



Supporting the Well-Being of Boys and Young Men — For Parents & Caregivers

As a parent or caregiver of a boy, you are on the frontlines of what it means to be a young man today. Boys still face traditional pressures and expectations—for example, to be strong, tough, independent or confident—yet the meaning of masculinity is shifting and expanding in new and different ways. It can be hard to know how to best support boys, including trans boys and nonbinary youth, through the multifaceted experiences of being part of a military family.

Next Gen Men is a leading organization on engaging boys and young men on topics like mental health, healthy relationships and gender equality.

This tip sheet is shaped by one simple belief: that when it comes to his well-being and positive development, your relationship with your boy matters more than anything else.

“Research on resilience confirms that a boy is better able to stay afloat when he has at least one ally: someone who validates who he is, cares about what he wants, and will stand by him no matter what.”
— Michael Reichert, PhD, author and psychologist.



Three Ideas for Stronger Relationships with Boys and Young Men

USE EFFECTIVE ENTRY POINTS

An entry point is how you start a conversation. An effective entry point is the art of starting a conversation in a place where a young person feels comfortable, and then walking together towards a place that is potentially more challenging, such as a parental absence. We know that boys are keen to have deep conversations, but sometimes they might need help getting there.

Consider starting with:

- The right timing—make sure you and your boy are in the right headspace to have the conversation.
- Closed questions—use yes or no questions, as opposed to open-ended questions.

 Instead of...	 Try...
"How was your day?"	"Did you have gym today?"
"Good"	"Yeah."
"..."	"Are you guys still doing basketball?"
	"Uh-huh."
	"Was it fun or boring?"
	"It was fun."
	"What made it fun?"
	etc.

- A familiar topic (for example, Next Gen Men programs often begin conversations about mental health by discussing why a top player in the NBA wouldn't ask for help).

PRACTICE CONSENT CULTURE IN CONVERSATIONS

Asking for consent within everyday conversations lays the groundwork for more vulnerable or meaningful conversations because it shakes up the familiar power imbalance between you and your boy. We've seen that when boys and young men have a sense of control alongside their vulnerability, they're likely to be more active and willing participants in meaningful conversations.

Consider asking:

- "Can I ask you a question?"
- "Do you want my advice?"

UNDERSTAND SCREEN TIME

Relocations are an inevitable part of what it means to be a military family, and online communication is often an invaluable tool for young people to maintain connections with peers. While you should encourage your boy to build and maintain a social network in your local community, try not to dismiss the importance of his online life. While some online behaviour, like endlessly scrolling video apps, can be isolating, others, like playing video games with friends, can be a dynamic source of social connection.

Consider learning about:

- Who your boy is connected with online and why they matter to him.
- What he is doing when he's spending 'screen time'.

Jackson: Parents just don't understand how much of, like, our social life happens online. Like for me, a solid chunk of my social life is online. I mean, I do hang out with my, my real life friends a lot, but like, my parents just don't get how many people...like, how we can connect. And like, they just don't. And it makes me angry sometimes.

Interviewer: How do you know they don't understand?

Jackson: Because like, they, they say, oh, online friends aren't real. Like, aren't real friends.

Interviewer: Right.

Jackson: Like, they think you can't form bonds or anything with them.

Michael: Me and Parker are online friends and he's my closest friend.

Jackson: Yeah, exactly.

— Excerpt from Next Gen Men's research report, **Boys Will Be _: The Online Lives of Boys Who Are Embracing Positive Masculinity.**

As Boys Grow Up

CHILDREN AGES 0-5	CHILDREN 6-12	CHILDREN 13+
Researchers have found that young boys' brains are highly sensitive and emotionally fragile, which means they need more nurturing, comforting and responsive parenting than we have traditionally thought.	Boyhood culture demands emotional toughness and invulnerability, which means boys need parents and caregivers to validate their feelings and hold space for their authentic selves.	Independence is often at the centre of adolescent boys' lives, but they also need interdependence: the knowledge that they are held in trusted relationships from which they can grow for the rest of their lives.

"While they search for a buddy or two, boys will be fortified by the unconditional acceptance of their parents. What will matter in the long run is that each boy believes he has some backing, some refuge, and that he is not wholly dependent on forces beyond his control." — Michael Reichert, PhD, author and psychologist.

Resources

- Next Gen Men's Resource Library <https://www.nextgenmen.ca/library>
- Next Gen Men's Blogs <https://www.nextgenmen.ca/blog>
- Next Gen Men's Facilitation Tools <https://shop.nextgenmen.ca/collections/facilitation-tools>
- The Military Family Services Program and local MFRC supports at cfmws.ca or on the 24/7 Family Information Line 1-800-866-4546
- Short-term counselling for children in military families through the Canadian Forces Member Assistance Program 24/7 line 1-800-268-7708
- Crisis Texting Service for Kids or CAF Families at [Youth Crisis Texting Service | CFMWS](#)
- And of course Kids Help Phone at kidshelpphone.ca or 1-800-668-6868—you can still call as an adult who is concerned about a kid and wants advice!

LEARN MORE.

