



BUILDING BOYS BULLETIN

with Jennifer L. W. Fink



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Boys & war

JENNIFER L.W. FINK

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READ IN APP ↗

“It’s like Red Dawn!”

That was the reaction of one of my sons to video showing Hamas gunmen descending upon an Israeli music festival via paraglider.

I didn’t hear fear or dread or horror in my son’s voice. I detected excitement. And I was disturbed. I’m trying to raise good humans, and my son is *not* horrified by a human crisis? By death, destruction, and devastation?

Is he a horrible person? Am I a terrible, ineffective parent?

No.

Our boys’ reaction to war may be very different than ours, and that’s okay. I learned that lesson back in 2020, when the United States killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. So much has happened in the world since then that you may not remember that specific incident, but I do because 1) my then-teens came home that day joking about the prospect of World War III and 2) I pitched an article to the *New York Times* about my experience.

It can be so disturbing to hear our boys say insensitive things during times of crisis and calamity. And when we’re on edge —

as most of us are right now — it's all too easy to snap at our boys and berate them for their lack of empathy. **Boys, though, don't perceive or process war the same way their parents do.** Most haven't lived long enough to experience serious pain or loss. Their not-yet-fully developed brains aren't great at forecasting consequences; they are impulsive and attuned to excitement and novelty.

AND they've grown up in a culture that uses war as entertainment. They've seen *Top Gun*, *Star Wars*, and *Avengers: Infinity War*. Played *Fortnite* and

Call of Duty and engaged in lightsaber battles, sword fights, and Nerf shoot-outs. Most of our boys (thankfully!) only “understand” war in the most abstract sense. The wars they know are either fictional, historical, or far away.



[Photo by Ivan Samkov via Pexels](#)

We should not shame our boys for their limited understanding of war.

We should not expect mature responses from immature human beings. We should remind ourselves (& others!) that boys perceive and process war differently than we do. Young boys may “play war” and write or draw battles. School-age, middle school, and high school-aged boys are likely encountering (& sharing) all kinds of war memes and videos online.

Teenagers and young adults may express a desire to go to war and “kick some ass.” Boys of all ages may imagine themselves as heroes and/or say incredibly dumb, stupid, insensitive things. **Each of these reactions is normal.**

Our boys need our help to understand current events. They need support to develop empathy, understanding, and self-control. So, open your heart, open your mind, and get curious about your boys' play, comments, and reactions. Stifle your urge to lecture or punish and ask questions instead. Engage in age-appropriate conversations, reassure them of their safety, and seek support from other adults, as needed, so you can respond with care and compassion.

Here's to building boys!

Jennifer

P.S. Talking to boys about tough stuff is not easy. That's why Janet (my ON BOYS co-host) & I are offering an interactive, online course soon, **Talk with Boys Like a PRO (about anything & everything!)**. Stay tuned for details!

IN THE NEWS

[This Noted Feminist is Really Worried About Men's Problems](#)

Highlights:

- "Boys are more likely to be medicated at school for disruptive behaviour. They're more likely to become addicted to alcohol, drugs or pornography, more likely to join a gang, more likely to be involved in violence...**Until we can start talking about those problems, we're just gonna have a coming generation of boys who are becoming angrier and angrier.**"
- Ours "sons have now grown up in an era where we keep saying the future is female."

[More Than 1 in 7 Men Have No Close Friends. The Way We Socialize Boys is to Blame.](#)

Highlights:

- "Research...shows that boys are just as likely as girls to disclose personal feelings to their same-sex friends and they are just as talented at being able to sense their friends' emotional states"

- “By the time boys are in their teens, they’re conditioned to prize achievement and competition and to devalue intimate friendships with other boys”
- “Guys learn to process emotions on their own, or turn to a female friend, a romantic partner or a sister”
- “The highest suicide rates are seen among single men in their 40s and 50s, and experts suspect that this trend is caused in great part by loneliness and the social expectations that help *create* loneliness.”
- “Whenever there’s a social problem this pervasive, we have a tendency to put the entire onus on the individual rather...But it takes *both* collective and individual action to create change.”
- “We need to allow boys and young men to explore the full range of who they are, what they feel and what they want in life, even if that doesn’t line up with stereotypical ideas of masculinity.”

How to Talk to Children About the Violence in in Israel & Gaza

Highlights:

- “Older children with access to the internet should be encouraged to be skeptical of videos shared on social media and offered help with evaluating news sources”
- Children “need context more than our opinions or political positions.”

Teen Boys: The Rippling Effect of a Mother’s Touch

Highlights:

- “When it comes to teen boys, **‘hugs’– albeit, not the traditional kind – come in all shapes and sizes.** Sometimes they come in the form of a knuckle bump or a high five.”
- “Oftentimes, teenage boys feel that any parental touch or show of affection is a sign of childish weakness and, in turn, parents often unwittingly pull away”
- “It’s important to respect our child’s desire – or lack of desire – for affection, but most teenage boys need and welcome their mother’s touch when it’s given in small increments and at the right time.”

I Work at an Ivy League School. My Son Wants to Apply Elsewhere.

Highlights:

- “I now see that **my son has benefited far more from his own growing sense of independence than any attempts I made to cultivate his future success.**”
- “Raising children is a never-ending act of sacrificial love, but it can also drift dangerously close to socially-sanctioned narcissism.”
- “Students would sit in my office and agonize as they tried to distinguish between what they wanted to study and what their parents expected them to achieve.”

6 Ways to Get Teen Boys to Open Up & Engage in Deeper Conversations

Highlights:

- “Parents often assume that if their son is in emotional pain, the best — or only — solution is for him to talk about how he’s feeling.. However, **having a discussion can make a kid feel worse by causing him to ruminate about the problem.** Instead, Dr. Damour suggests offering comforts...”
- “Texting is a very powerful way to have conversations with boys, and there’s no shame in that,” says Dr. Damour... A key advantage is that texting is asynchronous: You can ask a question or raise a topic, and your kid can see it and sit on it for two hours before responding.
- “Whether your son says, ‘That’s pathetic, Mom,’ or gives you the silent treatment, **it’s easy to go down that rabbit hole and decide he hates you.**” **He doesn’t.**

The Influence of Influencers: How to Tackle Andrew Tate in Schools

Highlights:

- “**Positive change is only possible when we position ourselves alongside boys rather than against them.**”
- “We need to see the sacredness of children in our classrooms. Even the hard-edged, joking teenage boys who don’t think they need anything more than what they’ve got. *Especially* them.”

- **“We need to view the next generation of men with hope—not as problems to be fixed, or just as allies for girls and women, but as fellow stakeholders in the movement for gender justice.”**

ON BOYS Podcast

Dr. Friendtastic on Boys & Friendship



Boys are twice as likely as girls to be friendless in middle school.

And by adulthood, 1 in 5 men say they don't have any close friends.

*“Dr. Friendtastic” - Dr. Eileen Kennedy-Moore
Psychologist and Author
*Moody, Moody Cars**

on-boys-podcast.com or anywhere you listen to podcasts

On BuildingBoys

How to Raise a Decent Human Being

...if we want peace in this world, we need to begin in our own homes.

The ways in which we raise our children affects them profoundly — it colors their perception of normal and acceptable, and teaches them what is tolerable and what is not. The way we treat our children is reflected in the ways they treat others. (Will they always follow our example? No. But our example will always stick in their heads.)...

Place your trust in love, not hate.