessness can lead to anger first and, possibly, depression afterwards. It is very important that a boy is able to talk about his experience with a wise counselor so that he can work through his feelings. So if your son goes through such an experience please make sure he talks to someone even if he appears to have coped well with it all. Both Jason Bantjes and Sid Cooper are available here and, like so many South African counselors (sadly), have experience in this type of counseling.

Yours sincerely

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