

# SYLVIA RIMM

## On Raising Kids



A Newsletter to Help Parents and Teachers

Volume 17

Issue No. 4

### RAISING AMAZING BOYS



While much work has been done and still needs to be done related to girls, boys, too, have many problems, which are listed below. Despite these disadvantages, boys can be raised to handle the developmental problems of children and adolescence in positive ways. Parents who are sensitive to the challenges boys face can guide them to achieving and fulfilling lives.

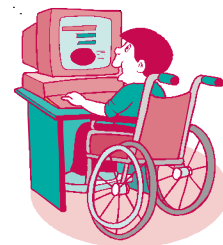
#### Boy Problems\*

- 🔸 Boys are more likely to underachieve in school.
- 🔸 Boys are more likely to have learning disabilities.
- 🔸 More boys are mentally challenged.
- 🔸 Boys are five times more likely to stutter.
- 🔸 More boys are involved in violence and crimes.
- 🔸 Boys develop more slowly than girls.
- 🔸 Boys aren't as strong in verbal skills as girls.
- 🔸 More boys struggle with handwriting.
- 🔸 Boys are more likely to have ADHD.
- 🔸 Boys are more likely to be autistic.

\*From *Education of the Gifted and Talented* by Gary A. Davis and Sylvia B. Rimm (Pearson Education, Inc., 2004).

#### School Learning

A clear message to boys about hard work in school from important male adults in their lives goes a long way in giving boys the confidence and humility to learn from their teachers. Praising effort rather than ability encourages hard work. Setting high expectations as coaches rather than judges in an alliance with your sons will motivate them to perform well in school. (continued)



***“Praising effort rather than ability encourages hard work.”***

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Consider that mothers are most often the key figure in their sons' early learning, and primary teachers are typically female. Boys enter schools surrounded by women telling them to behave and to learn. In two-parent families, it is important that dads become more involved in their sons' learning.

If both parents have high expectations for school learning, boys will take school seriously. When boys hear their dads saying positive things about their mothers and teachers, it reinforces the importance of learning. In homes where there is no dad, a strong male family member or friend can also convey this vital message.

## All-Boy Schools and Classes

Boys' preparatory and military schools have always been effective in helping boys find role models, disciplining themselves, building personal self-confidence, and directing some of their attraction away from girls and toward achievement. In the words of Harvey Hambrick, principal of Marcus Garvey Academy, Detroit: "I'm a firm believer that only a man can raise a boy to be a man. A woman can raise a son, but not a man." The academy seems to be doing well and includes parent involvement and community male volunteers.



## Pencil Anxiety



Remind your sons that "smart" can be slow and thoughtful, and that the first one in class who finishes an assignment is not necessarily the smartest. Boys often have problems with early handwriting skills. They rush through their work in an effort to be first, fast, and smartest.

***"Encourage them to 'hunt and peck' on computers to complete their spelling lessons, stories, and reports."***

Encourage them to "hunt and peck" on computers to complete their spelling lessons, stories, and reports. Early keyboarding classes will facilitate their efficient use of computers. They'll be more likely to love writing. Dictating their stories into tape recorders encourages expression of their ideas. Suggest they create family newsletters and sports adventure stories so their temporary handwriting problems don't escalate to permanent fears about writing.

## Play for Boys



Encourage boys to play with construction and imaginative toys. Reduce exposure to TV and video-game violence because it not only encourages imitation but causes boys to become dependent on overstimulation. For boys who tend to be too rough and physical, minimize wrestling with Dad. They may generalize the wrestling to the playground and get into trouble at school. For boys who are less physical, wrestling with Dad may actually help them build courage and be more relaxed on the playground.

Preventing violence takes more than elimination of guns. Even if you don't buy toy guns or glamorize them, boys seem to invent or create them. Although it's important to differentiate carefully between real guns and toy guns and to minimize guns in your son's toy collection, you'll probably not be able to eradicate them.

***"Read, talk, play board and card games, make up games, and discover the world together."***

Read, talk, play board and card games, make up games, and discover the world together. Some parents actually fear their boys playing dress-up because they believe it isn't masculine. Dress-up, music, and drama encourage boys' imagination; and some doll play helps boys express feelings. If boys experience a variety of play, they're likely to learn a variety of skills.

## Developing Interests and Teaching Sensitivity

It takes a lot of repetition and discussion about gentleness and sensitivity to help your sons contain their energy and direct it toward the many interests available in school and extracurricular activities. Talking and listening to your sons every day is important



for teaching them how to express their feelings. Boys who can talk through their problems and their anger are unlikely to act out in ways that harm others. Teach and model respect for others, both boys and girls.

## Moderating and Enjoying Competition



Team sports have great value for boys. They build family bonding and friendships and teach boys about healthy competition and collaboration. Good sportsmanship should be modeled by mothers, fathers, and coaches. Cheating, disrespect for coaches, and peer cruelty to less coordinated kids are intolerable for children's teams. Families should cheer kids on but avoid putting too much pressure on them. Don't brag about never missing a game. Miss a few from time to time, and permit your son to get himself involved because of his own interest. It will put your children's sports activities into perspective and take sports pressure off. Sports are supposed to be fun, healthy exercise, and good learning. Remind kids that being a good sport means doing their personal best and congratulating the winner!

### PARENT POINTERS\*

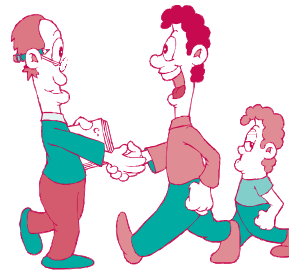
#### Special Talent Coaches as Role Models

When your children select role models who combine excellent qualities with problems, you'll want to communicate to those models carefully so that you can reinforce the beneficial relationship while preventing any potential harm.

- ☺ Contact the teacher or coach, and ask for a private conference without your child's presence.
- ☺ Indicate to the teacher or coach how much you appreciate the inspirational model that he/she has provided for your child.
- ☺ Point out to the teacher that he or she is very important in your child's life and that you want to encourage this positive relationship.
- ☺ Explain that your child has a few small problems that you could use help with.
- ☺ Ask the teacher or coach to help your child receive appropriate messages; for example, to study hard or do homework. Explain to the teacher or coach your concern about leaving avenues open should your child not be successful in his/her special talent.

\*From *Parent Pointers, Learning Leads Q-Cards* by Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D. (1996, Apple Publishing).

## Parent-Teacher Teamwork



Parents should team up for work and fun together, but don't ally with a child against the other parent. Children brought up with anger against their other parent learn that feelings of love and intimacy require enemies. Don't make your spouse, parent, or siblings the enemy; if you do, you'll surely find your child on a team against you some day. Model team leadership by teaching children positive goal-setting instead of anger. This is especially difficult in single-parent families or after divorce. It's worth the effort for your children. Some day they'll develop better relationships as adults.

### *“Team up with your children's teachers.”*

Team up with your children's teachers. Don't blame them when your children are being irresponsible. You and your children share responsibility with teachers for making learning exciting, interesting, and challenging. Children who respect teachers learn more, and children who respect teachers come from families where parents respect teachers.

## Male Role Models

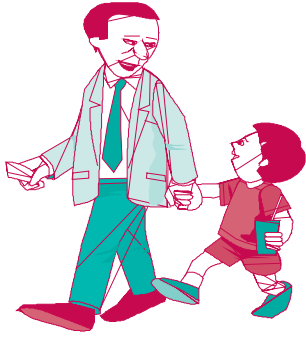


Boys are more likely to achieve if they have emotionally healthy achieving men to look up to. Dads are the best possible role models, as long as they give their sons healthy messages and take the time to be with them. When good dads aren't around, moms and teachers need to search elsewhere. Male teachers, church leaders, coaches, and Boy Scout leaders can be great. Uncles and good neighbors may be willing to help. Biographies of great men in books or films can be inspirational to boys. Mothers can also be effective role models and mentors to boys, but they are likely to be more acceptable to boys if men in the environment validate them. That happens because boys seem to have a need to reassure themselves of their own masculinity.

(continued)

Three characteristics determine who children select as role models. Children tend to select role models who are nurturing, powerful, and those in whom they see similar characteristics to themselves. Boys may choose poor role models like gang members or negative peers if good ones aren't available. Boys also frequently choose sports or media stars who may not always be the best role models.

## Be a Role Model of Success



Walking into your home at the end of the day can give children an image of your workplace role and your work satisfaction. Even when you're tired, add a little energy and optimism to your return home. Your children will assume your

work is positive. They need to know that work helps you feel good about yourself and permits you to make contributions to society. As parents, you can tell your children that you take pride in doing quality work and in fully earning your salaries. Explain that although you may be tired at the end of each workday, your weariness comes with the satisfaction of accomplishment. You can design an achiever image that will help your children develop a good work ethic.

***“Don't complain to your children that your partner works too much.”***

Don't apologize to your children for your careers. Don't complain to your children that your partner works too much. Instead, emphasize what good role models you are and what important work you do. Both your sons and daughters will take new pride in your accomplishments and their own. Despite the pressures of work, even supermoms and superdads should find some time for fun and laughter if they are going to be the excellent role models they'd like to be.

***“Managing schedules and child care can eliminate spontaneity and optimism.”***

The overload of two-career families can cause men and women alike to be rigid home administrators. Managing schedules and child care can eliminate spontaneity and optimism. You may feel as if you're precariously juggling instead of balancing your life.

At least every 6 months, stop and prioritize your activities. Think about who is doing too much and what you may have to eliminate. Busy, active lives can be fun and good training for managing complexity, but too-busy lives cause families to wish for the old days where men were men and women were wives. In a world of equal partnerships, occasional meetings to equalize your life permit your children to see strong and sensitive adults in their lives. Although modeling strength and sensitivity may be hard sometimes, it is most important for all. Search for balance.



## PARENT POINTERS\*

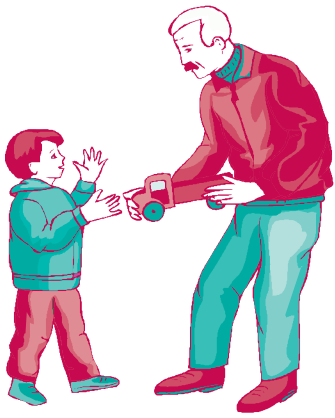
### For Single Mothers Raising Boys

- ✓ Boys should have an older male in their lives to serve as a model. Find effective role models for your boys. Uncles, grandfathers, teachers, Boy Scout leaders, and Big Brothers may all be helpful to your sons in learning to be comfortable with their masculinity.
- ✓ If you don't view your children's natural father as an effective role model, absolutely don't tell your boys how much they look like and remind you of their father, especially when you are angry. If their natural father is or was a good role model, remind your sons of their similarity to him in a positive way.
- ✓ Avoid power struggles with your children's father, but don't accept abuse. If Father mistreats Mother and shows open disrespect, sons are likely to imitate that behavior.
- ✓ Don't complain to your children about their father's lack of financial support. That will cause their father to seem powerful to them. Children unconsciously copy powerful models.



\*From *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades—And What You Can Do About It* by Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D. (1995, Crown Publishing).

## THE CHANGING FAMILY



Families have changed so dramatically that only 3 out of 10 children live in traditional families with two parents in their first or only marriage.<sup>1</sup> Fully, half of children will live in a single-parent household for at least part of their lives. Almost a third live with stepfamilies and 6 percent live with grandparents. The categories of family types beyond the traditional ones include single parent due to divorce, death, abandonment, or mother never married; stepfamily; blended family; foster family; grandparented family; and homosexual family. With all those family differences, parenting effectively provides continuously new challenges.

## More Bad News Than Good

The good news is that children from non-traditional families can't feel alone with being different because they're accustomed to hearing about many different families. Other good news is that many children from non-traditional families grow up to be well-adjusted and happy. Unfortunately, there is more bad news than good. Most single-parent families are father-absent; and father absence contributes greatly to violence, crime, and delinquency among children. Three quarters of adolescents in chemical dependency hospitals, more than 60 percent of teen suicides, and three quarters of teen pregnancies are adolescents from single-parent homes.<sup>2</sup>

Further bad news is that cohabitation has become increasingly the norm. If single parents with children are receiving welfare payments, getting married significantly reduces the amount they receive. A couple would then lose money if they married, but could keep the extra money if they only lived together.<sup>3</sup> That greatly reduces the motivation for family stability.

## How Children Feel About Their Changing Families<sup>4</sup>

Adjusting to divorce, separation, and blending families causes stress, abandonment, and sibling issues. A recent study of 467 children from diverse families found that most children were surprised and confused about the separation or divorce because they weren't provided with knowledge beforehand and had little opportunity to ask questions.

Children who were able to talk to their parents about their problems related to divided households adapted better than those who had little information. Approximately half of the children who lived in divided households responded positively about their divided lives. Of course, that also means that half did not, so there are many that need support and help.

A parent's death has a dramatic impact on children. Immediate regression behaviors like sleeping problems, anger, and worry are common. Even after time, these children often cope with confidence and preoccupation with illness problems (Barr-Harris).<sup>5</sup>



## DO YOU HAVE DAUGHTERS?

Get the Jane books by Dr. Sylvia Rimm:  
*See Jane Win®: The Rimm Report on How 1,000 Girls Became Successful Women* (NY Times Bestseller and featured on Oprah); Companion volume to *How Jane Won: 55 Successful Women Share How They Grew From Ordinary Girls to Extraordinary Women*; and *See Jane Win® for Girls: A Smart Girls Guide to Success*.

Call 1-800-795-7466 to order,  
or visit [www.seejanewin.com](http://www.seejanewin.com).  
Also available at book stores  
everywhere.



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2003. Rainbow Statistics: A Generation At Risk. <http://www.rainbows.org/statistics.html>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau report, Child Support and Alimony; 1989, released Oct 11, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> America's Changing Family by Aida Aki, December 2, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Children's Views of Their Changing Families by Judy Dunn and Kirby Deater-Deckard, September, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Death Statistics, 2003. Rainbow Statistics: A Generation At Risk, <http://www.rainbow.org/statistics.html>.

## What Non-Traditional Families Can Do To Raise Happy, Well-Adjusted Children

While raising children in non-traditional families can be more difficult, here are some suggestions for all kinds of families:

1. If you're having marriage problems, get counseling to improve the relationship before considering divorce or separation. Marriages are never perfect, but your children are likely to be happier if you can stay together in a respectful relationship.
2. If you've made a decision to separate or divorce, take time to explain to children what's happening, assuring them that they can continue to love both parents and be loved by both as well, provided those are likely possibilities.
3. If you have always been a single parent, explain to your children at an age-appropriate level the reasons that you are the only parent and reassure the children that you are capable of parenting them well. Don't share your worries and anxieties with your children. That's what counselors and friends are for.
4. Don't confide inappropriate adult details to your children—whether you are married, single, separated, or divorced.
5. Homosexual parents should help children with appropriate language and explanations for their difference, so that children will feel comfortable responding to questions by adults and other children.
6. Help children gradually build positive relationships with stepparents and stepsiblings. One-to-one time with a stepparent can be very effective for developing closeness.
7. Consider that sibling rivalry will be expressed in very different ways in blended families. Sibling rivalry is very natural even when children don't express it openly.
8. Don't treat children like adults if you lead a single-parent family.
9. Children benefit by having same- and opposite-sexed role models. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, teachers, coaches, and Scout leaders can all be helpful to your children.



10. Single-parent-led families can get together with other families to maximize feelings of togetherness and fun for holidays and vacations.
11. Single adults should be sure to preserve some time for adult relationships without children present.
12. Don't despair. Many non-traditional families raise successful, happy children.

### **Family Achievement Clinic** **Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D., Director**

Family Achievement Clinic specializes in working with capable children who are not performing to their abilities in school. Gifted children are the clinic's specialty. The clinic also offers a comprehensive range of psychological services centered on children, adolescents, and their families. Services include therapy for underachievement syndrome, attention deficit disorders, anxieties, and oppositional problems; as well as parenting and marriage therapy, divorce counseling, and career planning.

**For appointments,**  
**Cleveland, OH 216-839-2273**  
**Hartland, WI 800-795-7466**



## Sylvia Says...

**Dear Dr. Sylvia:**

*I have a gifted 10-year-old daughter who was an only child until her mother*

*remarried and had another child. Her half-sister is almost 3 years old, and my daughter expresses irrational jealousy towards her. She's also a bit of a bully to her.*

*I understand the reason for this behavior, but I'm wondering how to turn this situation around. I'm an "every-other-weekend dad," so I need to work with my daughter's mom, and we get along reasonably well. Her mom seems to be at her wit's end and mostly yells at my daughter when she acts this way.*

Here are some suggestions for you and your ex-wife. For you, you can assure your daughter that it's natural for a child who's been an only child for 7 years to have jealous feelings about a new sister, so she doesn't have to feel guilty about those feelings. What will help her to cope with her jealousy is for her to take the role of helper or babysitter for her little sister. She could read to her or teach her colors or letters. She can help her to bathe, or teach her to dress herself. Her mother will be so impressed that her helping behavior will get her the wanted attention. While she's with you, she can make gifts for her sister, and you can tell her how lucky she is to have someone to share her skills with. Be sure not to ally with your daughter against her mother. That will only exacerbate the problem.



For your former wife, you can suggest that once a week she arrange for her younger daughter to stay home with her husband or a babysitter, so she can have a special date with her older daughter alone.

In both homes it would be important for your daughter to hear positive adult talk about her. If adults constantly refer to your daughter's jealousy within her hearing, she'll feel like she can't change her negative behavior. If she hears about how helpful she's become, she'll live up to those positive expectations.

Columns in this newsletter are from Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids newspaper column. If the column is not in your local paper, call 310-337-7003 and speak to Margo Sugrue at Creators Syndicate.

You may send questions to Dr. Rimm at PO Box 32, Watertown, WI 53094 or [DrRimm@sylviarimm.com](mailto:DrRimm@sylviarimm.com)

Sylvia Rimm On Raising Kids Newspaper Column online at [www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures.html](http://www.creators.com/lifestylefeatures.html) (next, click Dr. Rimm's picture)



## A Teacher Tribute and Personal Memorial to Fred Mosteller, Ph. D.\*

About a dozen years ago, my husband and I hosted Dr. Fred Mosteller at a private dinner. Fred was a Professor Emeritus at Harvard, former Chair of the Department of Statistics and the chief developer of a probability and statistics course on public television in the late 60's. He not only made major contributions in his field but heightened interest and awareness of probability and statistics in the general public. My husband explained to Fred that I was interested in the childhoods of gifted individuals and asked if Fred would share a little bit about his childhood. I was both excited and embarrassed. Although I was intensely interested, I feared we may have been putting Fred in an awkward or confidential position.

Fred hesitantly began his story. He said, "I was an only child. I wasn't really much of an achiever in school and the school kept me back a second year in kindergarten. From first through third grade, I wasn't doing much of anything. My mother continuously came in to see the teachers and complained to them about their teaching. I never got along with my father, and neither did my mother. They eventually were divorced. You might say I was an underachiever."

As Fred stared off into space and quietly described his childhood, I, the "theoretical" expert in underachievement, counted off all the risk factors that lead to underachievement. He had them all. Then, with an especially dreamy expression on his face, Fred continued: "In fourth grade, I fell in love with my teacher. Actually, I think I'm still in love with her. She was a first-year teacher and only stayed at the school for a year. I think she left to get married after that. I don't know what she did, but I liked her so much that I started to learn and loved learning. Nothing could stop me after that."

Fred recently passed away at age 85. He achieved much and his contributions to the field of statistics will outlive him. This particular story is a tribute to his teacher and all teachers who take the time and have the commitment to inspire their students.

\*From article entitled When Overempowerment Yields Underachievement—Strategies to Adjust, *Parenting for High Potential Magazine*, March, 2007. Used with permission of National Association for Gifted Children.

## TEACHER TIP\*

### Four-Star Day for In-Seat Behavior<sup>6</sup>



The teacher has a private conference with the child and parent to explain how important sitting at the desk is.



The example of pretending to put glue on a child's bottom makes the instruction graphic.

Teacher definition of sitting should be anything in approximation to contact with the chair; for example, one leg on the chair should be considered sitting.



The teacher divides the day into four parts: morning to recess, recess to lunch, lunch to recess, and recess until the end of the day. The teacher explains to the child that each part of the day that the child is in-seat earns a star on a card. The goal is four stars. Three stars can be a temporary goal for the first week. Emphasize that stars are earned only for sitting.



The child brings the card home to the parent (or child advocate in school) at the end of each day. If the child receives four stars, the child earns a home prize, game, attention, points toward a gift, or weekend activity.



The parent is cautioned privately to be encouraged and not too easily disappointed. The first four-star day may take time to accomplish, but much else will fall into place while the child concentrates on sitting.



<sup>6</sup> The Four-Star Day plan can be used for other behaviors like maintaining eye contact, beginning work immediately, or keeping hands off others. From *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades—And What You Can Do About It* by Sylvia B. Rimm, Ph.D. (1995, Crown Publishing).