

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My boys are always wrestling and rough-housing. I worry that they will become too violent. My husband says they are just “being boys.” Who’s right?

ANSWER: Most boys enjoy being physical. The testosterone surging in their bodies makes them want to move around, test their strength, and act more aggressively than females (a generalization, of course). This need to touch, run, throw, kick and wrestle is not usually appreciated by females. It seems disruptive, chaotic, rebellious and even dangerous.

Research now supports the importance of wrestling and play fighting in the healthy development of boys to men. This behavior helps boys learn to control and be aware of their strength. It helps them manage anger and aggression. Fathers can be extremely helpful in this area of development by wrestling with their sons. Sons learn to take their strength and aggression to a limit, and then pull back.

Males learn best through physical, “hands on” activities. Generally, they gravitate toward toys they can throw, kick, blow up, and/or use as tools or weapons. Educational experiences that allow boys to accomplish something physical, observable, and measurable are the most effective and the most desirable. Boys find their greatest sense of worth and fulfillment through this type of accomplishment (i.e. Building, creating, testing, and competing).

Recess and physical education are immensely important in order for boys to work off their energies. They will do much better in situations that require them to “sit and be still” if they are allowed to expend most of their physical energy FIRST. Often, boys will be far more willing to talk if they are partially occupied by a physical task (e.g. Boys will open up more easily if they are building with *Legos* at the same time. Psychotherapy terms this technique “play-talk”).

Bottom line...fathers are usually better at gauging this type of behavior than mothers. Mothers are usually better at reading boys’ feelings and moods. That’s why God would like kids to have both parents around. Research indicates that boys who learn to control their strength and aggression early are LESS likely statistically to have problems with violence and anger as they grow into men. Sadly, our jails are filled with young men who have never learned to control their anger and physical responses.)

Be aware of how your boys are doing while they rough-house. If they are enjoying it and are able to control it, they are OK. This activity can also be a great bonding experience between siblings and/or father.

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P.S. There are some great new books on raising boys at your local Christian book stores. Check out: Raising a Modern Day Knight by Lewis and Bringing Up Boys by Dobson