

# Raising a Boy: What a Difference 30 Years Makes

My son turned on November 1. The age of 10 is one of the greatest years in a young boy's life.

There's something about going from single digits to double digits makes you stick your chest out a little. You start asking about using deodorant and shaving and all those things you see your dad doing.

For me, that happened 30 years ago. Seeing my son as a soon-to-be 10-year-old brings back those memories, but also has me looking at it from a different perspective—the perspective of a dad. Things are different now.

Here is a comparison between raising a boy in 1985 versus now, plus three key things we must do:

**We still love robots, but cartoons are no longer just cartoons.** One of the top 10 toys for boys in 1985 was a Transformer. One of the top 10 toys for boys in 2015 ... Transformers. I remember playing with Transformers and watching the cartoon. It was all pretty innocent.

Today, our boys can still play with Transformers and watch the cartoons on streaming video services. They can also watch a full feature film. The challenge we face now is these full feature films aren't necessarily created with young boys in mind. The violence is graphically shown at a level I never saw watching the cartoons in 1985. In addition, the sexual images of women dressed in revealing clothing is alarming and desensitizes our boys. I believe it can open the door to problems with pornography in the future.

**We still love sports, but it's not always for fun.** Wow. The year 1985 was one of the greatest years for me as a boy who

loved sports. Michael Jordan had just finished his rookie season of a career which would later lead many to call him the greatest basketball player of all time. My all-time favorite baseball team, the St. Louis Cardinals, would play the Kansas City Royals in the World Series. This year, the St. Louis Cardinals and the Kansas City Royals were two of the best teams throughout baseball's regular season, and Kansas City won the World Series again.

I played both little league baseball and basketball and absolutely loved sports. My boys are the same today. They love sports and play them all the time. However, youth sports in 2015 aren't the same carefree, play-for-fun type of youth sports I played in 1985. Everything seems to be organized, and it seems more like business than fun games.

Almost every sport offers travel, club ball or year-round opportunities. Kids are being trained exclusively in one sport by professional trainers. Most parks and neighborhood courts are empty because most kids play in a league, for a team or are at a facility with a parent or coach being trained.

As dads, we have to guard this special season in our boys' lives even from the things we love and they love. Yes, it's important for us to show our kids how to enjoy and appreciate sports, but keep it fun, not succumbing to the "business" that exists in the youth sports world today.

**We still start noticing differences in girls, but gender relations are a lot different today.** I really don't remember distinguishing that many differences between boys and girls I was friends with prior to age 10. Yes, we went to different bathrooms, and most of the girls didn't play the same games or with the same toys we did. But right around 10, things began to change.

Today noticing these differences begins much younger. What most viewed in 1985 as very inappropriate dress and conduct by

both men and women is very acceptable today. This is an area where we have to be very intentional and not passive. My philosophy is that I want my kids to hear it from me or my wife first before hearing it anywhere else.

Conversations about the “birds and the bees” must happen, and they must happen earlier than they did while raising boys in 1985. We are inundated with messages and ideals almost 24/7 about anywhere we turn. Be proactive in all areas but especially in this area.

If you are raising boys today, there are many things you may have experienced, but some of this is new territory for us. Be intentional as a dad of sons. I encourage you to embrace it and attack it head on. Your sons need you.

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