

## Answer Back: Children's views on underachieving boys

**Boys say they are falling behind girls at school because it's not cool or macho to study. So should teachers be making more of an effort to reach them, or is it just time for boys to pull their socks up?**

### Rose-Marie Rowlands, 14, Birmingham

I think boys are just as good as girls; guys just do not make the effort any more. Boys fool around a lot while girls listen. Guys have this attitude where they think they're "it", whereas girls have worked hard and gained loads in school. It is time for boys to pull their socks up and work harder. Boys act like clowns, and clowns don't get jobs.

### Zak Garner-Purkis, 13, London

However many new schemes you implement, the problem won't go away. It is tightly interwoven into British culture: it is more important that boys prove their manhood than get grades as good as girls. It is not seen as being manly to do well at school. This needs sorting out, but it will only change if we readdress the way society looks at things. The idea of having to be manly comes from the Stone Age.

### Sara Bates, 11, Birmingham

I think boys and girls are getting different marks because of the way parents, teachers and friends treat them about revising. Boys' parents are not really bothered about marks, but girls' parents are. Boys think it is uncool to revise for tests and girls think it is good to get better marks.

### Brendan Richardson, 14, Plymouth

Girls are given more support than boys, which is why girls are passing their exams with higher marks than boys. They get more attention from the teacher and more praise. Boys need to have more attention. The sort of attention a teacher needs to give a boy is to tell them that no one is teacher's special person - that they are all equal and that they all deserve the teacher's attention.

### Matthew Dent, 12, Birmingham

Boys are always thought of as less intelligent than girls. This type of stereotyping has a real impact on a young child, so they believe there is no point in trying to get smarter. Teachers might not do it deliberately but they favour girls over boys, because boys cause more trouble than girls. Boys are always thought of in groups - all the boys get told off if one boy misbehaves.

### Paul Bradley, 14, Belfast

I think in all-boys' schools there is a certain "macho" atmosphere, where it is maybe "uncool" to study hard or to do your work in class; whereas in girls' schools they are probably more mature. I do not believe girls doing better than boys has anything to do with the way parents treat their kids. It might help if we had more schools that brought boys and girls together in a working atmosphere that took the learning differences between the sexes into account. Some subjects seem more suited to one sex or the other, but I think ultimately that it is the kids who decide who out-performs whom.

### About answer back

answer back is a weekly column by Children's Express members, published in the Parents' pages of [The Times](#).

### 1 comment

cop out, not cool to study

The macho answer you hear boys say it is not cool to study is really a very macho attempt to hide something many adults do not understand. You see boys feel less intelligent but have been taught that when feeling inferior to act strong. Boys are treated differently from a young age that is keeping Males from doing well. Until we look at those areas the Male Crisis will continue to increase.

The nineteenth century belief Males should be strong heavily adversely affects Males from an early age onward in three large areas.

The first area of concern: society's belief, Males should be strong allows much aggression toward Males (differences as early as nine months) "Psychology of Sex Differences". Here I am referring to more commanding more abrupt, harsh words, less positive eye-contact, more intimidating eye-contact, more physical treatment and more harsh physical treatment. From this aggression this creates much higher average stress that makes learning information age skills much more difficult. The lower the socioeconomic bracket the more amplified the stress and so more allowed aggression toward those Males. The increased aggression Males receive, creates four bad things for Males academically, mentally, emotionally, and socially: 1. It creates higher average layers of mental frictions (redefined from higher average stress) which inhibit thinking, learning, and motivation in mental areas. 2. These higher layers of mental frictions also create improper pace and intensity in approaching mental work (apply too much effort when approaching new material) and higher tension that hurts motivation to learn. 3. The aggression Males receive and less positive (nurturing) attention also create the higher average stress, which then creates the nervous energy or over activity. 4. This extra aggression Males receive creates the Male ego or defensive cushion that the Male develops from an early age to protect them from the aggressions they receive from society. This Male ego or defensive cushion has the negative consequences of further alienating the Male from "any" various mental, emotional, social, and academic supports they "might just" receive from society and create additional stress. When Males hear firm or hard words from others like teachers or others their minds are thinking defense and not thinking about learning and enjoying the learning process. When boys are talked to it is often with firm short commands, not the soft, kind, ease of nurtured stability necessary for mental/emotional stability. Everyone should test this out in to see for themselves. The combination of high layers of mental frictions and defensive cushion are working to create an impediment to learning that accumulates in harm over time for men.

In addition, the more unstable and tension filled society becomes, the more open-ended the release of stress by parents, peers, teachers, etc. upon boys of all ages is allowed and society's gross tendency to look the other way. Now with the media stepping in to attack Males of all ages more so, this is leading to more open disrespect and more harsh treatment of Male of all ages. This could lead to some very angry Males in the future with less regard for themselves and for others. Since Females are still regarded as "to be protected" when times become more unstable or harsh, such release of aggressions due to stress is still not allowed by society thus protecting Females from the increased abuse. With this differential treatment, Females will continue to do well where Males who undergo more harsh treatment (due to any additional release of aggression) will tend to slide back farther academically and also economically. This could be responsible for boys facing more hardships growing up and suffering more so academically in recent years during more harsh times.

The Second area of concern: In society today, men are given love, honor, respect, and support or the essentials of their self-worth only on the "condition of sufficient" achievement, money, power, status or image. Again, this is all a part of the nineteenth century belief Males should be strong. This is what makes Males so competitive. Males are continually vying or competing for the essentials of feelings of self-worth from society. They must fight through the still present, nineteenth century confrontations allowed by society upon them from an early age to achieve those benefits and feelings of self-worth. Those Males who do not achieve in school or other like areas will not only not receive sufficient love, honor, and respect from teacher, parents, and others for this lacking, they may receive more neglect and even more aggression from those persons. Again, society allows this window of aggression upon Males to make them tough.

Males who can achieve in the classroom will do so. He will receive sufficient love, honor, respect, and support for academics and will continue to put forth more effort. When a Male Child is not showing a measure of achievement in school, he will tend to receive more neglect, abuse, and ridicule from parents and "teachers" than the Female child. This signals to the Male Child that he will not receive the essentials of self-worth in academics. He will then push himself in areas such as games, sports, and other pursuits to receive love, honor and respect (self-worth) from his peers. Over a period of years, this leaves Males far behind Females in mental, emotional, social, and academic knowledge and skills.

Third area of concern: In addition, generally Males "are not given" - kindness, ease, gentleness, and stable - mental, emotional, social, and academic support, attention, knowledge and skills (unless by accident). Society in its ignorance from the nineteenth century belief Males should be strong considers such attention and support as coddling the Male child. Society still holds that Males should pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. As a result, Males are not given the tools to develop many mental, emotional, social, and academic skills. This greatly cuts down on their motivation to develop those skills. The combined effect of society only rewarding strength and power to face aggression; neglect in many social and academic areas; not rewarding but acting with more aggression toward Males who attempt to develop mildness, kindness, goodness, and care for others are hurting many Males. Over a period of years, this is leaving many Males grossly unable to compete in the information age, which requires a slow accumulation of many complex mental, emotional, social, academic skills and talents.

This is creating the ever growing international Male Crisis that will only get worse for Males and then get much worse for Females when Males begin to take back with interest, their power and status. I feel society will continue maintaining this mistreatment of Males until a critical point is reached.

The truth is, little boys need just as much coddling as the girls and just as much kind, considerate mental, emotional, social, and academic support as the girls. While neglect of Male children and boys may have proved useful in the more physical nineteenth century, it is working opposite of need in the information age where it requires much more accumulated mental, emotional, social and academic skills acquired over time. In these areas, Males are being seriously shortchanged.

1. I fear followers of the genetic models will try to build a case for genetic learning differences or body mass requiring more activity or tactile learning. Note that nice middle class Males do not have this problem. Also the view of differences in brain activity are more due to large differences in differential mental, emotional, social, physical, and educational reinforcement over time, not organic differences.

2. I also fear the use of Male classrooms with more discipline and more time on task will only lead to more stern and even more harsh treatment and stereotyping of Males to perform more physical or menial labor to match the growing caste system being portrayed in the media against Males today.  
ann duckwoth from Jacksonville, FL, 27 September 2009 12:53

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