



'Boys will be boys'...if we let them

BY LISA LINTERN

I went through childhood without a brother, so when it comes to raising a son sometimes I feel totally out of my depth. This is especially the case when it comes to watching boys play 'rough and tumble'.

And by rough and tumble I don't mean a bit of harmless wrestling accompanied by fits of laughter that usually end up with twigs in matted hair. By rough and tumble I mean fist swings, karate kicks and running tackles.

You know, that kind of rough and tumble that cause many parents and teachers to tut and sigh resignedly 'boys will be boys'.

We don't do much rough and tumble in our home.

Some might say that's because we also have a girl in the house. You know, a little pink to dilute the testosterone. But I don't buy that reasoning. My daughter has the courage and strength to quite happily take on a pack of her older brother's friends in an attempt to sink her boot first into the soccer ball.

Some might say it's because it's not in my son's nature. He's a slightly built, bookish kind of kid, so when it comes to rumbling and tumbling maybe he opts out because he knows his limits? Yes, I can see why people would say that, but I don't think that's the only reason.

We don't play that kind of rough and tumble in my house because the boundaries I have set since my children were toddlers won't allow it.

You see, I'm a lover not a fighter. I'm more Mahatma Ghandi than Muhammed Ali - a peace-loving, enemy-embracing, pacifist. So when I see this kind of rough and tumble in the playground or at the park, I wince. Children role-playing and mimicking violence makes me feel uncomfortable.

I see nothing developmental or advantageous about allowing kids to engage in games with an objective to 'play harm' the other person. It also worries me when people explain this kind of behaviour between boys as: 'boys being boys'.

Well, I guess they are 'being boys' if that's what we allow boys to do.

Kids test boundaries all the time as they try to make sense of their world through their play. When it comes to aggressive behaviour between boys, are we creating boundaries that are too weak? And if we are, is there a risk our children will take those weak boundaries into adult life?

Now I know I will be branded 'soft' for this view. So be it. Hand me my 'helicopter mum' label so I can stick it proudly on my forehead.

Because as I listen to experts on the radio grapple with how we can solve the surge in alcohol fueled violence on Sydney's street, and as I think about the anguish that Tom Kelly's parents face every day since he was killed by an unprovoked single blow to the head during a night out in Kings Cross, I can't help but think we should do more to discourage violent role-play in our schools, playgrounds and backyards.

So that perhaps one day the saying 'boys will be boys' might have a different meaning.