

# A study of Emotional Miseducation of boys in the *Raising Cain* by Dan Kindlon

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## Abstract

Dan Kindlon, one of the country's leading psychologists, share what they have learned in more than thirty-five years of experience working with boys and their families, in the book, *Raising Cain*. From his work with the boys in schools, he knew that too many boys fall into trap of embracing the image of stoic masculinity they see in mainstream media – a template that has been adopted as the inflexible code of the peer group. The present article is a brief study of boys systematically steered away from their emotional lives by adults and the peer “culture of cruelty”- boys who receive little encouragement to develop qualities such as compassion, sensitivity, and warmth. The prominent view of the article is to make a compelling case that emotional literacy is the most valuable gift we can offer our sons, urging parents to recognize the price boys pay when we hold them to an impossible standard of manhood.

**Key words:** *Emotional Miseducation, Psychology, Literacy of Boys*

## Introduction

Dr. Daniel Kindlon is a clinical and research psychologist specializing in the behavioral problems of children and adolescents. He holds joint assistant professorship in the Psychiatry Department of the Harvard Medical School and the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Harvard School of Public Health where he is engaged in teaching and research. Kindlon has been in clinical practice for the last fourteen years focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of emotional problems, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorders. For the last twelve years, he has also been the psychological consultant to an independent school in Boston for boys in grades seven to twelve.

Past few years came over a rash of incidents involving boys who have shot, strangled, stabbed, or in some other way other inflicted violence on others including children, teaches and their own parents has

heightened public awareness and sparked widespread discussion of “the boy problem” in schools and communities across the country. Troubling statistics indicating that suicide has become the second leading cause of death among boys in their mid-to-late teens, or that a fifteen-year-old boy is seven times more likely to die by his own hand compared to a girl the same age, only add to the debate. But according to Dan Kindlon, schoolyard shootings and teen suicides which focus our attention on only a tiny fraction of the boy population are merely high-profile indications of deeper and more fundamental problems that place all our boys at risk.

In *Raising Cain*, Protecting the Emotional Life of boys, Kindlon shines a light on the troubled inner world of boys in contemporary society. With his experience, working with boys for thirty-five years, the author explores how our culture socializes and miseducates boys to disregard their emotional lives. He also shows that miseducation plays out in boys' relationship with their parents, their peers, their schools, and ultimately with themselves.

### **Emotional Miseducation**

Dan Kindlon reveals a nation of boys who are hurting, sad, afraid, angry, and silent in his book, *Raising Cain*. Dan Kindlon, PhD is a member of the Harvard University faculty for over fifteen years and conducts research in child development. So, as a leading clinical and research psychologist, sheds light on the destructive emotional training our boys receive – The Emotional Miseducation. The book tries to set a standard of behavior based on the horrible events at Columbine, and warns that if we continue to yell at our children, we will teach them even more violent interactions. In short, they assume that all interactive problems with boys aren't taught to express their feelings the same way girls are.

Thus, Kindlon makes a compelling case that emotional literacy is the most valuable gift we can offer our sons, urging parents to recognize the price boys pay when we hold them to an impossible standard of manhood. He identifies and explains the social and emotional challenges that boys encounter in school and show how parents can help boys cultivate emotional awareness and empathy, giving them the vital connections and support they need to navigate the social pressures of youth, in his book, *Raising Cain*.

There are talented writers who are able to convey vast amounts of psychological knowledge in easy to understand terms and weave it together with numerous case study examples that are presented in story

form. Kindlon is one such author who shows unequivocally how our educational system and to a certain extent, our culture are structured in a way that will stunt the emotional development of boys. He sets out to answer this basic crucial question: What do boys need, which they are not getting? He illuminates the forces that threaten our boys, teaching them to believe that “cool” equals to macho strength and stoicism. He cuts through these outdated theories of “mother blame”, “boy biology” and “testosterone” in his book.(Kindlon 11,13)

Even boys who are not allowed to watch violent movies or play violent video games, but who watch television sports, will nevertheless consume a steady diet of commercials in which a man is not a man unless, he is tough, drives a tough truck, and drinks lots of beer. These are not visions of manhood that celebrate emotional introspection or empathy. Our culture co-opts some of the most impressive qualities boys can possess - their physical energy, boldness, curiosity, and action orientation and distorts them into a punishing, dangerous definition of masculinity. The conclusions that are drawn are based on the worst examples, and they offer no suggestions about how to solve what they see as “boy problems”. Still, Kindlon puts forth some of the basic things that our parents and also, our society could do, to give proper emotional education to our boys which according the author, is the most important quality that boys could learn.

“Strong and healthy boys are made strong by acceptance and affirmation of their humanity”, Kindlon states. “We all have a chance to do that every day, every time we are in the presence of a boy and we have a chance to say to him, ‘I recognize you. You are a boy – full of life, full of dreams, full of feeling’ ”. (Kindlon 258)

Thus, as a child psychologist, the author, who have worked extensively with boys, he hope that he can offer insight into boy behavior and feeling that others might not easily see or understand.

In the study, about 50 percent of the time, a father and a son reported completely different experiences of the same shared moment. (Kindlon 105)

## Conclusion

In much the same way that Reviving Ophelia offered new models for raising girls, therapist Kindlon argue that boys desperately need a new standard of ‘emotional literacy’. Boys, no less than girls, need to feel

emotional connections. Throughout their lives, but especially during adolescence, they need close supportive relationships that can protect them from becoming victims of their turbulent, disowned emotions.(Kindlon 4)

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