

Boys to Men—Normal Developmental Markers

By Suzan Myhre, MSSW

There is always the temptation, because of the roller coaster nature of adolescence, to see young men in their 13 to 15-year-old state as only gangly and confused, and sometimes very irritating to be around. Of course, all of this is true, but we often miss the very sacred and precious path these young men are on. Their journey is one of seeking their place, their purpose in this world and how they will satisfy their deepest inner longings. They still need our guidance and direction, but they will often seek the guidance and direction of others - peers, teachers, and mentors. Their closeness and distance from us begins to change as they begin to think on their own and weigh the influences they see all around them. Our boys will pull from all the strengths they have within them and from those around them to develop the discipline, intelligence and moral spiritual compass that will help them navigate from boyhood to manhood.

I love the verse in Luke 2:40 that focuses on the 12-year-old Jesus (just on the brink of manhood). The verse reads: *“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him”*. Here we see Jesus being readied for His purpose and ministry to the world. His longings led Him to the temple. In fact, after the feast of Passover in Jerusalem, His parents returned home—yikes, without Jesus! They searched for three days and went back to Jerusalem asking, *“Son, why are you treating us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”*

Does any of that sound familiar? Parents are anxious when things change with their adolescents. We don't always know what to expect or what is in the 'normal' range of adolescent development. Boys are very different than girls. And, of course, *growth takes time*. There are many hurdles to leap over, and while some cause emotional bumps and bruises, some are more like crashes that require intensive care. Yet, through it all, we must keep moving ahead and encouraging our boys to finish the race. They need to put one foot in front of the other and keep going, because they are sacred human beings on the sacred quest of becoming the men God intended them to be.

The following is a list of the “range of normal” from Michael Gurian's book, *The Good Son*. It outlines normal expectations for adolescents through adulthood.

- It's normal for a boy to wonder if you still approve of him.
- It's normal for a boy to worry a lot—sports, girls, peers, and success.
- It's normal for a boy to impose high expectations on himself, but it's just as normal for him to avoid these and need you to impose them on him.
- It's normal for the boy to be a little more like either Mom or Dad as puberty hits; if dad isn't showy about how he loves, the boy may also be a silent lover.

- It's normal for the boy to want to argue - a lot - about pretty much anything that comes to mind.
- It's normal for the boy to enjoy activities you find distressing. In 1998, 900,000 boys watched the baseball playoff games, but 1.5 million watched professional wrestling!
- It's normal for the boy to be judgmental of his peer's tastes.
- It's normal for the boy to crave material goods other kids have. As puberty ends, he'll become more individualistic in his taste.
- It's normal for the boy to emotionally withdrawn, to feel easily humiliated, to be unable to express pain, and to need a lot of time alone to make himself feel better. It's equally normal for the boy to come right to you for help.

It's wonderful having wise people in life who can help navigate these transitions. They often provide coaching we (parents) so need. If you are feeling lost and do not have anyone to express your concerns to or to give advice when needed, you might consider calling a professional therapist to help you. These tender-hearted boys need our support and our belief that they are on their journey, and they *will* find their way.

Compliments of Practical Family Living, Inc.

P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute our articles in any format provided that you credit the author, no modifications are made, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you include Practical Family Living's web-site address (<http://www.pfl.org>) on the copied resource. Quotations from any article are also permitted with credit to the author and citing the web-site. Any use of other materials on this web-site, including reproduction, modification, distribution or republication, without the prior written consent of Practical Family Living, Inc., is strictly prohibited.