

# What Challenges Are Boys Facing, and What Opportunities Exist To Address Those Challenges?

## Fact Sheet

### Constructive Use of Time

**Nick and Alex became fast friends after sitting next to each other in algebra class on the first day of ninth grade.**

Since then, they have eaten lunch together every day, chatting about their classes, sports, and their favorite video games. But once the school day ends, the two boys go their separate ways. Nick heads off to practice basketball with his city league team. Nick hangs out with his teammates off the court too, even volunteering at the nursing home where the grandmother of one of his buddies lives. In the meantime, across town, Alex steps off the bus to an empty house. Most of the time, he surfs the Internet or sits on the front stoop and waits for the other neighborhood kids to come home from school. Alex's parents don't really want him hanging out with those kids, but what else is he going to do?



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for  
Planning and Evaluation

This fact sheet is based on a comprehensive review of scientific literature, including computer searches of the major bibliographic databases (e.g., PsychINFO, MEDLINE/PubMed, EBSCOhost) looking, in particular for epidemiological studies that determine what factors make boys more or less prone to certain outcomes. The literature search was limited to scholarly journal articles and government documents published in 2000 and later unless an article was a seminal piece in the field or contributed to tracking trends over time. The statistics provided are from the most recent year for which data were available. Where possible, data related specifically to boys are included, but when these data were not available, data on youth, ages 10 to 18, are provided.

# Some Facts About Boys and Constructive Use of Time

For the millions of children and adolescents who regularly spend afterschool time without adult supervision, being able to work, volunteer, or participate in some form of physical, social, or religious activities is crucial. It's during those hours that youth are more likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.<sup>1</sup>



## Participation in Afterschool Activities

- The percentage of kindergarten through eighth grade boys who participated in afterschool activities at least once per week increased from 2001 to 2005.<sup>2</sup>

- In 2005, the afterschool activities in which boys most frequently participated were sports (34%), religious activities (18%), arts (12%), scouts (9%), community service (7%), academic activities (7%), and clubs (5%).<sup>3</sup>
- About one-quarter (26%) of high school boys participate in a school club or activity.<sup>4</sup>
- A 2007 study found that boys and girls who spent time relating with caring adults—whether a parent, coach, tutor, or employer—were more likely to have healthy development.<sup>5</sup>

## Physical Activities

- In a 2002 study, researchers reported that boys who did physical activities of any kind on a daily basis were less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol.<sup>6</sup>
- The same study also suggested that 10-, 12-, and 14-year-old boys who play organized sports were more likely to be involved in other activities, such as school clubs, music, arts, and volunteering.<sup>7</sup>

## Religious Activities

- In 2005, boys and girls who regularly attended religious services were less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, commit or be exposed to violence, or get into trouble.<sup>8</sup>

## Volunteering and Service Learning

- Between September 2006 and September 2007, 23% of boys, ages 16 to 19, volunteered an average of 39 hours of their time. This shows a downward trend: the previous year, 24% of boys of the same age volunteered.<sup>9</sup>
- A 2008 study found that providing boys and girls with service learning opportunities increased helping behavior and perceptions of social responsibility.<sup>10</sup>
- Boys' rate of involvement in service learning has remained stable at around 46% since 1996.<sup>11</sup>

## Employment

- During the 2003-2004 academic school year, 25% of high school boys ages 16 to 18 were employed.<sup>12</sup>
- Employed high school students spend more time in religious, spiritual, and volunteer activities than students who are not employed.<sup>13</sup> However, youth who work more than 20 hours a week may be at risk for negative outcomes including failure to complete high school, delinquent behavior, and substance abuse.<sup>14,15</sup>

# What Factors Influence Constructive Use of Time?

By studying how boys like Nick and Alex spend their time outside of school, researchers have learned valuable lessons about boys' and girls' risk factors—those traits and life experiences that can jeopardize a person's healthy development—and protective factors—the characteristics and life experiences that can increase a person's likelihood of positive outcomes.

## Reasons young people may not make constructive use of their out-of-school time:

- Low level of self-esteem <sup>16</sup>
- Poor academic performance <sup>17</sup>
- Lack of parental monitoring <sup>18</sup>
- A neighborhood with limited access to resources, such as parks and recreation centers <sup>19</sup>

## Factors that promote young people's constructive use of time include:

- Having many friends <sup>20</sup>
- A sense of belonging at school and at home <sup>21</sup>
- Involvement with positive peer group activities <sup>22</sup>
- Having parents who volunteer their time <sup>23</sup>
- Religious or spiritual connectedness <sup>24</sup>
- A caring relationship with a significant adult other than a parent <sup>25</sup>



# Conclusion

Much of the research on constructive use of out-of-school time has focused on the positive effects of participating in sports, creative activities (such as music and art), and religious activities. Researchers suggest that these types of activities may contribute to positive youth development because they provide youth with appropriate structure, opportunities for skill building, and supportive relationships with peers and adults.<sup>26</sup>

Positive out-of-school time activities can range from a group of young people hanging out at a friend's house and playing basketball when a parent or other responsible adult is home, to more formal, licensed programs with highly structured curricula offered through schools.<sup>27</sup> They may be afterschool activities provided by community organizations or neighborhood programs that integrate school and community resources.<sup>28</sup> Whether structured and formal or impromptu and self-directed, constructive use of time has been associated with positive cognitive, behavioral, and social developmental outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, providing young people, like Nick and Alex, with positive experiences that encourage constructive use of time helps make boys more likely to succeed as adults.

Research into what works to build boys' strengths and reduce the challenges they face is still growing. Although the results are promising, efforts continue to pinpoint what strengths make some boys more likely to succeed and what risks, or challenges, increase the likelihood that they will struggle.

## Additional Resources

To download an electronic copy of this document visit:  
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

For additional fact sheets in this series or for more information and resources on boys, including promising interventions and federal approaches to help boys, visit:

### Fact Sheets

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/FactSheets>

### Findings Brief

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Findings1>

### Annotated Bibliography

<http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/boys/Biblio>

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