

Practical Tips for Encouraging Our Boys

One of the best gifts a father can give a son is a stable place to land. A place where the boy does not have to earn love with his stats. A place where he can be honest about fear and still feel respected. A place where he can hear, “I’m proud of your effort,” and also hear, “Now let’s get back to work.” These combinations are how boys learn that love is not fragile and standards are not cruel.

**So what does encouragement look like in practice, beyond good intentions?
Here’s what dads and others can do:**

1 Praise effort and strategy more than outcomes.

Celebrate preparation, discipline, and decision-making. Say, “I saw you stay locked in on defense,” “I noticed how you responded after a turnover,” and “I love how you kept the energy up on the bench.” This feedback teaches boys to celebrate mastery over victory and applause.

2 Normalize the idea of growth seasons. (New level? New pressure.)

Let boys know that confidence rises and dips. Teach them that discomfort is often a sign they are stretching, not failing. When a boy expects struggle, he is less likely to panic when it arrives.

3 Give boys language for their inner world.

Boys don’t lack emotion; they lack vocabulary. When you teach a boy to say, “I’m embarrassed, anxious, frustrated, or discouraged,” you give him a steering wheel he can use to drive his feelings toward constructive action.

4 Build a small, consistent routine that produces evidence.

Confidence grows when a boy can point to his own work, and adults can help him create a practice plan that fits his life: 15 minutes a day of ball-handling, 20 free throws before school, film study once a week, or strength work twice a week. Set goals small enough to do, then be consistent.

5 Treat mistakes as data, not drama.

“Next play” is not just a sports phrase; it’s a life strategy. When boys are coached with heat rather than clarity, they hear, “Mistakes make you unworthy.” This leads to fear-based playing and living. Instead, after we correct the mistake, we must return the boy to his identity.

6 Make room for mentors.

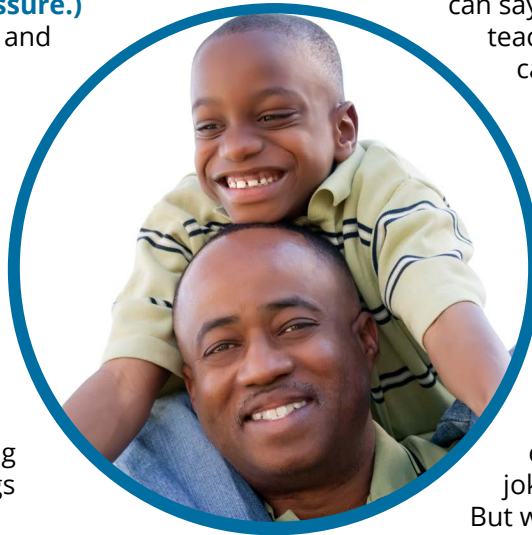
Boys benefit from more than one voice. A coach can say something a parent cannot say. A teacher can see something the coach cannot. An uncle, pastor, neighbor, older athlete, or community leader can model a form of manhood that is grounded and whole. When a boy has multiple healthy mirrors, he is less dependent on unhealthy approval.

7 Check the soundtrack.

Boys listen to what we repeat, not what we intend. If dialogue at home is constant criticism, sarcasm, comparison, or jokes that cut, boys doubt their worth. But when they receive steady encouragement with clear standards, they learn self-respect.

8 Teach boys how to define themselves beyond a single lane.

A boy who thinks he is “only” an athlete will crumble when sports disappoint him. A boy who thinks he’s “the smart one” will panic when schoolwork gets hard. Encourage multi-dimensional identity.



Encouragement also requires adults to do their own work.

Boys know when our words are performative, recognize when praise is a bribe, and perceive ego in the expectations we set. When a father tries to relive his own missed opportunities through his son, the son carries weight that isn't his. If a coach needs boys to win in order to feel respected, the boys learn that love is conditional. If a teacher has already decided what a boy can become, that bias shows up in every interaction.

The Call for Fathers is Simple and Demanding:

Encourage boys with intention.

Teach belief as a skill.

Create evidence through routine.

Correct without crushing.

Love without requiring performance.

Challenge without withdrawing affection.

Offer examples of men who carry
strength and softness together.

