

# Episode 19: Boys Need a Structured Discipline Plan

## Brave Hearts Bold Minds

### *Episode Transcript*

Leigh Hatcher: Hello and welcome to the Brave Hearts Bold Minds podcast: Growing Fine Young Men. I'm Leigh Hatcher. Thanks for joining me as we explore a whole world of ideas and inspiration. As we seek to help the boys of today, grow into the fine young men of tomorrow. Each week I'll be interviewing an educator from The Scots College in Sydney to find out how best to build a boy, and to offer all parents of school-age boys practical ideas and strategies to shape the character of a young man for life and for good. So let's ring the bell and meet our guest for this week's podcast.

With me today is Mr John Crerar. John is Head of the Preparatory School and Deputy Principal at The Scots College. His topic is 'Boys Need a Structured Discipline Plan'. John, thanks for popping in.

John Crerar: Thank you, Leigh. Lovely to be here.

Leigh Hatcher: Great to meet you. When it comes to discipline in schools, John, people have been long complaining that there's a discipline crisis in education, in society. How do you see it?

John Crerar: That's interesting, discipline crisis. I wouldn't describe it as such, but I would say there's a crisis in confidence amongst many parents when it comes to how to discipline the child. There are lots of talk, but in a psychological school if you'd like to look and also in the normal school on how best to discipline children. In the end though, it's the saying, that "eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow, we die". The problem is we actually don't die tomorrow. We go on to reap the negative consequences of poor behaviour or the positive consequences of good behaviour.

Leigh Hatcher: It's interesting that you highlight the issue for parents. It's kind of a crisis of confidence in parents.



John Crerar: Yeah. There is. I think there's a confidence issue when it comes to being a loving authority. When it comes to the parent, I don't think children want or need another friend. A parent is, well they love their children. Children don't want them to be their mate or their peer. They actually want a parent that's going to be a loving authority that cares and will do anything for them.

Leigh Hatcher: You say we need structures to assist boys to be disciplined, even self-disciplined. What are those structures going to look like John? How will they work?

John Crerar: Boys need structures in terms of; they need to know where they're going. They need to know firstly what the expectations are, and what happens if they move to the right and left of those expectations. They don't like a laissez-faire environment. They want to know what the consequences are going to be, and their comfortable within those structures. When it comes to family life and it comes to classroom experiences, if the boys know more about what's expected, what's going to happen if they don't meet those expectations, or what happens when they do meet those expectations, it's a security blanket for them. And so they're aware and they're quite relaxed and feel free within those structures.

Leigh Hatcher: It's going to take time, and it's going to be the reality that the parent needs to be bothered, or the teacher needs to be bothered to explain those structures, those boundaries if you'd like for a boy.

John Crerar: Yeah, absolutely. Whether it's at home or in the classroom, the explanation, that step of training up the child is an important one. We can have our consequences for poor behaviour and good behaviour, but unless we explain clearly what the expectations are boys aren't going to know what to do, and that's particularly important as a young child. We don't expect a boy who's in Kindergarten to be behaving like a Year 6 boy or a Year 10 boy. However, if they know what the expectations are, and what they look like, that makes them feel comfortable in the environment.

Leigh Hatcher: Yeah, you say it's quite important to consider each boy's personality type, so the discipline for a quiet shy boy may be entirely different to that of an outgoing robust boy.

John Crerar: That's exactly right. I think parents know, especially parents of more than a single child know that each member of their family is different.

Leigh Hatcher: So, [crosstalk 00:03:42] (laughter).

John Crerar: I mean for my case, how we disciplined our son was very different to our daughter. For our son, it only needed a wink to get him back in line. For our daughter it needed



much more than a wink, it needed a stronger form of discipline, a stronger consequence so that she would know the right thing to do, and what the expectations are.

Leigh Hatcher: It's interesting that you can discipline even with a look. That's very powerful.

John Crerar: That's very powerful in the classroom. One of the things that children don't like is to know that they've let their parents down, or let their teacher down, and sometimes a look is good enough moving forward.

Leigh Hatcher: But if you bring strong discipline to that child who just needs a look you can possibly crush them.

John Crerar: You could. You could. With some children, you could crush them with a look and so how you treat each individual child needs to be really dependent upon their personality type. And that's an art. That's an art as a parent. That's an art as a teacher, to know the right way to move when it comes to developing discipline within a child.

Your hope always is that there'd be self-discipline as they grow.

Leigh Hatcher: Yeah, I'm often hearing from experts in education like you in our podcast, that boys need and love as you said before structure and routine, to know what's expected of them. Does that make discipline easier you think?

John Crerar: I think boys knowing their expectations certainly make things easier. My experience in classes is that the teachers that have well-disciplined classes are really disciplined.

Leigh Hatcher: That's interesting.

John Crerar: The boys know their structures, they know their expectations, they're corrected on behaviour that may not be complimentary to those expectations, and so they're comfortable there. It's very rare that you would have a class that's well disciplined that you didn't have a teacher that's teaching them, and training them along the road.

Leigh Hatcher: Sometimes it might be easier for a teacher or a parent to just kind of let it go.

John Crerar: Yeah, that's right.

Leigh Hatcher: You say they need to be stepping up to this, be vigilant?

John Crerar: I think an important thing is to understand that whatever we accept, we teach. So if the boys are lining up in the morning in the class context, and we accept that they are not lining up correctly, and we don't correct them, that's what they accept. And that's what they think is the normal routine. And it's the same in the home, whatever we accept we're teaching them that that's the way it is. And so it is a training process, it's a constant process of correction and commendation, but it's a process through life.



Leigh Hatcher: Yeah, indeed. Two phrases from the John Crerar Book of Wisdom “Discipline is a friend for life”. That’s number one. Second, “A good dose of humour is part of discipline.” Please explain.

John Crerar: Okay, well the discipline is a friend for life. I think if we have a discipline process whereby it’s always negative, and it’s always trying to find the faults of someone, they won’t appreciate that.

Leigh Hatcher: Of course, yes.

John Crerar: As a friend ... But when it’s presented in the context of a loving authority figure, or figures that they’re there for the children, trying to correct them, and guide them through life. They will come to know that discipline is a friend. Every day is a day of discipline. Getting up early, getting your bag ready, coming to school, showing discipline in the playground, and you’re going to fail, the boys will fail, the girls will fail, but they can get back on that road, and there is a means by which they can get back on that road. Understanding that in the end, that discipline is going to be a friend that’ll take you into adulthood and further.

Leigh Hatcher: They need to know that you’re on their side.

John Crerar: Absolutely. One of the things that we insist upon, even when there is a serious disciplinary issue is that at the end of speaking with the boy, and providing a consequence, that we do ask them “Do you understand?” And “Do you think this is a fair consequence?” So that they actually see that it’s a consequence of behaviour that’s going to happen in life, and they can be accepting of it, and then moving on every new day is a fresh start.

Leigh Hatcher: What about the humour thing?

John Crerar: (laughs)

Leigh Hatcher: How does that fit?

John Crerar: Well I think that in the end, we all fail. There are always times when we are undisciplined, and when it comes to humour, boys love to laugh at themselves, and boys are very, very, very funny people. And so as we all know when we look back at our lives, and the times that we’ve failed and when we’ve been undisciplined ...

Leigh Hatcher: Hilarious.

John Crerar: ... we can laugh about that. We can laugh about it.

Leigh Hatcher: Yes you can actually.



John Crerar: (laughs) And so it's important to realise that. And what it actually says is that no one is going to be perfect, no one ever reaches perfection, but along the road there's going to be times of celebration, there's going to be times where things that we do are wrong, but they're funny, and we move on.

Leigh Hatcher: For a parent, for a teacher, you need to be careful being that kind of authority figure. In how you wield that authority. You argue against authority for authority's sake, but rather authority for love's sake. What's that look like? How do you apply that?

John Crerar: That's a very important thing to understand. Earlier you said that there was a crisis regarding discipline. I think there's also misunderstanding regarding authority. Authority is not there for authority's sake. Authority is there because it's a given structure in our world, that we have authority structures that are there to love and care for those who, if you'd like, are under them in authority.

So when it comes to a teacher, when it comes to a parent. That parent authority is someone that loves them, cares for them, has a sacrificial love if you'd like, for that child. And so when that authority figure is leading them, is correcting them, is rewarding them, it all has to do with wanting the best for the child, and loving that child, and in the end from a Christian point of view when it comes to our College, we have a loving authority who is God, who is our Father in heaven.

Leigh Hatcher: Who's on our side.

John Crerar: Is on our side, and when it comes to that we're representative if you'd like, of God's loving authority too.

Leigh Hatcher: These are really valuable and important insights for parents John, of any boy's way beyond Scots. Give them some strategies, some practical tips on how they can better structure discipline for their boys, for their life.

John Crerar: Okay, firstly I think underlying everything that we've discussed today is just an unconditional love. That a boy or a child is not going to do something where that love stops. It's always unconditional, and we will love them no matter what. But whether it be at the school, or at home, firstly rules are important. Or if you'd like, agreed upon ways that work at home and at school, so the boys need to know that. We need to teach them what the expectations are when you're watching television, what the expectations are when boys are having screen time, what the expectations are when they're playing in the playground. Firstly, they need to know that, and that's a security for the boys. Then they need to know if they go right or left, and go against those rules, there's going to be consequences both positive and negative. And they'll be rewards for walking in the right direction if you'd like through life. And there's also going to be consequences when they leave school, and when they're at school, and when they're in their family.



So having those clear, the rules, the positive and negative consequences, and understanding that the children are under loving authority, and talk to them about what we're trying to lead them to if you'd like, and that is to be self-disciplined as they grow up.

Leigh Hatcher: Routines are important.

John Crerar: They're most important. The routine of a school day, when it comes to understanding what time the day starts, what the routine is as you walk into the classroom, what's going to be the next subject. Boys like to know exactly what's going to follow after each other. And it's the same at home. Routines are very important. That there is a consistent procedure if you'd like when it comes to what's happening on Wednesday, what's going to happen on Saturday. Of course, it's not going to be exactly the same week after week, but that brings security. As rituals are, rituals are very important in a child's life at home. Whether it be –

Leigh Hatcher: What's the example?

John Crerar: Okay I'll give you an example of a ritual in our family. There's a special ritual for example: when it's Easter, we come home from church, and we have our hot cross buns, and that's something that our children, even as adults come round to home knowing that that particular ritual happens. But there are rituals around the dinner table. And the importance of not having the television on is a ritual that we follow at our home. And it's a time to talk and to discuss things, and it brings security to the child, that we are family, we are one, and these rituals help build us up.

Leigh Hatcher: With all of this, I'm sure it's the earlier you can start with this the better.

John Crerar: Yeah.

Leigh Hatcher: No use starting this when they're 18.

John Crerar: No, absolutely. We once had a parent, not come to Scots, but at another school, and brought the child to them, and said, "We haven't disciplined our child because we want to leave that to the school."

Leigh Hatcher: Oh wow how revealing.

John Crerar: Amazingly there was that mindset, but I did have a little giggle when the Principal replied, "Well I hope we're not too late." We're never too late, but it's best to start as early as we can. And as mentioned before, when it comes to a classroom, and when you have a disciplined classroom, not much discipline work really happens, it's just that the expectations are there, and there followed through each time in the classroom, and in the family.

Leigh Hatcher: Important that no one plays favourites in discipline.



John Crerar: Absolutely, and boys particularly are alert to that. They'll be alert to it in the classroom, and they'll pick up if there are any favourites. So if there is a warning, and if there's a consequence for a particular behaviour, you can't overlook the next one, where a boy has done exactly the same thing.

Always, keeping in mind the personality, and the needs of that child.

Leigh Hatcher: Let me finally ask you to lift the veil on the John Crerar story. Did you ever struggle with discipline as a boy?

John Crerar: Yeah, I had a terrible struggle. My parents said that I was a home angel, but a street devil. So I actually ran away from class in Year 6.

Leigh Hatcher: Did you really?

John Crerar: I did.

Leigh Hatcher: And here you are a teacher at The Scots College.

John Crerar: It's interesting, very interesting.

Leigh Hatcher: What happened there?

John Crerar: Well I came from a large family, so my older sister was a very compliant, intelligent lady, as my older brother was, but then I came along and I wasn't. And so I had the same teaching, she expected me to be exactly like my sister and brother were, and it ended up that I ended up in the store room. I wasn't allowed to come in the classroom.

Leigh Hatcher: In the store room?

John Crerar: That's right, that's where my desk was, and so I ran away. And I went home to mum and I said: "I'm not going back there, she doesn't like me." And it's interesting, it has an effect on me even today. You know while we want children to have a disciplined life, it's very important to explain what the expectations are and to love them no matter what.

Leigh Hatcher: Not much love there.

John Crerar: (laughs)

Leigh Hatcher: How's that had an impact on you?

John Crerar: I suppose it's had an impact on me when I think about boys particularly. I think when it comes to behaviour they need a clear explanation. Boys don't think sometimes. When they're out in the playground they don't think about their behaviour and their



consequences. But when talking to them and teaching them, it's best to talk over things, so they get a chance to have a say, and then you can see their context. And then sometimes you can understand their reasoning behind, sometimes their poor decisions, and talk about how they can be best trained to make better decisions next time. So it's a learning process from the beginning to the end, but as long as we're unconditional in our love to our boys, and also positive that they'll make it. They'll pick that up.

Leigh Hatcher: What great lessons from a rich life John Crerar. Thank you so much indeed for joining us.

John Crerar: Thank you, Leigh.

Leigh Hatcher: It's been a great conversation. If you'd like more information about growing your boy into a fine young man, you can subscribe to receive really useful articles and news from The Scots College. It's free and offered to every parent who wants the best for their boy in their journey to manhood. In your internet search engine enter 'The Scots College enewsletter' to subscribe. I'm Leigh Hatcher. Hope you'll join me again next week on the Brave Hearts Bold Minds podcast: Growing Fine Young Men.

You can't have seen this but throughout this interview, John Crerar's hand and his finger have been hovering dangerously close to this button. He hasn't hit it yet, thank the Lord for that. Now's the time John.

John Crerar: Thank you.

