

Lost Boys



JOE FERGUSON, PhD

PhD Clinical Psychology, Fielding University
MBA, Wharton School of Business

At 15, plus or minus 3 years, many adolescent males make a convincing case that they are incapable of any responsible judgment and unable to grasp the concept of a future. They continue to reinforce this impression through creative demonstrations of astounding recklessness and poor judgment until they are 24, plus or minus 8 years. This is when the world switches from predicting how they are going to turn out to judging how they actually turned out, which is critical because that judgment tends to fulfill itself.

This indisputable reality is sometimes called the self-fulfilling prophecy or, more technically, the Pygmalion or Rosenthal effect. Rosenthal famously demonstrated that when teachers are led to expect enhanced performance from their randomly assigned students they get it, and when they are led to expect poor performance they get that. The same goes for psychologists and probably for physicians as well. Predicting an outcome is very different than creating one, which is what is going on here. Parental judgments and expectations exert a far more profound Pygmalion effect on their kids than those of teachers or psychologists.

The fact of the matter is that we have no idea what our kids are going to make of themselves, or when. Since they often don't even wake up until they are 24, plus or minus 8 years, that is a more reasonable time to start predicting how they are going to turn out than to start judging how they actually did. Many of them are just starting their adult launch sequence. This is also the point at which you can actually be helpful to them if you have not previously alienated them by trying to be too helpful, too forcefully, too soon. If you aren't careful you can wind up treating your son as though he were defective, which is neither helpful or true. Trust me. Call me or have your son call me.

Concise Personal Counseling

\$175 per 70-minute session

Santa Fe, NM ~ (505) 913-7159 ~ DrJoe@Fergi.com ~ www.Fergi.com