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Young Men Are GOOD & READY

Understanding Their Power, Vulnerability & Dreams

"I want to see you game, boys, I want to see you brave and manly, and I want to see you gentle and tender"

-Teddy Roosevelt

Young men are in love with the world. Their relationship with the world is vibrant and naturally creative. It is a lively interaction, aggressive and wonderful. Young men who are more melancholy and appear less intense, still carry with them a shrewd and clever perspective. If young men cannot use their innate ability to love, it will become the energy to destroy, as witnessed by the increasing recent violence carried out by young men. Very often the initiator of violence is one of the "quiet ones". The stereotypical bully or gang member is not the only young man who is practicing energy management as a destructive expression.

Physiologically, boys become young men when they are of breeding age which begins at approximately age 13. Their aggression is increasing as well as their need to be individually and autonomously recognized. As recently as two – three centuries ago, young men in the age category of 13 – 20 might already be married, possibly with children and be responsible to protect their families. They would be the trusted and respected guardians of community safety. Every young man knew he was on – call to protect and knew it was his obligation to do so.

In today's world, adult men know what young men are experiencing because it wasn't that long ago in their lives that they related to the world in a similar way. However, most men today are not honoring the feelings they used to have or still have but allowed them to be buried under excessive attention to jobs, families and homes. Men are not acting shocked or appalled at the escalating

violence of the teenagers. There is almost a catatonic acceptance by men about the inappropriate behavior of these young men which indicates the disempowering of men in our society.

Allowing fashionable politically correct viewpoints to create sides about men's relationships with young men, causes the young men to be rejected and abandoned, unseen and unheard. The rapid recent escalation of young men's eruptions of frustration is causing disruption to themselves and the world around them. They are disregarded or worse, an easy target of scorn.

What Young Men Want

Men should not be surprised to find out what young men really want. It's the same thing that men want: friendship, fraternity, camaradery, autonomy, recognition, opportunity to brag, full freedom of expression, encouragement and ultimately, distinction. Young men get this simply by hanging out with adult men. They don't usually care what it is we're doing with them. Most often, the less structure and more spontaneous the interaction is, the quicker the trust and respect is created. To accomplish this requires an adult male who is confident and practices the art of self-discipline. He is sure of his values and is not afraid to declare them. He is so confident he never needs to impose his values, knowing that influence by example is enough to guide the relationship: This is true charisma.

In the environment where the adult male is secure with himself, young men feel safe to physically and verbally express themselves without the worry of insulting or hurting others. This is the foundation for the true freedom of expression that young men must have to develop beyond their boyish narcissism. The emerging

independence of young men needs to be based on confidence and real life practicality. When young men develop their intuition through their experiences, they will begin to trust themselves as they trust others.

Young men are most attracted to the male with the greatest discipline and highest status amongst the other males. Status arises from the recognition of one's contribution to the benefit of the many. Because young men crave the feeling of acceptance by other males, they will emulate the best men.

The Language of Testosterone

Testosterone is not a disease. We once received a phone call from a parent of a young man who simply did not understand the biological and psychological changes the son was manifesting. More than likely, the young man did not understand his transformation either. It was obvious from the conversation that the lack of information by both of them about what was naturally occurring to the young man created even more of a rift between them. Flustered and exasperated, the parent gave up any chance of supporting the son by saying, "This testosterone thing is a disease".

In his book, "Male Menopause", Jed Diamond gives an example of how this hormone is perceived in various ways. He says it has been called the "hormone from hell" and "the fountain of youth". He quotes Dr. Crenshaw, past president of the American Association of Sex Educators who says, "As production of testosterone kicks into high gear, the psychological and physical impact of testosterone is overwhelming...teenage boys become walking grenades, just waiting for someone to pull their pin...sperm gets produced and wants release, often".

Whether young men voice their relationship to their testosterone loudly or quietly, the key is to let them voice in whatever style they choose. As adults, we are expected to guide them in knowing when and where it is socially acceptable to voice. Not giving them the opportunity to voice in an organic, meaningful, all – out manner and demanding them to communicate to you in a specific way is "to pull their pin".

When society depresses the effects of testosterone in young men's thinking and behavior, their Voice becomes a "shadow" and the loss of confidence in their self understanding expresses itself clumsily and crudely. If adults harshly critique the virile emergence of the new young man should it surprise us that they move from a context of loving life into one of destroying life?

At this time in life, young men have footholds in two worlds. One is that which says "I want to be cared for" and the other says "I want to take risks and fully engage with life which means I must dance with death". Let's give them the opportunities to take the right risks so that their energy is channeled into developing self-esteem and achieving virtue.

What Young Men Need

Young men need to be held to the high expectations that they *already know* they should be living by. Monkey see, monkey do. Communities that anticipate participation from young men will approvingly observe them performing in the following ways: sharing in community service as a dependable way to practice surrendering ego, engaging in activities of courage and courtesy, and making good decisions based on their experiences and their intuition.

Repeatedly tell young men that the easiest way to get respect is to first give respect (definition of respect: to esteem with reverence) to themselves, their families, communities and the environment. We'll know we have done a good job of this when we hear young men saying, "give you some" not, "give me some"! Let them know that the most difficult way to get respect is by dominating others.

Young men need to compete in sports or actively engage in other physical activities and/or the arts. This allows them to get their energy out without intentions of hurting others. Young men are built to win; provide the opportunities for this – give them some!

Initiation Into Manhood

For thousands of years young men were taken out of the village by the men to undergo an Initiation into manhood that would prepare them

for their responsibilities. The women, children and elders eagerly anticipated the completion of the initiation as they knew the young men needed to acquire the leadership skills necessary to ensure a safe and prosperous future. It takes a community of men to do this. The fathers cannot initiate their own sons. There is a story by Joseph Campbell that, in essence says, the fathers who are too easy on their sons prevent them from feeling the confidence of passing the tests and trials of initiation. The fathers who are impossibly hard on their sons, crush any chance of them feeling the success of winning, which is the motivation for future triumphs.

Michael Gurian, author of the book, "The Good Son", describes the positive effects of initiation: "... they face obstacles together, they face fears and pain, and feel very bonded to another during the process... grown men recall their rite of passage experience as a time of immense personal growth and attachment to fellows. For some of the men, friendships established or solidified are lifelong".

Our experiences in leading rites-of-passage events confirms that young men want to say goodbye to the "boy". Through the intense physical process of releasing past negative experiences, the young men allow their wounds of childhood to scar over and serve as lessons for future life mastery. As the final part of the initiation process, men welcome them into adulthood without fanfare. It is understood and deeply felt as an ancient and present living ceremony.

The Right Guides

In order to lovingly and effectively guide young men, adults need a philosophy and code of conduct that they truly live by. This authentic modeling is the cornerstone for developing authentic relationships with young men. If they do not trust that you have developed a successful perspective and behavior in life, the primal need to be in family and community will cause them to seek it somewhere else whether it be in a destructive gang, an internal, private realm or anywhere in between.

Therefore, the mentor must be a man of integrity who knows when he is truly ready to serve as a guide. The spiritual teacher, Adi Da Samraj, in the book, "Love, Wisdom and Happiness in the First Three Stages of Life" describes seven stages of life that will naturally occur in the healthy development of a human being. He details the qualities of such an adult – someone who is characterized by equanimity, discriminative intelligence, heart – feeling and the impulse to always continue to grow. Mentoring should be centered around values and codes of

conduct for the well-being of the community, more so than occupation and career. Knowing that young men will naturally strike out on their own, the ultimate goal of the mentor is to have them leaving the "hood" experiencing life with their natural sense of awe instead of leaving defiantly with a feeling that they will not be controlled. As a mature adult, the trust you have in yourself will prevent you from feeling that you need to "fix" them.

Prepare Yourself – You Will Be Tested!

Young men like to engage in boyish games with adults such as acting immaturely to get you to tell them the right things, which they already know are true. Oftentimes, a direct look from a man that says, "Are you kidding me?" is enough to get the young man to now show you how mature he is. Go figure.

In the book, "Real Boys" by William Pollack, it is stated that young men may express themselves violently "when they are not allowed to express the full range of their emotions". Therefore we recommend that you not expect or push young men to tell you what is really going on with them if you are not mature enough to handle their physical and mental/emotional unleashing. Their instincts know if you are capable even when yours may not.

Indulging in the management of young men's egos through emotional competition where you need to be the one who always knows or feels best, creates the environment for them to continue to "act out". Using young men as a way to work out our own unresolved issues puts them in the position of having to be the models to us. Have you noticed how exhausting it is trying to win this game?. Let the discipline of the attributes of your way of life guide you. Simply trust that the young men will do the right things sooner or later.

We suggest a context of "serving not saving" when you are modeling/mentoring. When adults take the popular psychological stance that they are in young men's lives to save them, the young men shut down as this is in direct conflict with their innate sense that they are already free and fine. When young men know that you are simply serving life, it arouses their desire to show you how much good they can do.

Swami Rama, knowledgeable about family customs in the East and the West, says in his book, "Love and Family Life" that the best preparation in being a guide to others is to "learn to love and accept yourself first.... You'll find that all souls are one and the same". Are we ready to love young men?

The Right Way to Be With Young Men

Young men can handle the harsh realities of life and respect adults who act and talk straight with them. Being open and honest is the best policy and this does not necessarily mean asking for their advice or their approval. When situations present no clear solutions and you say, "I don't know" you reveal a condition about life the young men need to know. There is much in this world that is mysterious and awesome and letting them directly feel this allows them to develop their perspective about life.

Let them have experiences of winning and losing. Much of their frustration comes from the false impression we give them that we should expect to have things go our way. Use humor as a way to release tension and make it safe for young men to learn how to laugh at themselves. Young men naturally know how to playfully "dis" each other as a way to compete and relax. When men hang out with young men and act silly and stop thinking, having fun in the ridiculous ways that guys need to, young men learn how to "turn it off" (excessive thinking by men is hazardous for all people around them!)

Give young men opportunities to take responsible risks so they can develop courage and security. When they are way off base, there is no need to nag them. Simply tell them to, "knock it off and move on". They know that you know what's right and that's all it takes to guide them back on track .

We use a simple four step process as a way to guide our mentoring. The first is to simply listen and not interrupt. The second is to ask them questions that allow them to go inside of themselves to seek the answers. Thirdly, if the young men cannot see a solution, we may offer a few words of advice that eventually ends with questions such as, "what do you think?" or "what would you do that is respectful to yourself and others?" Finally, we briefly thank them for being honest and telling us their thoughts.

How Elder Men Benefit from Being with Young Men

You might ask, why in heaven's name would an adult man want to repeatedly place himself in the company of young men? Running with the bulls (young men) restores a primal sense of excitement for men when they are confronted with the challenges of life. It produces a strong feeling of freedom from the illness-inducing burdens of conventional societal expectations concerning how men should behave and believe. The blending of wisdom from mature men combined with the vitality of young men deepens the young men's sense of belonging and

self-worth while raising the testosterone of the mentor. This hormonal gift produces a sense of well-being and virility.. the true fountain of youth!

In the book, "The Testosterone Revolution", Dr. Malcolm Carruthers discusses the beneficial effects of testosterone in adult males and states, "the efficiency of testosterone in restoring potency is a common experience... there will be an increase in libido, confidence and energy..." Do men need a better reason than this?! Jed Diamond reminds men of another reason to run with the bulls. "One of the primary community roles that elder males must engage if they are to be successful is to be mentors to young men. Without elder males committed to the well-being of young males, this society falls apart." Sometimes men can have an easier time hearing things about themselves from young men that they couldn't acknowledge from adults. Young men are not afraid to tell elder men when they think they are out of line or full of crap. Their single-minded insistence puts the elder men on the spot and in the immediate position to do or say the right thing because they know they cannot fool the young men.

Good and Ready

We have been blessed to have spent countless hours with young men engaged in ceremonies where they reveal their hopes, dreams and visions for a better world. To hear them pray with tears in their eyes about wanting to make a difference, brings us back to our youth and is the reminder that these young men are good and ready. Young men want to make the world safe; they want to be your heroes; they are ready to take good care of things. Are *we* ready?

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