

When Boys Fight and Compete

How do we know when it is permissible for boys to fight? When do we determine that an altercation was justifiable and when it was not? A boy fighting off a kidnapper is surely to be praised, but a boy reducing himself to a fistfight over the last sweet is to be disciplined. As parents we must instruct our boys to fight in a life-threatening situation and not to fight when the issue is petty and when a higher authority is just around the corner in the kitchen, who can adjudicate the dispute.

The best way, as with all things, is to go to the Word of God and discover what it has to say about fistfights in the gray areas. For example, what about the consistently determined bully at school, or what if a friend is getting unjustly hammered by someone and when there is no hope of adult intervention?

The Christian faith is not pacifistic. We are given a glorious vision of victory in Scripture, when spears will be beaten into pruning hooks. A time will indeed come, when men will no longer have to study war, but in the meantime our boys need to be instructed in the art of warfare, fighting and self-defence. We cannot wait until boys are fully-grown; the training must start at a young age. Future men need to learn when, where and how to fight.

In Matthew 5 we see that not only is murder forbidden, but also anger without a cause. Boys who fight for entertainment, or who fly off the handle at things which are no provocation at all are in need of discipline. This must be detected at an early age, as it is an attitude which manifests itself in a variety of ways.

Boys must be taught never to fight for trivial reasons, and they must not be motivated by a personal disdain that is evidenced in the desire to wound through name-calling. Boys must also be taught that they may not fight unless the fight is consistent with their love for their enemies. The heart of the Christian ethic is for individuals to be reconciled to God. Personal vengeance always escalates out of control, but strict justice can be administered by a civil magistrate according to God's Word.

As parents we must be clear in our teaching that our personal enemies must be loved. At the same time we as parents can instruct our sons that a bully can and must be restrained when there is no other way to stop the abuse. In this case, the son is the deputy of his father.

War At Play

Many adults are concerned over boys playing war with toy guns and swords. But boys are training at something men are called to do. This is as honourable as girls mothering baby dolls. We must however make sure that Biblical rules apply even here. Boys should never treat a toy gun more freely because it is not real. Boys playing war with boys should be allowed to blast away with the best of them. But if a lady comes over to visit the young boy's mother, and is standing in the hallway, and the boy comes up and tries to blow her away, the young warrior's mother should haul him off to the bedroom to be tried for war crimes. The visitor was a civilian and non-combatant. Mother should be schooled in the principles of Just War theory, and she should enforce the rules. Boys must also be trained in the use of real firearms. They should be fanatics about gun safety, and the rules of gun safety should apply whether the gun is real or not.

Athletic Competition

This is really mock war, and many valuable lessons can be learned in the context of disciplined athletic competition. In the world of sports involving children, egalitarianism runs rampant. Winning and losing is said not to be important as long as every child comes out of the game feeling good about himself. It is quite true that a competitor should not care about winning more than he cares about glorifying God. But although it sounds crass, the point of playing a game is to win it - and this is how young men should be trained to glorify God. Winning is most certainly not everything - but it is the point of that particular activity. There is nothing wrong with encouraging our sons to win at competitive sports, as long as good sportsmanship is demonstrated. In a team context, the individual's skills help the whole team win, and this in of itself teaches valuable lessons.

In summary, there are times when boys must be taught to mute their natural energy. (Subject of a future article), but at other times another set of manners requires a release of energy. These channels in which aggressiveness can flow should be well defined and established. We see here the benefits of organized sports and military training.

But even on the playing field, 'manners' are still important. When aggressiveness overflows the banks, or when there are no banks (restraints), we have a major problem. Boys should learn at a young and tender age what God requires of Christian men.

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(For further reading, obtain 'FUTURE MEN' by Doug Wilson, from [Christian Liberty Books](#).)