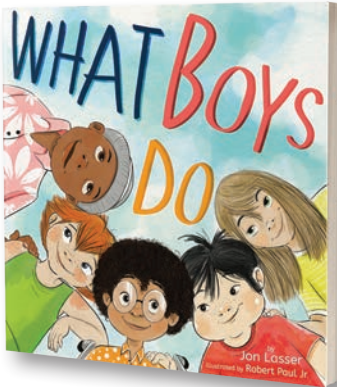




Support Your Boy's Healthy Development



What exactly do boys do? The answer is ANYTHING and EVERYTHING! From eating to dreaming, making mistakes to exploring, to hurting and loving, there is more to being a boy than meets the eye. *What Boys Do* by Jon Lasser, PhD, is a fun, affirming book that holds no restraints to traditional norms about what it means to be a boy.

Here's an adapted excerpt from Dr. Lasser's Reader's Note with strategies to support boys.

In the case of boys, we often think in terms of stereotypes of masculinity. In many Western cultures, boys are expected to be tough, stoic, self-confident, independent, aggressive, assertive, ambitious, and insensitive. This gender role may be transmitted to boys at a very young age.

Many psychologists and educators are concerned that gender role stereotypes can be harmful to boys and men...Boys and girls may function best when they can integrate qualities that are masculine and feminine. When restricted to the qualities associated with one gender, children may be limited in their potential. Adults can facilitate the healthy development of boys by supporting their personhood rather than the more narrowly defined boyhood.

Ways We Can Help Boys

Read diverse books to boys. Look for books that feature male and female characters with diverse interests. Boys may enjoy stories that show girls as strong heroes, or stories in which boys have opportunities to be creative and loving.

Engage in imaginative play with boys. Playing house or school involves interpersonal communication, role-play, and imagination. Through play, you communicate that boys can take on nurturing roles.

Support boys' goals and interests. All too often we assume that a boy wants to play a sport or play with toy trucks. Many boys do have such interests, and it's good to support them. Even so, some boys have an interest in dance or theater. Provide boys with a variety of options and support them in pursuing that which aligns with their interests.

Help boys see that there are many ways to be a boy/man. Though gender role stereotypes are powerful, there are countless examples in our communities of boys and men who have both masculine and feminine qualities. When you observe them, point them out to boys.

Practice unconditional positive regard for boys. We have an opportunity to express love and acceptance of boys regardless of their gender expression. Though some may criticize boys who deviate from gender stereotypes, we can promote healthy development by accepting boys for being who they are.

Boys can experience a range of feelings and behaviors. We can help boys by showing them that there are many ways to be a boy, and support boys for being who they are.

This Article's Author

Jon Lasser, PhD, is a psychologist, school psychologist, professor, and program director of the school psychology program at Texas State University. At Texas State, he has developed and taught graduate courses for the school psychology program and has also taught the freshman first-year experience course. Jon holds a bachelor's degree in Plan II liberal arts from the University of Texas at Austin, a master's degree in human sexuality education from the University of Pennsylvania, and a doctorate in school psychology from the University of Texas at Austin.