

## **Mind, Body, Spirit**

Teaching boys is exciting, surprising, challenging, frustrating, exhausting but above all rewarding. It is the joy of teaching boys that attracts many teachers to boys' schools. But it is necessary for teachers to understand how boys are different to girls and how to work with boys during their years of adolescence. Parents of boys will already have a very good idea about how a boy thinks and behaves. However, it is essential for the overall development of an adolescent boy that teachers and parents work together.

So what do boys need and how can we provide balance in their lives? The three key ingredients are mind, body and spirit\*.

I have always believed that boys are simple creatures, certainly when compared to girls! A boy's mind is not overly complicated but does get confused when regular routines are broken. Boys need consistency in their lives and this starts with a safe environment both at school and at home. By safe environment I mean a place where a boy feels secure, comfortable and where there is order. There must be clear expectations for his behaviour with clearly defined boundaries of what is acceptable and what is not. He needs to understand that should he step over those boundaries then there will be consequences. The best way of providing boys with this consistency is to establish a well-defined routine – and stick to it! As teachers and parents, we need to be predictable in our behaviour so that the signals that boys receive are clear and consistent. After all, our aim is to provide a supporting environment in which a boy can learn and grow.

Boys love praise and encouragement no matter their age. Indeed, a Form 7 boy is just as much in need of adult recognition than a younger boy. We need boys to feel that they are genuinely appreciated and valued. There is nothing more important in teaching and parenting than encouraging a boy and supporting him when things do invariably go wrong.

Research has shown that the most important issue in the mind of a boy is his relationship with classmates. Boys crave for acceptance and recognition from peers which is why he sees mateship as being so important. Boys learn from each other and the relationships with classmates that are forged while at school will often last for life.

It might be an obvious comment, but boys need to move, and move a great deal! While our classrooms and homes restrict such movement the fact remains that a boy must move frequently in order to stay focused. Regular activity is essential and boys need to take advantage of recess, lunch, PE classes and sports training to keep in good shape and to sharpen their minds. This does not mean that he must remain inactive in class. Boys learn best when they are processing information by 'doing' rather than simply by listening. Stimulating activities and plenty of variation help boys stay on track and remain attentive in class and at home.

One of the joys of teaching boys is that they are funny. Boys laugh a great deal, often to the complete bewilderment of adults! They have a wonderful sense of humour and look for fun in almost any setting. Adults need to recognise what boys see as fun and help them channel their enjoyment into a love of learning.

At times boys can appear fragile and insecure. Boys are highly emotional yet often prefer to keep those emotions to themselves. This can lead to confusion, anxiety and depression. It is our responsibility as adults to encourage boys to express their emotions and for them to be made aware of the emotions of others. There is no better place than an all boys' school for a boy to be himself and to learn how to act as a male.

Observe boys at play or in the classroom and you will notice that they are highly competitive. Boys look for a challenge in all activities and in most cases will strive to win. As adults, it is our responsibility to channel this competitiveness in a positive direction and to show boys how to be good sportsmen.

We are blessed at St. Paul's College in having such a wonderful group of boys. I encourage teachers and parents to cherish their uniqueness and embrace their many qualities. The boys need our wisdom and guidance!

J R Kennard

\*Last year I read an article written by Mr. Brewster Ely the Headmaster of Town School for Boys in San Francisco. Mr. Ely wrote to his teachers outlining the characteristics of boys and what it means to teach in a boys' school. His work focused on the three main ingredients of that task: mind, body and spirit. Some of his key ideas have been encapsulated in this assembly address.