

Why do junior high school boys so often want to hit each other? Dan Doyle of the Institute for International Sport has stated:

*In the youth culture, it is accepted or even appropriate to respond to disrespect with violence and if you don't, you're not a man.
(Sappenfield, 2004)*

After twenty-eight years of practical experience in junior high schools observing the behavior of boys, and having once been a boy myself, I think Mr. Doyle captured the boy's point of view perfectly with his observation.

I wish Doyle had another good quip to explain what parents and schools ought to be doing better to speed the process from adolescence to civil manhood!

The March 2006 issue of *Principal Leadership* magazine contained an article by psychologist David R. Leaman entitled, "Helping Students Keep Their Cool". Leaman went on for several pages to describe the biological roots of anger. I am going to liberally borrow from Mr. Leaman and give you a short explanation of his work.

Leaman defines anger, "... as a physiological response to a perceived threat." The brain and body's chemicals kick in and the 'fight or flight' response is engaged. The brain and body enter a state where the likelihood of hostile action is increased, not reduced. Leaman asks you to think of a ten point anger scale. When the body's chemistry set dumps such large amounts of anger arousal hormones into a body that nine or ten on the scale is reached, survival instincts take over and the creative-reasoning parts of the brain temporarily shut down. Leaman says:

During anger arousal, people perform as if they had a thought disorder or learning disability. When a person reaches point 9, there is no effective intervention.

To Leaman's observation I add mine... the more public the location where the hostilities begin, the less likely an adolescent boy is to turn and walk away. His sense of personal dignity simply won't let him turn the other cheek and risk ridicule of his manhood. (A boy's version of preferring death before dishonor as suggested by Doyle).

After the fight happens and the boys are in my office to tell me what caused the conflict and to explain why the physical aggression happened, the thinking is consistently similar no matter what the original conflict was.

Leaman describes the behavior I deal with as, “**negative thinking or self talk.**” “Attributing negative motives to the other person increases our sense of injustice and our belief that we have the right to be hostile.” The boys convince themselves the other is intentionally aggravating them, is a jerk, there is unfairness inherent to the problem, and they see a need to teach the other to never ‘do that again’.

According to Leaman, the underlying emotions that an adult would recognize are feelings of helplessness, hurt, fear and guilt.

Leaman’s article begins to lose traction with Junior High realities when he starts describing how to de-escalate emotions through the use of tension relieving isometric exercises, deep breaths and a sharing of feelings. If the boys were consistently able to understand and apply those skills they would be young men- not adolescents!

So what do we do at NPMS to help our emotionally charged and hormone flooded boys cope with their insecurities, budding sense of justice and hyper-inflated sense of dignity? Great question, but it will take next month’s column space to answer!

In the meantime, dads at home will continue to do their part role modeling civil behavior and gentle words while mashing their boys into paste rasslin on the living room floor and moms will attempt to keep the fridge stocked while enforcing minimum levels of decorum around the house!

Your homework due by next month, is to read the best work ever written about the workings (and malfunctions) of a boy’s mind. You will find Mark Twain’s book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* at the local library, or for \$12.44 at Amazon.com! The man was a genius when it comes to understanding and explaining a boy’s world!