

FROM A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Being Patient with Our Boys: A Father's Perspective

By Michael J. Pomi and Kristin Loebbecke

I think a lot about raising boys and about being a good parent to young adults. Often, it all comes down to patience. In the relationship between parent and child, we need to acknowledge that there are differences between girls and boys. And, we need to acknowledge that adults in their early 20s (especially boys) haven't finished growing yet.

It is science that has shed the most light on my own experiences as a father and as a veteran of mentoring, disciplining, and protecting boys in the juvenile justice system.

We all know how important the first five years of life are in a child's brain development. Researchers are now drawing attention to another period of cognitive development, ages 18 to 25. This gap between being a teenager and a full-fledged adult is often called "emerging adulthood." Recent findings of the National Institute of Mental Health and neurologist Jay Giedd, for example, show that the front of the brain is one of the last areas to mature, and it changes well into the mid-20s. This is the part of the brain that plans, organizes, measures risk, and controls impulses. It is no wonder, then, that ages 18 to 25 have peak rates of car accidents, drinking, anxiety, and depression. And, yes, all this is happening at a time when our children may be also making decisions about career, education, military service, marriage, and parenthood.

This research makes a lot of sense to me and is why I tell myself and other parents that we need to be patient with our boys, even and especially, as they are growing into adulthood. We need to give our boys structure and feedback. We need to give them opportunities to practice independence and decision making. They need our help in thinking through processes and making decisions.

At the end of the day, we are responsible, and dads especially are responsible, for raising our boys to be the next generation of dads and granddads. We need to provide leadership. Regardless of what happens in our own lives, we need to remember that as fathers and male role models, we are the ones who influence generations of young men.

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As executive director of The Children's Cabinet, Mike helps oversee dozens of Family and Youth Intervention programs, including those that support teenagers and their parents during times of transition. Prior to joining The Children's Cabinet, Mike served as director of Washoe County Juvenile Services. He has a master's degree in social work and 30 years of experience as a juvenile probation and truancy officer. Mike is also a proud father and grandfather.