

## Boy's Rap

*A powerful method for helping boys work out disagreements and resolve their fights.*

**Objective:** To create a place where boys can be honest about their behavior, be praised for taking ownership and support one another as a group.

**Format:** Group discussion. The topic is how the boys have or have not been getting along, quarreling, etc. A time limit is set (40-50 minutes), the agreements are reviewed (below), the object of the meeting is clarified and the discussion begins. Boys like being recognized for being brave, and this is the approach used to help them admit their quibbling with one another and take ownership for what they've been doing that has contributed to arguing, fighting, etc.

### **Essential Requirements:**

- Safety in the group meeting place!
- The space the boys meet in must be private
- There must not be any physical or verbal intimidation by adults or by the boys
- It must be made clear that the meeting is not about assigning blame, but about getting along better.
- A non-judgmental, preferably male facilitator will model listening, restraint, praise and self-disclosure. →It is best to have two or three adults present at the meeting, especially if the fighting has been extreme.
- Left unchecked, the boys will blame and counter-blame, which only perpetuates the struggle. →Remember that most boys essentially want justice. In this encounter, that justice begins with each boy finding and using the courage to admit what he has one to add to the fighting, then get acknowledgment from a respected male adult authority for taking this brave step.

**Procedure:** The tips below *are essential* to success. Remember that as important as *what* the boys say is the *process*—how the boys respect one another and take risks or demonstrate courage and how the adults respond. Keeping the group agreements is crucial to the process!

### **Specific Steps:**

- 1)
  - a) Whenever you meet with boys, whether they are four or fourteen, *have them sit in a circle*. By sitting this way, every boy sees every other boy in the group.
  - b) Each boy should have his own space in the circle and not be sitting on top of or hanging all over another boy (younger boys and close friends tend to do this.) The idea is for each boy to participate fully, without distractions, acting as their own person.
  - c) Whereas with girls I may choose to have everyone sit on the floor, with boys it may be more productive to sit around a picnic table. This keeps everyone feeling safe and helps impulsive boys stay calm and prevents physical fighting.
- 2) *Adult facilitators should sit across from one another, not side by side*. Not only does this give the adults greater exposure to the boys by spreading out, it allows facilitators to see one another during the meeting and signal each other in response to any change in the course of the meeting or any "infraction" of the meeting "rules."
- 3) Each meeting should begin with a review of the agreements the boys make for how the meeting is to be conducted. These rules should be written on a piece of poster board or paper and held up at each gathering of the group. →Keep them simple! The agreements might sound like the following:
  - a) **One boy speaks at a time**. For younger or more impulsive boys, use a pine cone, sea shell or similar object (*not a stick or a stone*) for them to hold while talking. The person with the object speaks. The *adult facilitator always controls the object*, giving it out and then getting it back after each boy takes his turn.
  - b) **Each boy speaks for himself. The only thing the facilitator will accept (after an initial warm up period) is what a boy has to say about what he has done to contribute to things being not so great in the group**. Boys have a habit of saying what "sins" other boys have committed, not taking responsibility for their own behavior. The deliberate act here is to praise boys for having the courage to own up to what they have been doing. Explain that this is a crucial step toward being a true man. This agreement will need to be clarified as you go along.
  - c) **Respect what each person says**. This is another way of saying, "No put downs." It is important to create and maintain an environment where boys can feel heard, not judged or attacked. In addition, the boys get praised by respected adult authorities for owning their own misbehavior.
  - d) **What gets said here, stays here**. This agreement helps promote safety in the group by keeping what gets shared from being turned into "gossip" →and by preventing the quarreling from spilling out beyond the meeting. Facilitators may want to amend this agreement by stating that, as caring adults, they, too, will respect the boys' privacy by not talking about what gets said in the meeting except in a way that honors their privacy.

### **Other Tips:**

- When you first meet, it is best to have the boys generate their own meeting "agreements."

- One adult does the bulk of the talking for adults. The others sit respectfully and →listen.
- Overall, the boys do most of the talking. Adults encourage, support, listen, ask thoughtful questions in a respectful way and keep the agreements.
- The more physical or extreme the fighting, the more important to use a table and to have three adults for every 8 to 10 boys. Groups over 12 are rarely productive in such a format.
- Younger boys can meet for shorter time periods as their attention span is shorter.
- At the end of the meeting, each adult should say something encouraging about the boys courage and honesty.
- A plan should be made to channel the aggressive or competitive energy of the boys. This can be a tournament that harnesses their energy, or a project that gets them working together.
- Another set of agreements might be made to address behavior. Again, if this is done, the agreements should be simple, realistic and few in number.

**The Job of the Facilitator:**

1. To encourage participation by listening and remaining non-judgmental.
2. To validate what a boy may think or feel.
3. To actively keep the meeting agreements.
4. To praise boys for being brave and admitting their role in the troubles.
5. To help the boys make a plan to change their behavior.

**Robert B. Ditter, M.Ed., LCSW**  
**72 Montgomery Street•Boston, Ma 02116**  
 tel.617-572-3353•fax.617-572-3373