

North America's Lost Boys – What to Do?

Written by Ginny Grimsley
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As Adolescent Male Achievement Declines,
Author Says, 'Get Outside!'

There is bad news for boys in North America: they are being blown out of the water by girls in academic achievement, and psychologists say young men are becoming more socially awkward, making relationships with young women difficult.

Sidney Gale, a medical doctor and author of *Unto the Breach* (www.sidneygale.com), an outdoor adventures book for boys, is concerned about the following statistics:

- Boys are 30 percent more likely than girls to drop out or flunk out of school. In Canada, five boys drop out for every three girls.
- Boys are underperforming girls at every level, from elementary to grad school.
- Boys are less likely than girls to get bachelor's of arts (44% vs. 56%) and graduate degrees, (45% vs. 55%).

In addition, young men in college are increasingly socially inexperienced, which means they're less likely to go on dates or otherwise step out of their comfort zone, says Stanford University psychology professor Philip Zimbardo. In general, males were never as sophisticated as females in verbal and bodily communication, but it's gotten worse.

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Excessive hours of solitary video-game play and internet use likely account for atrophied social skills, Zimbardo says.

“We need to get boys out of their solitary bedrooms and into the sun,” Gale says. “It’s also a good idea to get them reading something other than tweets, texts and the like. They have intellect, and we should encourage them to use it.”

Gale offers ideas to help boys even the achievement and social gap:

- **Camp:** Summer is a perfect opportunity to consider varied activity for young boys. Gale, an avid seaman, says sailing camps encourage teamwork, physical activity and navigation skills.
- **Read novels:** Physical isolation has significant effects on one’s mental state and will stymie social skills. While reading is an activity pursued alone, reading novels can be very therapeutic, he says. They take readers beyond their daily lives, illustrate the workings of human relationships and increase language skills. They can also teach social- and problem-solving skills.
- **Get social – both boys and parents:** Children pick up on parental behaviors. If Mom and Dad do nothing but work and vegetate at home, chances are good that boys are just doing the same. Leave the house, together, when you can. Recreational activities are ideal; however, simply shopping together is an easy way to get boys out. “Talk to them on the way to the store,” Gale says. “It sounds simple, but we are so inundated with technology in every part of our daily lives that an in-person conversation should not be taken for granted.”

Like anything worthwhile, a boy’s development takes time and effort, he notes.

“The old idea of a boy was one who longed for adventure, like Tom Sawyer or the Hardy Boys,” he says. “As with any of today’s issues concerning children, parents need to be vigilant so they can lead their sons to a successful and socially active life.”

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About Sidney Gale

Sidney Gale is the penname for Ian Blumer, a physician who has published a number of non-fiction books. He has been a specialty doctor in the Toronto area since 1985. “Unto the Breach” is his first work of fiction.