

BOYS TO MEN

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

'Fatherlessness' has caused repercussions in our society that we did not anticipate twenty years ago. While marriages have always broken down, divorce and reconstituted marriage is almost pandemic in its proportions. Mothers have born the brunt of raising children alone and have generally done a great job. However, the lack of fathers in homes has led to a generation where a percentage of adolescents are running wild in the community, some even killing each other. Father modeling is just not available to many youths who so desperately need a positive example to exemplify what 'being a man' and 'being a father' is all about.

Many mothers have overindulged their sons, partially as an over-compensation for not having a father around. Sons are not expected to pick up after them selves, to cook, or to do other household chores. This is hardly fair on the woman they eventually marry who certainly doesn't want to be the man's mother figure and do for him what he has expected his mother to do. Further to this, even fathers in good marriages have not always had effective modeling from their fathers and we men tend to pass down to our children what we know and have experienced. Many baby boomers' parents were influenced by child psychologist, John B. Watson. He was influential after World War 1 and right up to the post WW2 era. His philosophy was one of austerity and lack of affection by parents towards their children. To him it was sufficient for a parent to shake their child's hand in the morning and to give them a peck on the forehead in the evening while in their bed "lest they drown in mother love."

Spock came forward with his unmitigated child-centered philosophy and the western civilization swallowed it hook, line and sinker. It was so refreshingly different and empowered parents to have a relationship with their children they felt they could never have before. Stemming from the indulgence of the Dr. Spock (not Star Wars!) era many baby boomer fathers are the result of our parents' pendulum swing to the opposite extreme. From authoritarianism to indulgence. From a position of parent centered to child centered family management. From being seen but not heard, to children having input into family life. From being the child in a family to being in charge.

The hippy era with its 'free love, drugs and rock 'n roll' is seen by many as the result of the 'anything goes' culture that arose out of the Spock epoch. The so-called X and Y generations have suffered the fate of that indulgent era as parents, especially fathers, enter marriage with so few skills to successfully manage their families.

If this seems all gloom and doom let me say that there are men who have risen to become the responsible adult models their children need. This does not

just happen. It takes skill and practice. Fathers, our example so often leads to our boys becoming great fathers. This will likely become generational. There are many resources available to help men in their fathering role. If you do not feel you are in parental control of your family, then seek help.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.