

Adam Cox, PhD

## Helping Boys to Communicate and Connect: Strategies that Really Work

(90 minute presentation with extensive visuals. Suitable for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. Also available in half-day or full-day training format for educators and mental health professionals).

**Description:** Drawing on his book, *Boys of Few Words: Raising Our Sons to Communicate and Connect*, Dr. Cox discusses the challenges so many boys face in learning how to be effective communicators. The obstacles encountered by diverse groups of boys, including those who are anxious or shy, angry or resistant, or struggling with neurodevelopmental challenges, such as learning disabilities and/or ADHD, are covered in depth.

This program clarifies why communication is fundamental to social and emotional development, and explains which kinds of communication obstacles grow from a boy's temperament, and which may be more related to brain differences. Sometimes, boys have an extensive vocabulary for "instrumental communication" — words used for the factual exchange of information, such as how to program a computer or the names of dinosaurs. Yet they may lack the ability to use words to connect at a deeper level, and express what they think, feel, and believe. Participants get practical advice on how to connect with boys bound by walls of silence.

**By attending this program, participants will:**

- Understand the developmental, social, and psychological issues that impact boys' communication
- Learn why social communication skills are critical for life success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Discover causes for lack of communication, particularly the *language of emotions*
- Learn how to identify and prevent specific communication problems
- Be able to initiate communication strategies to enhance relationships with boys of all ages

*\*This presentation can be tailored to the interests of attendees, for example, focusing on prevention and intervention strategies for specific age groups, or on a specific issue, such as withdrawn or shy boys.*

**Outline, Helping Boys to Communicate & Connect:**

- I. **Welcome and brief overview: how boys and girls are different; current challenges of boys; communication's critical role at home, school.**
- II. **Words unfold a child's mind. Importance of nurturing social communication. A broad range**

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of potential interventions; effective remediation built upon a foundation of collaboration.

- III. **What makes the listening skills/challenges of boys unique?**
  - A. **Basic Brain Differences**
    - The *corpus callosum* – "bridge" to hearing
    - How learning disabilities and social problems are linked
    - Hemispheric differences
    - The executive brain – ADHD is only the "tip of the iceberg"
  - B. **Social Challenges**
    - Decoding nonverbal communication
    - What is pragmatic communication and why is it so important?
    - Difficulty of sending friendship signals
  - C. **Emotional Challenges**
    - Assessing a boy's "empathy quotient"
    - Empathy is not optional for a successful life
    - Common behavioral and mental health issues of emotionally disconnected boys
- IV. **Three social learning platforms: *Play, Action, Mastery*. How these approaches appeal to boys. Recognizing strengths and need for feelings of competence. Rule #1: minimize vulnerability.**
- V. **When, Where and How to Intervene**
  - A. **Learning about personal differences**
    - How to help boys know who they are
    - Asking questions that safely elicit self-expression
    - Practically encouraging social risk-taking
    - Using media to teach social awareness
    - Teaching how to disagree, agreeably
  - B. **Learning the language of emotions**
    - Helping boys try on roles
    - Exploring constructive avenues for protest
    - Distinguishing between thoughts and feelings
    - Practicing how to identify with other's feelings
    - Publicly praising expressive skills
  - C. **Building a social conscience**
    - Teaching boys how their words impact others
    - Making praise specific to actions
    - Modeling social interest at home and school
    - Bringing community life into family discussion
  - D. **Audience interaction** [optional]
    - General questions and answers
    - "Can I ask about my child/student who...."

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## No Mind Left Behind: Coaching the Eight Pillars of the Executive Brain

*(90 minute presentation with visuals. Suitable for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. Also available in half-day or full-day training format for educators and mental health professionals).*

**Description:** What is the common thread of disability for special needs children, and what can we do to help? This seminar explains the concept of **executive control**, describing how it helps children to navigate important developmental hurdles, both social and academic. Special emphasis is placed on working memory, self-monitoring, and cognitive flexibility, particularly as they contribute to helping someone become productive and efficient in daily tasks. These important skills also enable problem-solving, goal-directed action, and adjustment in many areas of a child's life, ultimately leading to increased feelings of self-confidence. Strategies for building and coaching these skills are presented and amply illustrated with "real-life" examples.

**Outline, No Mind Left Behind:**

- I. **Welcome and brief overview of program: our extraordinary age of brain research; what we are learning and how it is important to parenting and teaching. How should we practically apply science to the day-to-day process of raising capable kids?**
- II. **Introduction to the executive brain (accompanied by visuals and brain development animation). Many child behavior and learning problems are herded under the "umbrella diagnosis" of ADHD. Explanation of how executive control problems are similar, yet more comprehensive and specific, than a diagnosis of ADHD. Consequences of misdiagnosis at home and school.**
- III. **Overview of eight pillars of executive brain**
  - A. **Working Memory** – the foundation of making associative connections. Fuels processing speed, enabling fluency of thought and communication. Single most important executive function – greatest impact on efficiency of all other executive functions.
  - B. **Initiation** – the ability to get started on things. Useful lens for understanding such challenges as poor follow-through on homework, procrastination, and

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related problems with time management.

- C. **Sustained Attention** – key executive control deficit associated with ADHD. Explanation of how attention is related to brain's ability to inhibit distraction, and what psychostimulant medication does to enhance attentional capability.
  - D. **Flexibility** – the ability to shift focus as needed, as well as understanding "rule" changes such as applying different work habits, communication styles, etc. according to specific situations.
  - E. **Self-Monitoring** – the critical ability to see oneself with an adequate degree of objectivity and analysis. Enables a child to adapt their behavior in accordance with social cues. Facilitate social connection and meaningful understanding of oneself.
  - F. **Emotional Control** – keeping emotional reactions in proportion to events. The essence of self-regulation and the skills that are so important to transitioning to school and coping with frustration and stress.
  - G. **Organization** – at the core of efficiency. Enables a child to maximize output and keep up with presentation of new information.
  - H. **Planning** – assist goal-directed thinking by helping a person sequence a series of steps to bring about a specific result. Makes a significant contribution to time awareness. Surrogate executive control; how parents and teachers can support executive thinking skills; specific strategies to assist with each executive function. Implications for flow of family life.
- IV. **Building effective classroom strategies that exercise and maximize executive thinking capabilities.**

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## **Mighty Good Kids: The Essentials of Teaching Social Skills**

*(Half-day training for teachers and mental health professionals)*

**Description:** How can you set-up an effective social skills program within your own school or community setting? This half-day workshop provides information about structuring dynamic, fun social skills groups. Participants learn about age-appropriate topics, intervention strategies, handling complex group interaction, and talking to parents about group goals. An overview of a 10-week group curriculum is provided, along with suggestions about customizing groups for children with learning or attention challenges.

Participants receive more than 30 topic suggestions, along with numerous ideas for how to teach those topics in ways proven to be effective and engaging to kids. Strategies focus on facilitating interaction among group members. Suggestions about how to incorporate physical activities and multimedia into meetings, develop cohesion and support within the group, and integrate learning at home, school, and community are provided.

### **Questions answered include:**

- Why develop a social skills course?
- Who should participate? Identifying and recruiting children who are able and likely to benefit from a social skills course.
- Who should not participate? Identifying your core constituency (gender, presenting issues, such as anger v. shyness, age range.) How to refer more impaired children for intensive services.
- How to build enthusiasm and engagement within the group; building cohesions, "rules for the road".
- How to communicate with and support parents

*Sample workbooks and session plans will be provided.*

### **A Note About Programs:**

We will work with you and your organization to plan a program that meets your needs. We offer:

- Keynote Address/Lectures
- Half-Day Workshops
- Full-Day Workshops
- Customized Programs

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Programs are adapted to the audience's level of familiarity with the subject matter. Workshops are offered for:

- Staff Continuing Education
- Parent/Teacher Associations
- Community Groups
- Professional Organizations
- Business Groups