

What a
Difference a
mom
Makes

*The Indelible Imprint a Mom
Leaves on Her Son's Life*

Dr. Kevin Leman



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dr. Kevin Leman, *What a Difference a Mom Makes*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2012 by Kevin Leman

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Leman, Kevin.

What a difference a mom makes : the indelible imprint a mom leaves on her son's life / Dr. Kevin Leman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8007-2173-2 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-8007-2211-1 (international trade paper)

1. Mothers and sons—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4529.L84 2012

306.8743—dc23

2012009168

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with the author, some details and names have been changed.

The internet addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers in this book are accurate at the time of publication. They are provided as a resource. Baker Publishing Group does not endorse them or vouch for their content or permanence.

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Dr. Kevin Leman, *What a Difference a Mom Makes*
Revell Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2012. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To my wonderful son,
Kevin Anderson Leman II

I'd love to take credit for the
great man you've turned out to be,
but this book points out the obvious:
Mom had a great deal more to do with it than I did.
You've won six Emmys, you're the head writer
and an executive producer of the
funniest daytime TV program,
but what makes me proudest is the
respect and care you show to others,
your humble nature, your faith in God,
and your love for your family.

Contents

- Acknowledgments 13
- Introduction: Boys Will Be Boys—Always 15
*You panic. “I don’t know a thing about boys!”
Ah, but you will.*
1. Your Boy Doesn’t Need to Wear a Skirt (But He Does
Need a Good Dose of Femininity) 19
*You, Mom, leave an indelible imprint on your child. Here’s
why.*
2. Planning Your Toddler’s Wedding 37
*Want a boy who will be a great husband for your future
daughter-in-law and a great father for your grandchildren?
Here’s how. (By the way, did you know that you also play a
large role in picking your future daughter-in-law?)*
3. What Kind of Parent Are You? 61
*What influenced you to become the parent you are? What’s
your parenting style—and how does that affect Little or Big
Fletcher?*
4. Understanding Fletcher 79
*Why is Fletcher the way he is? Why do he and his siblings
squabble? Here are the secrets to knowing when to step in
and when to butt out and let them handle it.*

5. Discipline That Works—Every Time 101
Say no to those daily battles with your son with a no-fail plan.
6. Ages and Stages #1: From Infant and Toddler to Early School Age 125
Each step in the journey of growing up has its joys . . . and its challenges. Here's how you can get off to a great start and make the best of this time of transition.
7. Ages and Stages #2: From Middle School to High School 145
Each step in the journey of growing up has its joys . . . and its challenges. Here's how you can make the best of both and help your child step up to the plate on his own.
8. Guess What His Favorite Body Part Is 161
There's no escaping our sex-laden world or a boy's growing interest in sex. But how you respond to and address your son's sexuality can make all the difference in his perspective.
9. Doormat, Dishrag, or Strong and Smart? 179
How do you treat yourself, Mom? And how do the men in your life treat you? Now's the time to stand up for yourself—for the sake of your son and his future relationships.
10. On Duty or MIA? 195
Does your son have an actively involved father or an emotionally or physically MIA daddy? Here's what to do with each one.
11. Are You “Velcro Woman”? 213
You're mighty, but you're only one woman. So how can you juggle everything? Here are hints for sorting out what's important from what's not.
12. Your Someday Man 231
Someday the little boy with the bandaged knees and that mouthy, hormone-laden teenager will become a man. But

Contents

the work you do now to capture his heart will pay off—just wait and see.

Epilogue: Good Ol' Mom 243

I'd never be where I am today if it weren't for my mom, who believed in me despite all evidence to the contrary.

The Top 10 Countdown to Being an Awesome Mom 249

Notes 251

About Dr. Kevin Leman 255

Resources by Dr. Kevin Leman 257

Acknowledgments

To my mother, May Leman, because I know firsthand what a difference moms can make in their son's life.

To my dear wife, Mrs. Uppington, because I've seen the difference she's made in our son's life—and so has the world.

To my editor, Ramona Cramer Tucker, who gets what boys of all ages—including myself and her adventurous, fun-loving, go-for-the-goal husband, Jeff—are about.

To my stellar Revell team, including Lonnie Hull DuPont, editor extraordinaire, and Jessica English, who fine-tunes my manuscripts to their brightest sheen.

Introduction

Boys Will Be Boys—Always

You panic. “I don’t know a thing about boys!”

Ah, but you will.

You’ve always dreamed of having that precious little daughter—one who is a little replica of you. You dream of the close relationship you’ll have as mother and daughter, watching her taking her first step, buying her first tutu for her ballet recital, arranging her hair for her first date . . .

And then you show up at the doctor’s office for your sonogram.

“What’s that?” you say, pointing at a little something you can’t quite place on the blurry black-and-white image.

And the doc says, “That’s a penis.”

You frown, not understanding. “My daughter’s got a penis?” Then realization dawns. “A boy?”

Inside you start to panic. *What do I do with a boy? I don't know a thing about boys!*

Ah, but you will.

Maybe you weren't raised with any siblings, or at least with any brothers. Perhaps your dad was MIA, so you didn't get much guy influence in your house. Or maybe you did have a brother, but you didn't understand him then . . . or now.

"My daughter's got a penis?"

Or perhaps you're already thrown into the process of bringing up your boy. He might be an infant you recently birthed or adopted, and you're congratulating yourself because you just figured out how to strategically place the Pampers so you don't get those early-morning or late-night surprise showers when you change his diaper. Good for you! You're on the road to success already.

Your son might be a toddler who has recently told you in that determined tone you know means business, "By self, Mom. I do it by self."

Perhaps your son will soon be going off to preschool or kindergarten. You can't help but think, *My baby's leaving the nest*. Half of you looks forward to the break (and the quiet!), but the other half mourns your son going off somewhere—anywhere—without you.

Then there's your nine-year-old, who used to be so close and affectionate but now is backing off a bit. He even asked you the other day to walk a few steps behind him and said, "Please, Mom, don't hug me in front of the guys."

And your adolescent son? The one who eats cereal in a bowl you could put a bowling ball in? You're a little tired of hearing a grunt and then a door slam in response to your "How was your day?" Picking up sweaty socks from his jungle of a bedroom isn't your idea of a fun afternoon either.

Then there's your high schooler. The one who shaves but doesn't always use deodorant. Yeah, that one. The same one who gets annoyed when you do the "sniff test" before he walks out the door to school. Sometimes you wonder if you would matter in his life at all if you weren't holding the car keys.

Let's face it. There are times you're really stumped about why your son does what he does. Why he says what he says. And what's he really thinking? You haven't got a clue. Sometimes your son is just such a . . . *boy*.

Boys and girls sure are different, aren't they? I just saw five seventh-grade girls yesterday, talking nonstop and clustered together like a gaggle of geese. The seventh-grade boys? They were strutting like roosters single file behind those girls, acting cooler than cool, high-fiving each other every once in a while in a show of masculine bravado.

Then I caught a glimpse of the second and third graders on the playground. The girls all resembled a covey of quail, traveling in flocks, clucking and hugging. The boys? In the five minutes I watched, three of them were pushing and yelling right in each other's faces, and two more were whacking each other hard on the shoulder. Another boy a little farther down the field got tackled by three other guys in a rough-and-tumble game of football.

Besides the easy-to-see physical trait differences, there are lots of emotional and mental differences too. As a girl yourself, you might not always understand your boy, but he'll always be *your boy*. Your son is altogether different from you, but when it comes to him, you're Mama Bear. May God help anyone who says anything negative about your little cub. They could easily lose an arm.

But you want to know something else? Of all the people in the world, *you*, Mom, make the biggest difference in your

son's world. He may not act like it. (In fact, he may act far from it!) Yet when it comes right down to who's the most important to your son, it's you. You see, your son is hiding a secret from you. He'll never reveal it to you straight out,

so I'll say it plainly. *Your boy wants to please you.* And that driving need will stay with him for a lifetime.

Males aren't nearly as complex as females. But their hearts are just as tender and easily hurt.

That gives you, Mom, a lot of power in your son's life. You can set your son up for success in life—or failure. You, and only you, can help him understand what it is to be male and how to form healthy relationships with other females.

After all, if he doesn't learn that from you, where will he learn it from?

I'll share with you another secret too: males aren't nearly as complex as females. But their hearts are just as tender and easily hurt.

What a Difference a Mom Makes is all about you. It's about your son. It's about the relationship the two of you have right now—and the relationship you *can* have. It's about understanding the male your boy is and helping to craft him into the man you want him to be when he leaves your nest to fly on his own. It's about understanding yourself and why you respond to your son the way you do. And it's about not only weathering the changes in your relationship as your son grows up, but enjoying the fun along the way as well.

The old adage is true: boys *will* always be boys. But honestly, would you want your boy to be any different?

Just don't forget the secret: how much *you matter* in your boy's world.

1

Your Boy Doesn't Need to Wear a Skirt

(But He Does Need a Good Dose of Femininity)

*You, Mom, leave an indelible imprint on your
child. Here's why.*

Honey, what's the matter?" I asked immediately upon hearing my wife's frantic voice on the phone. I was in my office at the time, and I couldn't even decipher what she was saying at first since she was crying and nearly hysterical.

Immediately my heart began to race. One of my kids had to be seriously injured . . . or dead.

Finally my wife blurted out, "It's Kevin!"

Oh no! I thought. I asked, "Did he fall into the pool?" It was my worst nightmare coming to life. My eighteen-month-old son had drowned in our own backyard.

“No,” Sande said. More sobs. “It’s his tallywhacker.”

I wasn’t sure I’d heard right. “His tallywhacker?”

“Yeah,” she said, “it’s *purple!*”

“Purple?” I was really confused now. “What happened? Did somebody hit him?”

“No, he colored it with a magic marker.”

I couldn’t help it. I burst out laughing. Little Kevin had always shown a predisposition toward art, but this creative endeavor really beat them all.

“What are you laughing about?” Sande asked, horrified.

“Little boys do things like that,” I replied. “That’s the funniest thing I’ve ever heard!”

Sande didn’t see why it was so funny.

Boys Are Always up to Something

You see, I knew something Sande didn’t. Boys will keep you on your toes. I’m a prime example. When I was a boy, my mom hated to do my laundry. Who can blame her? She once reached into my pants pocket and got bit! After hearing a bloodcurdling scream of “Keeeviiin!” I came running and fished out the critters from my pocket. I couldn’t understand what the big deal was. After all, I’d gone fishing that day and had just forgotten to remove the crayfish, cricket, grasshopper, and two salamanders from my jeans.

There’s no doubt that boys are not girls. Boys do their nails with their teeth—no expensive manicures needed. Most don’t think twice about wearing the same T-shirt they wore yesterday . . . and the day before that . . . even if it does have a few dirt stains or smell a little rank.

Boys spit and burp. They make all sorts of other noises too, like *bbbppssitt* and *vrrooom!* when their toy planes or cars

take off at top speed. They like to crash things and knock their sister's blocks down. Such acts are a part of their day. They're rarely quiet, but when they are, you better come running to check things out, because most likely they're up to something. They whistle and tease girls when they like them. They might even push girls or try to wrestle them. (Most girls simply aren't appreciative of such actions. I ought to know, since I tried a few of those moves in my own growing-up years.)

*Boys will keep
you on your toes.*

What Makes Boys So Different from Girls?

What makes boys so different from girls—other than the obvious? Researchers in the journal *Cerebral Cortex* reported a fascinating difference between men and women in regard to the part of the brain that controls visual-spatial abilities and concepts of mental space—skills necessary for tasks such as mathematics and architecture. That area of the brain is about 6 percent larger in men than in women.¹ But does that mean men are smarter? Not necessarily. Men's brains may be larger, but women's contain more brain cells.² Also, male and female brains work differently. When men and women perform identical tasks, different areas of their brains light up in response.³ In addition, females use both hemispheres, while male brain activity is restricted to one side.⁴

Perhaps that's why you sometimes feel you and your son are on opposite sides of the planet—because you truly are. You're able to bounce from brain hemisphere to brain hemisphere, but he's solidly entrenched in one and can see only that side of the equation without your help. Another good

reason God almighty created both men and women. We need each other in many ways!

Men tend to focus on the present and the future, and they like to present possibilities whether they're realistic or

The more you know about that male critter in your house, the better off you'll be.

not. They are often fast moving and risk takers. Contrast that with women, who tend to focus on the present and the past due to their relational abilities, and since they use both sides of their brain, they tend to think more realistically and in detail about tasks that need to be done. As a result, they are usually

more cautious and less risk taking. Put the two together and it's easy to see why you and your son will sometimes disagree or even clash.

But the more you know about that male critter in your house, the better off you'll be.

Boys Are Competitive

Boys are tough. They're competitive. They say things like:

“My dad's stronger than your dad.”

“Oh yeah? Well, my dad's got really big muscles. The other day he . . .”

“You think so? Well, last week, *my* dad . . .”

Or like:

“Hey, look at me! I can swing higher!”

“Oh yeah? I can hang upside down!”

“Well, me too!”

Notice all the “I” and “me/my” language that boys use. Now why is that? From the very beginning of their lives, little boys are primed for independence, and that independent edge only grows stronger as they grow older.

Boys are risk takers who don't want anyone else to get ahead of them in life. They've got a drive to be number one and in the fast lane. They're born competi-

tive. They go after what they want with determination. That's why you'll rarely find guys like me in the slower, right-hand lane of the expressway. We're always the ones zooming to the outside lane to see how far ahead we can get of the next sucker.

Now, my wife? She waits patiently in her lane to get to wherever she wants to go.

For boys, it's not just the thing that counts, it's the size of the thing. That's why if a fourth-grade boy gets a skateboard, his buddy has to get one too . . . but it has to be bigger and badder. It's why the junior high locker room is a difficult and embarrassing place to be. I know about that too. My skinny white body with its sole chest hair wasn't much competition for the boys who already looked like men in every way. And they didn't cut me any slack.

For boys, it's not just the thing that counts, it's the size of the thing.

Boys Get Bored—Fast

Within the heart of every boy is an adventurer. Boys like to be on the move. (I can hear some of you saying, “You can say that again! He never stops!”) They have wildly different attention spans than girls. They prefer to look at objects for shorter time periods, but they are more active in their

What This Mom Did Right

Ben Carson grew up in abject poverty. He was the son of Sonya, who had dropped out of school in the third grade and married when she was only 13. She and her husband divorced when Ben was only eight, and Sonya cleaned houses, among numerous other jobs, to provide for Ben and his older brother.

When Ben was in fifth grade, he was at the bottom of his class. His mother was determined that both her sons would have a good start in life in spite of their situation, so she took action. She especially wanted them to be good readers (whether they wanted to be or not). Each week she had her sons read two books and write reports on them. This wasn't part of their regular schoolwork but something extra she assigned to them.

Ben was in sixth grade when he found out something intriguing: his mother was basically illiterate. She could barely read the reports her sons turned in to her. But she didn't let anything stop her from encouraging her sons to succeed.

Today Dr. Ben Carson is the top pediatric neurosurgeon (among other roles) at Johns Hopkins University.⁵

attention to that object. Boys are physical beings—they're attracted to the physical. They're not into talking about the details; they're scoping out the details—the way a toy is built, the way a computer runs, or the cute waitress at IHOP.

Boys are more intense and tightly wired, and they're bored much more quickly. Their brains move more rapidly from object to object, which means they can often get the full scope of a project more quickly than girls. But they also take in less sensory information than girls, so they can miss things along the way. That means boys sometimes misinterpret what someone says, because they don't take the time to process both the verbal and the physical cues to see if that person really means what they're saying. That's why sarcastic comments such as "Well, it's about time you took out the trash" are lost on boys. So why not save your own emotional energy and just ask your son in a straightforward manner to take out the trash now?

Boys Are Singularly Focused

When you throw any new information your boy's way, you'll most often hear that famous word: "Huh?" Does this mean your boy is ignoring you? Or that he's completely clueless? No, it means he's deeply focused on the world of whatever he's thinking about, and he isn't able to change his thought track as fast or as often as you can. He's solving a problem, and he can only handle one problem at a time. But no doubt about it—the problem will be solved.

Males are wired to be singularly focused. When they're doing a task, they're doing just that task—not thinking up their to-do list for the rest of their day like you are. To say that males aren't multitaskers is the understatement of the century. But, Mom, that's why they need you in their world.

*To say that
males aren't
multitaskers
is the
understatement
of the century.*

I Am King, Hear Me Roar!

Within the heart of every little boy is the need to be king. To conquer and to be the one in charge. To be the one who figures everything out by himself. The lone hero standing on top of the highest rock, sword in hand.

It's why even grown-up men don't ask for directions. They want to figure it out by themselves. It's the challenge of the hunt that drives them. They have the capacity to stop and ask for directions, but they don't want to. They're primed to do the task and believe they can get the job done, even if it's not their natural bent. So why should he need your help,

even if you've been driving in circles for an hour and your suggestion to stop is a good one? That's male thinking, as exasperating as it might be to you.

Your son wants to conquer the task, and he doesn't want your help (at least right now—let him get a little more desperate first). It's why your 6-year-old boy tried to take apart your toaster (without your knowledge)—he wanted to figure out how it worked. It's why your 14-year-old is in the living room stomping around—he can't figure out the directions to his new computer game, and he's not about to ask for help. But

Life belongs to those who get there first, who work hard, who are the fastest, and who stay on top, *boys are primed to think.*

if you give him a little time to cool down, he'll most likely retackle the task with gusto and figure it out himself. If not, his emotions will have calmed enough that he may even consider asking for help from Dad, the computer guru, or Frank, the next-door-neighbor game whiz.

Boys have the need to be in control and to stay in control. They also have the innate drive to stay on top of the manure pile of life. That's why they work hard and they play hard. *Life belongs to*

those who get there first, who work hard, who are the fastest, and who stay on top, boys are primed to think. And they're determined to be the conqueror, the winner.

That's why your son is likely to tell you about what has gone well for him—at school, in the gym, at work—but isn't as likely to tell you when things go wrong. Doing so goes against his competitive, conqueror-driven nature.

Such an attitude can serve your son well in school, in his career, and in life, but without the balance you bring to the equation, it can be harmful to his relationships.

Your Son's Number One Woman—Guess Who?

Every tough, risk-taking boy needs a good dose of femininity. No, I'm not talking about "getting in touch with his feminine side." For the past several decades, society has been working hard to redefine men's roles and to emphasize the "sensitive" man who is supposed to enjoy cuddling and talkfests, and basically act like a girlfriend would. But is that really who you want your son to be? A girlfriend? Or do you want him to be a real man—one who is determined, honorable, and goal-oriented, but also loving and thoughtful toward the women in his life?

Frankly, I'm sick of getting in touch with my "feminine self." I like the masculine part just fine, thank you very much. I like channel surfing. I won't apologize for thinking that sex and football are two of the Almighty's and man's greatest inventions (respectively). I don't go to Tupperware parties. I won't eat quiche. I'm comfortable with my testosterone. I like eating with plastic forks—or no forks at all. I don't need a napkin to complete my meal.

Yet anyone who knows me would tell you that this tough guy has a very tender heart toward all his children and his wife, and he is very thankful for all the strong women in his life who are more capable in certain areas than he is.

Are you comfortable with your son? Do you affirm his maleness? More than anything, your son needs for you to appreciate him as a boy and to encourage the masculine qualities you want him to have.

In today's world, some moms are more concerned with increasing a male's sensitivity toward the female population than

I'm sick of getting in touch with my "feminine self." I like the masculine part just fine, thank you very much.

with affirming male qualities. But such tactics don't really produce the results moms want. Instead, they create confusion—and confused sons tend to make terrible, traumatic choices.

Is it okay to do “girly” things? If a boy has an older sister, like I did, it's only natural for him to sometimes have pretend tea or play with dolls. But there's a huge difference between being comfortable *with* girls and always wanting to act *like* a girl.

No woman wants a sissy for a son. She wants a tough, resilient man who will stand up for others with firm resolve and gentle compassion, and who will have a fierce, protective love and understanding heart for those close to him. Helping your son develop clearly defined gender roles will produce such a mature adult.

But it all starts with you, Mom. In all my years of counseling families and speaking to literally millions of people through radio, television, and seminars, one fact has impressed me as much as anything else: it's the child's relationship with the parent of the *opposite sex* that is most important in families. That means the mother-to-son relationship and the father-to-daughter relationship (for more on this one, see my book *What a Difference a Daddy Makes*).

Mothers leave an indelible imprint on the lives of their sons. Their sons may leave home, graduate from college, get married, and have children of their own, but they'll never stop being Mommy's boy. Although it might be natural to think that the man in your son's life—your husband, your ex-husband, the man who fathered your child, or your boyfriend—would have the most influence on him since they're both males, the opposite is true. *You* influence your son directly and have a much greater impact on the man he will become.

Mothers shape their sons in ways so profound that many men live with their mom's unwritten rules imprinted on them.

That means your son's relationship with you, more than any other relationship, will affect the way he relates to all other females in his life, including bosses, co-workers, subordinates, sisters, wife, and daughters. How you treat him and think of him—and how he treats you and thinks of you—is the key to how he will treat all other females. That means you, Mom, have the edge in picking your own someday daughter-in-law. A man's marriage says far more about his relationship to his mother than it does about his relationship to his father.

You as the mom bring certain qualities and characteristics to the parenting task. If you're married, your testosterone-toting husband brings an entirely different perspective and approach. He may be a lot tougher on your son than you are because he expects more out of him (especially if your son is a firstborn). And you may be a lot more tender. Sometimes the reverse is true, though it's not as likely since Mama Bear is always protective of her cubs. If you're a single parent and you're trying to be mom *and* dad, there's good news: you don't have to be both. (What a relief, huh?) Just be his *mom*, and you can heap blessings on him for a lifetime. (For more on that, see chapter 10.)

The more you understand about this unique mother-son relationship, the better you'll be able to help repair a damaged heart or strengthen an already healthy relationship both now and in the future.

What Your Boy Needs Most from You

No matter what age your boy is, there are three things he needs most from you.

He needs to be respected. Your son may be 13 and have recently dyed his hair blue, but he still needs to know that you respect who he is at his core, instead of merely looking

What He Needs from You

- To be respected.
- To be needed.
- To be fulfilled.

at his exterior and thinking how he'll embarrass you in front of your friends. Keep in mind that little secret I shared with you: your boy *wants* to please you. You're his mama, the most important person in his world . . . even if he is asking you to walk a couple steps behind him and his friends. Your son needs you to believe he is a capable, worthy human being. He needs to know he is important in your world, and not just another thing to take care of or clean up after. He longs for acceptance, a sense of belonging, and companionship from *you*. No one else will do.

He needs to be needed. Again, your boy wants to please you. He just may not know how to do it. If you look too capable (at times the multitasking abilities of you moms can be incredibly intimidating to us men), he may not risk trying to help. Why not give him some ways to help? You'll do yourself a favor too.

“Fletcher, would you mind moving the couch for me? I'd love to vacuum under there tonight, but it's too heavy for me to move.”

Your sometimes surly, hormone-laden 15-year-old will leap to help, flexing his muscles as he does. If you play your cards right, you might even get him to vacuum! Why? Because you've shown him that you need him. He's not just another piece of furniture but a needed member of the family.

Think of ways to include your son, no matter his age, as an active member of the family. Two-year-olds can do a great job putting away their own toys. “Sam, Mommy would love it if you would pick up your toys and put them in your toy box. Will you do that while I make macaroni and cheese for

dinner?” Bet that toy box will be filled in record time. You may not be able to close the lid—after all, your son may not do things exactly the way you’d do them—but in the long run, does that really matter? Or is it more important that your son felt needed?

It’s especially important that sons feel needed around the house, since males tend to live as islands. They have fewer friends than women do, so they have fewer relationships. If they don’t learn to help and relate at home while they are growing up, who will teach them? Your daughter-in-law and grandchildren will someday thank you for your efforts. See how influential you are?

Your son needs to be needed not just by anyone. He needs to be needed by you. So let him be a boy. Let him be a conqueror, let him compete, let him problem solve in his own way (even if you immediately see the answer). When you do so, you encourage your son to further his efforts and abilities to help not only himself but others as well. Your son needs to know he has a solid place in your world, in your home, and in your heart.

He needs to be fulfilled as a man. That includes knowing who he is—specifically as a male, what makes him unique, and how he should relate to women. No one can teach him more about what women want and how they deserve to be treated than you, a woman. If you have a husband who’s a wonderful daddy, your son has a great start for male role models. Uncles and other close male family friends can also fulfill that role for a growing boy. But what your boy needs from you is your acceptance of his masculinity.

Think of ways to include your son, no matter his age, as an active member of the family.

You often hear, “That’s my boy!” from dads, but how often do you hear that statement from moms? Your boy needs to know that he belongs to you, that you think he’s special just as he is, and that you appreciate his maleness—the ways he thinks differently from you, the times he uses his physical strength to shovel snow and mow grass, the way he looks out for his younger sister at school on the playground. Affirm his maleness, and you’ll have a boy who will be eager to help around the house and will go the extra mile for you when needed.

Most of all, teach him how to see through your eyes what it’s like to be a woman. Explain why whacking a girl on the head won’t gain her interest or her respect, but smiling, engaging her in conversation, and offering her a Snickers bar will go a long way toward friendship. Teach him manners—how to use a napkin, to say “please” and “thank you,” to answer the phone politely, and to start a conversation with a girl. Explain, age appropriately, how girls and boys are different in both thinking and needs, and how wonderful and exciting a relationship can be. After all, who better than you to explain how girls think and feel, since you happen to own the very same equipment as your son’s future girlfriend?

Don’t ever allow your son to treat you in any way that debases you as a female. If you do, you are setting up patterns in him that will negatively impact every female he has a relationship with, as well as the next generation (if he has children).

You don’t need to put a skirt on your son or teach him to play with dolls in order to make him able to relate to his sisters and his someday girlfriend or wife. But you do need to explain clearly to your son what a woman wants from a man and what she needs to feel fulfilled.

What You Can Do

- Let your boy be a boy.
- Let him conquer and compete. (He'll have to in order to survive in a man's world anyway.)
- Show him how much he is needed in your family.
- Teach him how females deserve to be treated.

Remember the top three needs for a man? To be respected, to be needed, and to be fulfilled. Well, the top three needs for a woman are quite different: affection, honest and open communication, and commitment to family. Through your own actions in your home and your interactions with your son, you can help your son learn inherently how to meet these three needs. And that's an indelible imprint that will last a lifetime and rocket him to success in all his relationships.

Mama Bear and Cubby Leman

I was always close to my mother when I was growing up. Even during the years when kids have a hard time talking to their parents, I could talk to my mother about anything—including girls and sex. My mother was a straight talker. I also knew she loved me. And no matter what others said about me, she believed in and expected the best of me.

My mother had a lot of stresses in her life. We were poor. We didn't have a car, only a panel truck my dad used in his small dry-cleaning business. It didn't even have a passenger seat, just a driver's seat. I sat on the dry-cleaning bags on the floor of the front seat of that truck. There were no seat belts in those days.

My dad was a drinker. He embarrassed me and my mom more times than I can count. The most money he ever made in one year was \$12,000—for a family of five. When his small business floundered, Mom went to work full-time as a registered nurse and often worked all night. One of my most vivid memories is of watching her walk through two feet of snow at seven o'clock in the morning. She was coming down our street in Buffalo, New York, after working the night shift at the hospital.

How I loved my mother. And it was always clear Mama Bear loved me, my brother, and my sister. In the midst of all the hard work, she took time to go fishing with me. We'd walk

*It was always
clear Mama
Bear loved me,
my brother,
and my sister.*

to the creek half a mile from our house and catch fish. She'd celebrate each of my catches as if they were the most spectacular ones any boy had ever gotten!

My mother was my champion, even when, in the world's eyes, I was a failure—the dumber-than-mud kid who couldn't finish consumer mathematics

(even the girl who ate glue did), flunked Latin three times, and never “got” chemistry at all. I took elementary algebra so many times I could have declared it my major. I was headed nowhere—fast.

Little did I know until much later that my mother often prayed, “God, please have Kevin bring home just one C on his report card to show me there is *something* there.” She was often at school more than I was—talking to teachers who were constantly saying, “If Kevin would only apply himself . . .”

My mother continued to pray when I was thrown out of the one college that had managed to accept me, and I became a janitor. During that time of trying to “find myself,” I took a

night course in geology at the nearby University of Arizona . . . and promptly flunked it. The next semester I took it again . . . and flunked it again.

Then something miraculous happened. I met a woman who believed in me just like my mom did: Sande, a nurse's aide. I fell head over heels in love with her. She reintroduced me to church and to the God my mom believed in and had raised me to believe in.

My life did a 180. I went back to school full-time even while I continued working as a janitor. The first semester back, I passed all my classes and was even put on the honors list. I still remember staring in shock at my name on that list. Imagine my greater shock when I was asked to report to the dean.

My first response? "I didn't do nothin' wrong!" (It was a learned response, believe me.) I was scared. My little-boy thinking told me, *Last time I saw a dean, he threw me out of college.*

I went to see him anyway. And you know what? He told me I had won university scholarship honors and that the school was going to pay for my tuition the next semester.

My dear mother finally had something to be proud of, after a very long wait. I credit my success and who I have become now to this woman who believed in me, even when believing was such a long stretch of faith that it looked impossible.

Even though Mama Bear May Leman is now in heaven, this Cubby still feels the warmth of her love and belief surrounding my life.

Mama Bear Sande and Cubby Kevin II

Remember Sande's shock at Kevin II coloring his tallywhacker purple?

Any less-brave mom would have hidden all the magic markers after that event. But not my Sande. Seeing his artistic ability and wanting to channel it into something more helpful, Sande encouraged Kevin in the field of art. (She's artistic herself but doesn't give herself enough credit.) When Kevin was a little guy, Sande always had in her purse a new crayon, a colored pencil, and some paper to draw on if there was any waiting time wherever they went. She even allowed him to decorate his own bedroom in New York. We still call it the Aladdin room since characters of that movie are sketched all over the walls.

Kevin has always been an idea person. He can't spell worth a darn, but he's fantastically creative. His major in college? Art. Now he's a world-class artist, and he works for one of the top-rated television shows as a creative writer. He's even won two Emmys. And who does he credit with kicking off his artistic abilities and encouraging them? Dear ol' Mom.

Also, the way Sande taught him to relate to the opposite sex had girls in his preschool lining up to give little Kevin a hug. Today, this same charming personality has gained him footholds and friendships with both males and females in the upper echelons of Hollywood. Anyone who knows Kevin has nothing but good to say about him, his creativity, his passion for getting the job done, and his integrity.

That's my son. That's Sande's son.

And Sande gets 95 percent of the credit for it. (Hey, I have to give myself just a sliver of credit too.)

So, Mom, encourage the best in your son. Let him be who he is—that competitive, go-for-the-goal thinker and doer. Teach him to treat you and other females with the respect you deserve, but don't put a skirt on him. He doesn't have the legs for it anyway.