

Michael Auden's Teaching Boys Emotional Literacy

Interactive Training Modules



A Boy's Identity

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The Village Teacher
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“Who am I?”

“Who am I?” is a question oft-repeated by teenagers, though you may not voice it out loud or use precisely those words. One of the biggest challenges that you face during the transition between childhood and adulthood is this struggle with your own sense of identity. For one thing, it seems to constantly shift: you may act one way with a particular group of peers and completely different with another. There is a sense of being “neither here nor there”, also. You are so often in a state of becoming that it can be difficult, at any one time, to pinpoint exactly where you are.

Part of the confusion is caused by hormonal changes, which are occurring so rapidly at this stage in your life. Your appearance is undergoing a radical transformation; your body not only looks but also feels different. You’re suddenly confronted with issues that you’d given little thought to before: body odour, oily hair and acne, needing to shave. The way that you see yourself in the mirror has a big impact upon your self-image. It’s human nature to want to identify who we are with the way our bodies are, and when changes are happening so quickly it can be hard to form a clear picture.

Teachers and parents often wonder why even previously obedient kids will suddenly start questioning everything that they’re told once they reach their teen years.

Though it looks like nothing more than rebellion (and that may be part of it), what you are really doing is exploring your own independence and preparing for the life of responsibility that lies ahead of you. If growing up means that you have to learn to think for yourself and make your own choices, then you can’t take other people’s word for anything – even if those people are your teachers or parents.

Ironically, though, the opinions of your friends and acquaintances become very important at this age even as you are rejecting your parents' overtures.

Here is another area where your sense of identity can become clouded, because you start comparing yourself to everyone else. They may worry about why you're developing earlier or later than your peers in certain areas.

Because puberty and adolescence are such confusing transitions, you can feel a strong urge to check your own progress alongside that of another, or to gravitate to people who, for all outward appearances, seem to have it all figured out. No wonder you end up questioning who you really are, after having spent so much time imitating others.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is still as common today as it was in the past - maybe even more so with the increasing importance attached to music, computer games and fashion. At the start of your teens, you start new schools, experiment with new things and everyone is expected to be clones all doing the same thing all of the time; if you don't you get left out or bullied but then as you get older attitudes change. Whether you go with peer pressure or not you still get hassle - just in different ways.

As an indication of peer pressure and individuality, here are some rough guidelines which outline how we develop our identities through the crucial teenage period.

- From the ages of 11 - 12, full group identity is predominant.
- From the ages of 12 - 13, full group identity is still at the fore with elements of individual identity creeping in.
- At ages 13 - 14, we develop stronger personal identities while still holding on to a group identity too.
- At ages 15 - 16, we have usually carved out our own identities within a group.
- From the age of 17, onwards we have usually created our own full identity, either in or out of a group.

Here is one Researcher's advice on how to deal with the constant shifting of group dynamics. You never know, it could work for you...

I'm lucky in that I managed to stay friends with everyone, both in the 'cool' crowd and those who weren't. It has to be said that I have much more fun now with those who weren't considered cool as they're not afraid to act as themselves rather than 'Sweet High' stereotypes. With the other group, we started clubbing at about 15 and went out to pubs even earlier and there was much more pressure within the group to be something you weren't. I've since been told by several of what was the 'cool' crowd that they really respect me for being able to handle both sides to the pressure and quite a few of them have said that they would have liked to have been able to have my way of thinking and be friends with everyone.

In my leaving book I had about 60 messages, probably 50 of which were sincerely written by true friends. In the 'cool' crowds leaving books there were about 15 messages half of whom I know were insincere as they have spent the past two years moaning about each other and saying how they can't wait to get away from each other. So in response to conforming to peer pressure in order to fit in, while it might seem necessary in your early teens, as the years go on you'll be much happier being yourself as you'll end up with much more respect.

Every kid reaches that age where they struggle to discover who they really are. It is natural to the process of growing up. We stop defining ourselves by our family, and start defining ourselves by our friends. We naturally want to push the limits, push our bodies, and push the rules. During this time, our dreams and feelings are larger than life, and Oh-so-real. As young adults, all we want is to be taken seriously, and to be heard. The teenage years are a beautiful, fragile time in which children become adults.

Two Page Plan – Identity

Boys are busy trying to build an identity for themselves. If they are not successful at school then that ID may be built upon physical skill, clothing or even aggression or humour.

List some of the characteristics you notice boys using to care out an identity niche for themselves.

What ideas have you become aware of in this session that help you understand a boy's need to be accepted on his own terms?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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