



THE CRISIS OF CONNECTION FOR ADOLESCENT BOYS

with Niobe Way, EdD

■ Discussion Guide for Families

This discussion guide is designed for families who are interested in learning more about the crisis of connection, its impact on the health and well-being of adolescent boys and young men, and the implications for parenting and supporting teens.

After conducting hundreds of interviews focused on friendships with black, Hispanic, white, and Asian American adolescent boys over the past 25 years, NYU Professor of Developmental Psychology Niobe Way concludes that boys are experiencing a “crisis of connection.” Boys report feeling pressure to “man up” and fear that having or even expressing their desires for close male friendships will make them look “girly” or “gay.” Boys, in early and middle adolescence, often have intimate male friendships and explicitly link these relationships to their mental health. Yet, by late adolescence, boys speak about losing these close male friendships and reveal feelings of loneliness and isolation. Given the research that links friendships with mental and physical health and well-being, Way’s research has profound implications for adults who work with adolescents. Way shows us the dangers of assuming that boys don’t want or need close male friendships and urges us to foster the positive friendships of adolescent boys to help them thrive.

The guide can be used in a variety of settings including staff meetings, conference sessions, or trainings.

Here are a few planning tips:

- Plan for families to view Dr. Way’s video segments individually or as a group. The video is on YouTube and is 30 minutes in length (divided into shorter segments that can be watched individually or together).
- Decide who will facilitate the conversation.
- Allow approximately 30 minutes to discuss the questions. If the group is larger than 10 people, consider breaking into small groups.
- Ask the facilitator to walk through the resource list with the group (and, if possible, to review the resources themselves before the session).



■ Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Way highlighted harmful stereotypes about boys and close friendships (e.g., that they don't want or need such relationships). Do you think these stereotypes have an impact on the adolescents in your life? How so?
2. Dr. Way shared quotes from teenage boys she interviewed for her research. What was most striking to you about how the boys talked about their friendships?
3. Dr. Way explained the often over-looked connection between friendships and health. How does this change the way you think about supporting the boys you care about, in both their physical and mental health?
4. Dr. Way suggested ways in which adults could act upon her research. How can families and communities better foster connections for adolescent boys and young men?
5. What are three take-aways from Dr. Way's presentation that you will share with the boys in your life, family members, and other parents and interested adults to help boys and young men maintain close friendships as they become older teens?

■ Additional Resources

- Relevant books by Niobe Way, EdD:
 - ▶ Deep Secrets: Boys' Friendships and the Crisis of Connection: <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674072428>
 - ▶ Everyday Courage: The Lives and Stories of Urban Teenagers: <http://nyupress.org/books/9780814793398/>
 - ▶ Adolescent Boys: Exploring Diverse Cultures of Boyhood: <http://nyupress.org/books/9780814793855/>
- Project for the Advancement of Our Common Humanity – www.pach.org
- The Social Brain and Its Superpowers - Matthew Lieberman, PhD at TEDxStLouis. Available at <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/The-Social-Brain-And-Its-Superp>
- "It's hard to leave everything you know." High school juniors Akiva Johnson and Henry Jimenez talk about the friendship they developed while taking part in the StoryCorpsU educational program. Available at <https://storycorps.org/listen/akiva-johnson-and-henry-jimene-151218/>
- Casteix, J. (2016, July 25) Boys don't cry? Sure they do, and we need to embrace it. *Orange County Register*. Available at <http://www.ocregister.com/articles/boys-723579-need-feelings.html>