



5 Critical Needs of Boys

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Introduction

Boys are getting a tough break.

Recess is going or gone. Tug of War is now called Tug of Peace. Red Rover, Dodge Ball, and Tag are disappearing because some claim these games can “undercut emotional development and create an environment of resentment.”¹

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, boys are almost twice as likely to receive special education,² and the National Institute of Mental Health reports that boys are three times more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD.³ Academically, boys underperform girls at every level.⁴ Meanwhile, women earned more than 52 percent of doctoral degrees and more than 57 percent of master’s degrees in 2016.⁵

Diagnoses of ADHD increase steadily. Conduct that used to be considered typical boy behavior—running or climbing when it’s not appropriate, or having a hard time waiting to talk or react—is now bulleted in lists of ADHD symptoms,⁶ as if boyhood is some sort of social disease that needs to be eradicated.

Because we are removing the reality of outdoor competitive, rough-and-tumble, boy-friendly play, we are driving boys indoors to a virtual reality that parks



them in front of a video game while starving them of real-world competition, fresh air, and normal peer interaction.

The need for boy-specific activities and mentoring that provide challenge and reward has never been greater. Properly channeled and intentionally challenged, the drive and daring of healthy boys will benefit society when these boys become determined, focused men.

Who will stand up for them? Who will mold these boys' values and provide the proper activities to help them become strong Christian citizens, husbands, and fathers? More and more adults who understand this challenge are giving boys the essentials to succeed in this contrary culture. Entire organizations are being founded and growing exponentially because they have accepted the challenge to reverse this dangerous trend.

Trail Life USA is one of those organizations. Here's what we're doing to help boys reach their potential:

#1



COMPASS

Boys need a compass.

In the confusion of cultural relativism, mixed roles, and gender fluidity, messages have never been more scrambled. Boys need a fixed starting point.

If boys don't know where they are and where they are headed, they will either choose their own course or refuse to move at all.

The biblical foundation of Trail Life USA secures a "true north" that doesn't shift with every new idea or construct.

Give a boy a clear direction.



#2

MAP

Boys need a map.

A map is evidence that someone has gone ahead to spy out the land, experience the trail, and note difficult sections. Although the opportunity to discover new paths has great value, boys gain confidence when they get a sense of what lies ahead from someone who has been there.

Puberty, peer pressure, and typical insecurities are challenges that can paralyze a boy if his future is unclear.

Trail Life USA gives passionate adult volunteers—who have been background-checked and trained in child safety and youth protection—the privilege of leading boys.

These men can be a powerful influence in the lives of boys who don't have an engaged father in the home. Single moms embrace this opportunity for their sons, and see them grow in maturity and confidence before their eyes.

Give a boy a safe male mentor.



#3

GUIDE

Boys need a guide.

As valuable as a mentor is, boys also need someone on the trail ... a peer to walk alongside them through the challenges. They need to hone leadership skills that will set them on a lifelong course to make good decisions, absent negative peer pressure.

Unfortunately, for many boys, the closest they get to peer leadership is through a gang. They are attracted to that environment because it provides a bond and loyalty that is absent in other areas of their lives. They test themselves against one another, learn how to negotiate, compete, and lead— all beneficial skills if the objectives were admirable.

Trail Life USA's Troop and Patrol structure gives boys the opportunity to grow alongside peers who share their values, providing them with accountability under the watchful eye of their leaders. The unique Patrol setting allows them to lead other boys their age or

younger. The robust awards program and the challenge of the outdoors lets boys develop strengths and abilities that distinguish them in a healthy way as they grow in self-esteem.

Give a boy the opportunity to lead and be led by peers in a supportive environment.

A flashlight beam illuminates a dark, textured surface, possibly sand or gravel. The beam is bright and focused, creating a strong contrast with the dark surroundings. The flashlight itself is visible in the upper right, with its handle and buttons partially illuminated.

#4

FLASHLIGHT

Boys need a flashlight.

For a boy looking for truth and a glimpse of who he can be, these are dark times. A shifting sense of one's place in the future is unsettling; it robs boys of incentive and the ability to develop mature skills such as delayed gratification and a sense of cause-and-effect.

Boys take great comfort in firm, fair, and consistent guidelines and anticipated reward. They may test the guidelines, but they want to know their expectations will hold.

Trail Life USA's clear objectives and emphasis on the unchanging Word of God as a guiding light gives boys the daily counsel necessary for navigating an unsure future.

**Give a boy a solid sense of boundaries
and a glimpse of who he can be.**

#5



MOUNTAIN

Boys need a mountain.

If we fail this generation, it won't be because we over-challenged them. It will be because we under-challenged them.

Boys love outdoor challenges in structured environments. "Tell me who's with me, who's in charge, and what our mission is," they seem to say. If the answer is unclear, they will create this structure in a way that looks like rebellion, resistance, or apathy. Or they'll find a virtual world where they can conquer and excel.

In addition to outdoor adventure, Trail Life USA provides a robust awards program that feeds the desire to be challenged and to accomplish something significant, not just a participation trophy or empty progression toward the next game level.

Give a boy a real-world challenge.

Conclusion

As more and more responsible adults value the healthy maturation of boys, society will be impacted as generations are touched by these deep, essential principles.

Help a boy or get behind an organization that does. Yes, it's that important.



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1 Thomas Murphy, physical education teacher at Tobin Elementary School in Sandy Coleman, "Dodgeball Sparks Debate in Schools," Dayton Daily News, April 3, 2001.

2 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

3 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd.shtml>

4 <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/04/girls-grades.aspx>

5 <http://www.aei.org/publication/women-earned-majority-of-doctoral-degrees-in-2016-for-8th-straight-year-and-outnumber-men-in-grad-school-135-to-100/>

6 <https://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/guide/adhd-symptoms#>

Mark T. Hancock is CEO of Trail Life USA, a character, leadership, and adventure organization that is both Christ-centered and boy-focused. Learn more at www.TrailLifeUSA.com or scan the code to donate to help boys.



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