

# **RAISING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY BOYS IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

Matt Dunatchik, MSED, LPCC and Libby Steele, MSED, LPC

*Adolescent and Family Therapists, Gestalt Columbus*

10/23/2019

# INTRODUCTION AND AGENDA

## **Goals for workshop:**

- Understanding “boy culture” and societal expectations of boys
- Helping boys understand and express their emotions
- Guiding boys through modeling, self-expression, and emotional connection
- Understanding that anger is not “bad”
- Helping boys to navigate their digital world with integrity
- Setting loving limits with them

# TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

- Includes elements of "anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence" –American Psychological Association
- Constricted view leading to aggression, homophobia, misogyny, bullying, sexual harassment
- Repression of true self and true emotions
- “Toxic Masculinity”

# TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

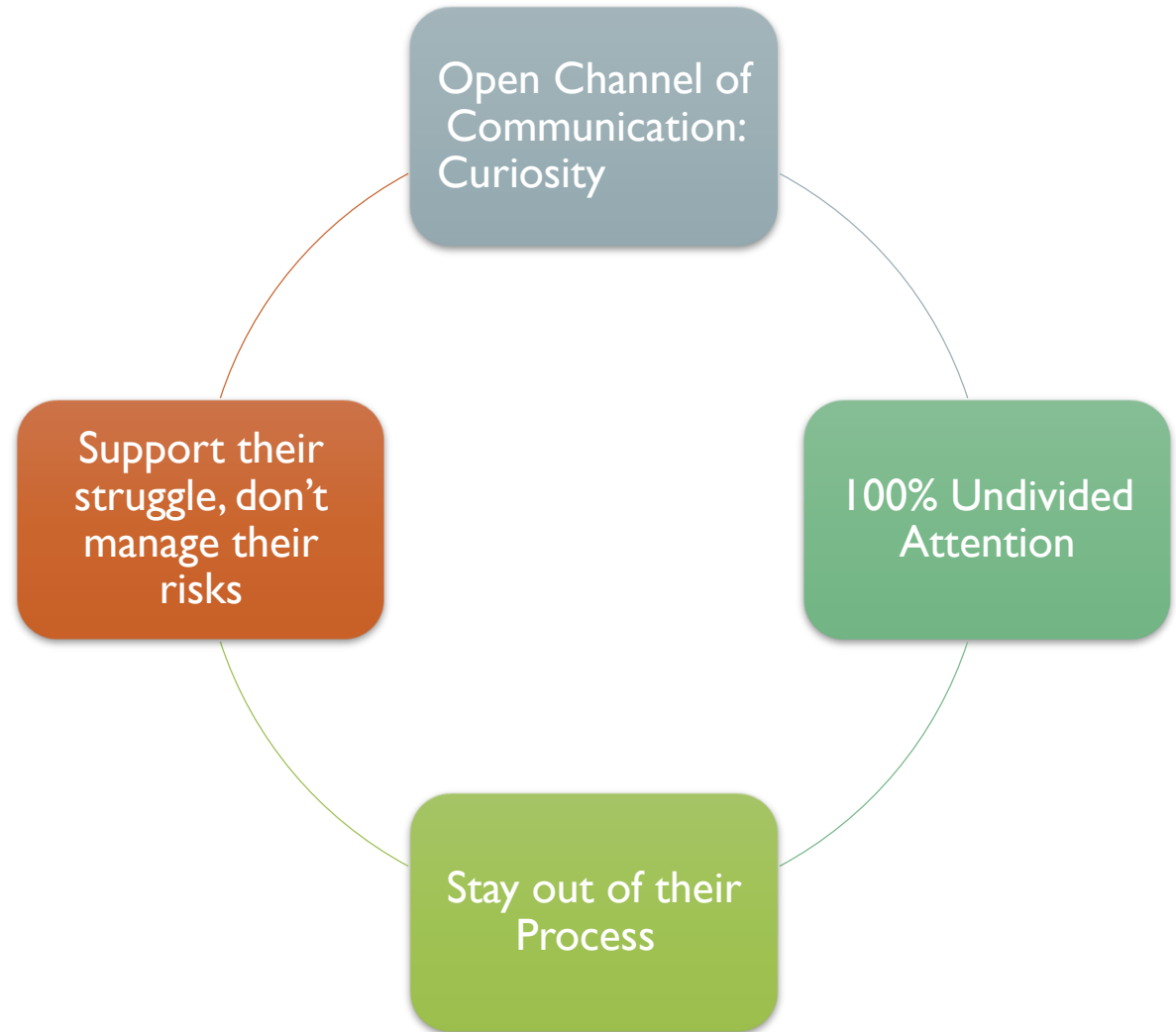
- Socialization for conforming to traditional masculinity ideology has been shown to limit males' psychological development, constrain their behavior, result in gender role strain and gender role conflict, and negatively influence mental health and physical health
- Men are 4 times more likely to die of suicide than women
- Men commit about 90% of homicides nationwide
- Biological considerations

# THE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

- The emotional connection that parents develop with their boys IS the “training” for their adult relationships and how they will face the world.
- Children learn how to be in the world three important ways.
  - How you treat them!
  - How you treat each other!
  - How you treat the world!

What are they learning from you?

# EMOTIONAL CONNECTION



# MOM'S ROLE

- Not prematurely separating connection
  - Challenging stereotypes of boys' emotional needs
- Gentle, repetitive communication of boundaries & consequences
- Praise for verbalizing his feelings, not punishment for the “bad” behavior
- Awareness of critical, judgmental voice
- Consistent respect for your boy's father (especially if divorced or separated)
- Supporting dad's importance and process

## DAD'S ROLE

- Challenge your own beliefs of masculinity and what expectations you put on your son
- Physical Touch
- Modeling gentleness, compassion and healthy anger expression (more later)
- No shame in emotional expression
- Individual time spent with your boy
  - Explore altruistic activities to teach him more empathy and compassion



# MODELING

- The most powerful “tool” we have as parents
- How do you express your inner, emotional world in front of your sons?
- How do you talk about difficult emotions with your son?
- More is caught than taught
  - Lectures are not the best ways our boys grow
- Exploring friendships and other relationships

THERE ARE NO GOOD FEELINGS OR BAD FEELINGS

Joy



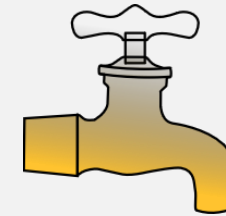
Anger



Fear



Sadness



# ANGER

- Expressed differently in boys
- Usually acts out emotions with behavior
- Boys are taught to hide all emotions except anger
- Low self-esteem can lead to aggressive anger

# FEAR AND SADNESS

- Often turned inward
- Anxiety can be expressed through aggression
- Pressure to be strong creates a polarity in self
- The unexpressed feeling does not simply go away.

# DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM

- Identify your child's individual personality strengths
- Self-Confidence vs. Self-Esteem
- Look for opportunities of self-discovery
- My internal and external resources



# SETTING LOVING LIMITS

- The Family Container
- Not shaming behavior
- Limits around violent media/video games
  - Constant conversations about fantasy vs. reality
- Healthy self-esteem is critical in a boy's ability to act respectfully on the internet

# THE FAMILY CONTAINER

- Home is where I learn to struggle
- Home is where I learn boundaries
- Home is a soft landing for when I fail
- Home is where I learn to invest in others



CREATING THE CONTAINER  
SETTING EXPECTATIONS