

Boys, young adults and men, are drawn to risk, challenge and adventure.

But often these things are discouraged in the local church. Instead, most congregations offer a safe, nurturing community-an oasis of stability and predictability.

How can we help boys feel that church is also for them?

There is an excellent resource paper prepared by Exeter Diocese, giving suggestions and resources

The paper begins by outlining the basic challenge:

Childhood and Growth

Boys are initially very attached to their mothers but later need a father or significant stable male.

We need to get men out of church leadership and into children's work. Due to single parent households plus 13% of primary teachers are male. 87% are women, there is even more need to have significant males role models in the church.

Boys brains develop more slowly - Fine motor skills in particular will develop later. There are less connections between left and right brain – i.e. emotional to practical.

In church we expect **emotion** especially in church. Even our relationship with Jesus – boys find this hard to be emotional about. Boys will need help expressing their emotions.

Growth - Growth spurts affects boys hearing.

Testosterone Hormones – turns them into men, Sex, Competitiveness, Daring, Instinctive responses, Uncontrollable, Aggression

- 3,4,5 year olds – realise independence, no 'sharing', jostling, fighting
- 11,12+ – can make them to feel really embarrassed, sex, look at girls, fighting, competitiveness,
- By tuts, stares, comments, the church is saying 'we don't want you to behave like boys whilst you are here'. We will emasculate them and we will not end up with strong men in church.
- You've got to have structure but let boys be boys.
- Acting tough can cover insecurities.
- Giving them responsibilities will help with competitiveness.

Recognition of the personalities of boys is recommended

Blame others and want to entertain - Entertaining others will give them credibility so why not provide opportunities to 'show off' in drama or a skill they can do. They will then learn when it is time to 'show off' and when it is inappropriate. Often boys will enjoy watching and participating in drama and role play. Boys often find using puppets a much easier way to talk about what they really think and as a way to communicate how they are feeling.

Less confident than girls - Boys will often behave differently when they are with you alone than when they are in a group of children. Many will have a big fear of being called 'gay' which is basically means anything 'wet' or soft. So mates will say going to church is 'gay' because its all about singing and 'loving' Jesus and this can strongly put boys off. When there are strong males in the church this can counteract and help the boys to see its 'cool' to go to church even as a man. Role models, older male mentors (not parents) are very important in boys lives.

Friendship – Boys will be quick to fall out but will quickly make up. Peer pressure is much stronger amongst boys. If you can keep them until 13,14, they will make incredible church leaders. If they stop, they'll all stop and start hanging as a group somewhere else. If you can't get enough boys to make a cohort, join up with the church down the road.

Boundaries - Boys need to know what the boundaries are, don't ever work without them. Give them a chance to work as a group and decide on what is 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviour and agree some ground rules. Decide the sanctions as a leadership team and stick to them. Remind boys in particular about the consequences of poor behaviour.

In church - Beautiful carvings, stain glass windows, pretty banners – won't do anything for boys. Image of Jesus we portray often show a nice, gentle, wet man. Services often expect too many emotional responses and boys won't engage with this.

The Bible and boys

You need to present the bible in all its 'gory'. Battles, fighting against the flow, standing up for God when no one else is – boys will enjoy this challenge and engage with the story. The Bible is full of wonderful stories: from fighting giants to being swallowed up by big fish! The stories all have one person in common: the God who made us, loves us and cares for us.

The resource paper continues by dealing with boys and prayer, using games and sports, science and recommending a short list of books boys would most likely love to read.

<http://www.exeterccyp.org/children/childrens-advice/boys-and-church/>