

## High Achieving White Working Class Boys - CREC

White working class boys in low income families are the lowest performing ethnic group in the UK and the difference between their long-term educational achievement and that of their richer white peers is wider than for any other ethnic group. White boys from low income families also make less progress than most other group after entry to school.

*Parenting can be much more difficult under such pressures yet parenting styles and interactions are crucial in supporting early learning and sustaining progress. Successful attainment in high achievers appears to be dependent on the early development of exploratory, self-managing attitudes and dispositions of these young children; responsive and supportive interactions and relationships in the home; the nature of talk and other home behaviours and experiences; and collaborative interactions between the home and preschool settings. The overwhelming evidence is that early intervention (critically, between birth to three years) makes the greatest long term educative impact on this socially disadvantaged group. It is important to recognise and acknowledge the complexity and diversity of 'family' type and circumstances in a non-judgmental way. Social and emotional support for parents and grandparents is as important as support for boys' learning and development. The needs of families can be complex and require integrated responses from a range of agencies. Mental health support for young parents needs to be signposted and made accessible. Support to reduce stress levels in the family and build resilience for parents living in challenging circumstances or with mental health needs should be a priority.*

- ✓ **Certain personality or temperament characteristic seems to act as protective factors and increase young boy's resilience to adversity. Those most frequently observed included sociability, affection, memory, flexibility, reasoning capacity and a sense of humour.**
- ✓ **Other protective child attributes which can enhance a young boy's capacity to learn include being curious, being socially competent, being an independent learner, and having the ability to focus, concentrate and persist.**
- ✓ **Enjoying dialogue and engaging in sustained talk is associated with higher attainment and development in young boys.**
- ✓ **An enjoyment of the imagination and stories can facilitate deeper level learning for young boys.**
- ✓ **Physical outdoor activity is often important in young boy's explorations, developmental capacity and wellbeing.**
- ✓ **Friendships and attachment to others provide young boys with a sense of belonging, and support their understanding of rules, behaviour expectations and boundaries. These relationships 'anchor' young boys in their social world.**
- ✓ **Developing a sense of agency and independence provides young boys with a sharpened sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation and capacity for success.**

### Project findings:

**Socio-Emotional Characteristics:** The boys have a capacity to make strong and loving attachments to their close family, to make and sustain friendships with their peers and others, to be affectionate loving, empathetic to others and to 'lead' interactions are characteristics associated with high achieving young boys. Although tantrums and frustrations may appear, they are quickly overcome.

**Attitudes and Dispositions:** High achieving young boys have strong exploratory drive. They are inquisitive, curious, questioning and fascinated by how things and relationships work. They are capable of long periods of concentration, persistence and focus and can become obsessive about things they find interesting. They can memorise and mimic and seek detailed information for things that fascinate which they can retain. They are generally confident, independent, self-motivating and self-sustaining operators within their world, although they also enjoy joint, 'companionable' activity.

**Physical Capacity:** The importance of physical and outdoor activity is evident in high achieving young boys preferred experiences. They enjoy rough and tumble play, movement of all kinds, scooters, trikes, bikes and football and seem to delight in exploring the natural world. They can also get immersed for long periods of quiet, still activities, including puzzles, reading, drawing, Lego and small world play.

**Fascinations and Aspirations:** Some high achieving young boys have already developed a prowess and a deep fascination for an accomplishment such as football, swimming, music, composing, maths or reading and express a strong motivation to develop this further. This prowess, however, sat in a wider range of achievement not as isolated success.

**Routines:** parents ensure that each day has clearly embedded routines but not rigidly imposed.

**Technology** is a recognised element in daily life; with screen time monitored and limited.

### Action points:

- Encouraging positive, warm relationships with regular routines and reasonable expectations for their children can help parents to relax and enjoy their son's company.
- \* Supporting and sustaining strong, secure and trusting attachments of young boys to key adults and peers, both within and outside of their home, is critical to healthy development, resilience and wellbeing.
- Encouraging a young boy's sociability, friendships and emotional competence is central to their capacity to connect and learn, self-regulate and manage relationships. Warm, nurturing, attentive, relaxed but 'boundaried' parenting with regular routines provides the basic nutrients for optimal development.
- Giving young boy's space and time to pursue their interests and develop their fascinations and supporting their capacity to focus and concentrate for extended periods of time will enhance their capacity to learn. Giving children opportunities to initiate, self-direct and self-manage their activity and to take responsibility for their actions encourages the development of life-long learning habits and dispositions which have been called the super-skills of learning.
- Encouraging the young boy to develop their capacity to 'lead and shape' his learning and engage in sustained dialogues about their interests and passions is hugely beneficial in motivating the child. Having regular one-to-one time where the young boy is given individual, affectionate attention, sharing activities and interests can deeply impact on the boy's sense of self-esteem, self-worth and well-being.
- Language rich environments, in which sustained shared dialogues between children and adults predominate, with lots of story sharing and creating provide the optimal conditions for learning to occur. Reading together, sharing stories and modelling reading for pleasure is important.
- The mind and the body are linked and young children need to move to learn. Building in regular and sustained periods of outdoor and physical activity will enhance the young boy's learning, motivation and wellbeing.
- High quality early education supports school readiness. A play based, active pedagogy which encourages child-initiated activity and offers a broad range of learning experiences provides a stronger foundation for life-long learning than a narrowly focussed, formal, didactic approach.
- An effective local early year's system provides an integrated network of support around families. Parents need to be encouraged to access early education entitlements and the key person is crucial to developing trusting relationships. Settings need to know families well and be able to signpost support.
- Settings and schools should work together to become community anchors, actively supporting social cohesion and community. Early years settings which are an integrated part of a local system which supports children from birth to school offer better transition experiences for children and families.



<http://www.crec.co.uk/hawwc-boys>