

# Home Economics for Boys

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When home economics was first established it dealt basically with food, shelter, clothing and sanitation. It was a subject for girls and women, with little, if any, thought of extending these areas of learning to boys and men. As time went on, additional areas of study were included in the home economics curriculum, some of which were child development, management, consumer education, human relations, family relations. One result of this broadening of content was its much wider appeal. Williamson and Lyle<sup>14</sup> record that a prominent educator in 1930 thought of home economics as a "way of living". He took the position that it required more than vocational training to help young people live "...intelligently and sanely in the world of the future." Not since these words were written have people been on the threshold of this "world of the future" more surely than they are today.

With society rapidly changing and increasing in complexity at every level, it is important that young people receive specific training to help them meet with intelligence the many facets of living with which they are faced. Whereas previously the home was chiefly a producing unit which demanded mainly the mastery of certain physical skills, today it is a consuming unit which demands the 'mastery of many and varied intellectual skills. The need for an emphasis on management and on the guidance of relationships has increased in direct proportion to this new need for intellectual skills.

One of the general goals of education insofar as it is possible is to meet the needs of all young people and, in so doing, meet the needs of the whole person. The two terms "young people" and "whole person" refer equally to girls and boys. Most girls and boys are now, and will be in the future, involved in family living. Home economics classes for boys will give them an equal advantage with girls both now, in their present family, and in the future when they establish--homes of their own. If only girls are educated for this facet of living, then, as Williamson and Lyle<sup>14</sup> have so ably stated, 'We are educating for family friction, for we are educating only half the family for family life.' Much friction can be avoided when two people agree on such basic philosophies -as methods of child rearing and general decision-making, or on the handling of finances, conflicts over which are the single greatest cause for the present high divorce rate. It would be presumptuous to suggest that home economics for boys could solve family friction *per se*. When, however, through education an atmosphere of understanding has been developed and is a predominating factor in human relationships, then undoubtedly there can be fewer occasions for friction and an increased ability to resolve mutually those that may arise. Schepman<sup>10</sup> states, "When both boys and girls have had training in family relationships they will have a similarity of ideals for home life that will smooth over many necessary adjustments".

Spafford<sup>13</sup> has made the statement that satisfying and successful home life does not just happen. " If this statement is a fact, then while the field of education is in the process of being revised and up-dated, home economists in particular, and other educators in general, should be developing types of classes which can assist young people in attaining a satisfying home and family life. An effort must be made by all responsible for educating the young to improve personal and family living.

The family unit is the pivot on which our society hinges, the central core of that which gives meaning to life. People are educated for participation in all manner of activities such as sports, careers. and music. This is good. Even animals are domesticated and trained to perform specific functions. At the same time there exists a condition of casual indifference and neglect in educating young people for another of their important functions, that of becoming an effective family member and eventually a parent. Training of this type has been available (mainly on an elective basis) for girls for years, but as Anthony says, it is necessary to wake up to the fact that "... both parties need to have the same basic understandings of family life if they are to establish successful homes."

During the past few decades, the roles which were at one time played by men and women within a family have undergone an active change. Two conditions exist today which in large measure have contributed to this change -- the shorter workweek and the increasing number of homemakers working outside the home. Since many women are spending more of their time outside and men are spending more of theirs within the home, a partial exchange of roles has taken place. Women contribute to the family income and men participate actively in homemaking activities. Men baby-sit their children, shop for groceries and perform many other tasks which at one time were not a part of their role as head of a family.

Simply being a father does not guarantee an understanding of child development or the techniques of high-pressure advertising which meet the eye at every turn on a trip through the local super markets. Young men are assuming a greater responsibility in the home and it is desirable that they be given opportunities through training to increase their understanding of a man's role in the modern co-operative family. Educators need to keep in mind too the fact that "... the high school boys of today will be the husbands and fathers of the not-too-distant future. " <sup>5</sup>

The needs and interests of boys, according to Barnett <sup>3</sup>, do not, at the senior high school level, differ greatly from those of girls. Boys need to understand why and how to share home responsibilities in order to make a home a pleasant place for each member, and need to be interested in helping make the home attractive and comfortable. They need to know how to help young children develop normally. They need to be concerned about personal grooming and appearance, and how to dress well at minimum cost. They need to develop a desire to maintain health and physical vigor by observing fundamental health standards, and, in this connection, to know enough nutrition to select and plan healthful meals. Boys need to know the value of planning wise use of money for individual and family needs, and to develop some insight about buying problems in general. Boys often need some instruction in social customs, and require some help in personality development. In addition to these, boys need as strong a background in all areas of family relationships as do girls.

In my opinion, this list of boys' needs provides the core around which an effective program could be developed. As Anthony <sup>1</sup> suggests, boys and men often do not understand and appreciate the woman's role in the home, as well as the fact that differentiations between men's and women's roles are becoming less and less. Since boys have not had as much opportunity as girls to learn about themselves (their physical and emotional development), they are also often unaware of the important part they can now and in the future will assume in family living. Some guidance in the art of decision-making and some knowledge in advance about the "how" and the "why" of the many home responsibilities can assist a boy greatly in preparing him for effective family living. Jones <sup>6</sup> says: "A considerable proportion of 'life' for the husband and father is devoted to homemaking duties, so boys need to be taught to know what they can do - Family relationships can be strengthened when a boy learns how much work is involved in running a home, preparing meals, and cleaning up. Boys need to and can learn to understand the mother's work and her need for leisure time.

The trend today is for fathers to help with the daily care and supervision of their children, so it is imperative that boys as well as girls receive some education in child development. With the increasing incidence of teenage marriages, education of this type takes on new meaning and is doubly important. Thinking, mature adults recognize that in present society there are many "children rearing children". The trend is in evidence. The consequences are enormous in relation to the negative effect this is having and will continue to have on future generations, unless education in the present is emphasized. Molloy <sup>9</sup> says, in this connection:

... crying infants need to be cradled in arms for their physical and mental health. I speculate that some of the mental illness that is plaguing us today is the result of lack of loving care of infants by immature parents who have not been trained to make sacrifices, and these immature parents who have not invested sufficiently in their infants seek to salve their conscience, subconsciously perhaps, by overindulging their teenagers.

This statement gives some insight into one of the present facts of social living which will in no small part contribute to future social problems, if educators do not meet the challenge.

Education in family economics and consumer buying is a necessity for all young people in order to prepare them for making intelligent choices and decisions when confronted with an ever-changing market which continually provides and displays a host of new and diversified products. It is important to be able to evaluate advertising of all types, and to have some knowledge of ways to budget personal and family income. In addition, young people need some information to deal with those items of purchase which involve a large outlay of money. An understanding of credit buying and the borrowing of money can help prevent financial errors which otherwise can plague an individual or a family indefinitely, or even for life.

Boys need instruction on the selection and care of clothing; learning the techniques of simple repairs also would not be amiss. In today's home, with mothers so frequently working, a boy might well be prepared to iron a shirt, press trousers, darn a sock, sew on a button, or wash a sweater. Some guidance with personal grooming, social customs and personality analysis might well be correlated with this area of instruction.

Since boys are usually hungry, teachers can capitalize on this native interest in food. Boys need to have some idea of good principles of nutrition so that they at least have a basis for selecting the correct foods when in a cafeteria line-up. Buying food, quick meals, outdoor cooking, and meat cookery are areas that appeal to

most boys. I believe that there could very easily be an overemphasis on the cooking phase of home economics for boys, and this feeling is supported by Smith <sup>12</sup> who says, "Most people concede that it takes two to make a home. Why, then, do we educate girls in homemaking subjects and ignore the boys? Or, if we do have boys enrolled, why do we limit their instruction to the preparation of food -- the phase of homemaking which they are the least likely to use?" Including some foods work might well stimulate a boy's interest to take a home economics class. To spend a whole semester or year on this subject would be a waste indeed. Once home economics teachers have boys in their classes, it should be possible to lead them into the broader and deeper phases of homemaking education.

Boys are interested in the mechanics of the home; they want to know how to use equipment and what makes it operate. They are interested in studying house plans, room arrangements, types of furniture and interior decoration. Very often boys are quick to recognize the functional in furniture and room arrangements. Educators need to encourage development of this ability and give boys incentive to train in some of these areas, and by so doing prevent to a degree some of the unfunctional homes, equipment and furniture with which the market is burdened.

As far as course content is concerned, the needs of senior high school boys and girls are similar. I have already made the point that an over-emphasis in the area of foods would be unwise and, in similar vein, so would an emphasis on clothing construction. Boys respond to the same teaching methods as girls: demonstrations, field trips, committee work, lectures, case studies, and role play, so in many ways the approach by the teacher is the same as for a girls' class.

How should home economics classes for boys differ from those for girls? One of the main differences between boys and girls is that boys have more analytical minds. Boys will usually analyze and reason out problems and then begin the tasks. Boys have a tendency, because of their direct approach, to expect results in a short period of time. If these are not forthcoming, they tend to lose interest and become bored and restless. Continuous motivation therefore needs to be built into every lesson -- which is a good rule to follow in the preparation of all lessons. There are those who suggest that in a laboratory situation-- with boys, enrollment in a class should be limited to, for example, a group of 12 or 16. Boys tend to be noisier, and they are also larger on the whole than girls. They therefore need more room in which to operate.

There is another phase of home economics education for boys which should be noted here, and that is the possibility of careers for boys and men in this field. Columbia <sup>4</sup> asks, "Why not have, men teachers for home economics?" Jones <sup>6</sup> suggests home economics as a field in which men, might even excel as teachers. As a man, Jones recognizes the value of home economics and the appeal it can hold for the male element of society, high school students and grown men alike.

Many are convinced of the value of home economics training for all students. Jones <sup>6</sup> says, "American systems of public education have continually, 'missed a good bet' in not insisting upon the completion, by boy and girl alike, of at least one fundamental homemaking course." Scott <sup>11</sup> challenges, "Let's dare to demand a year of home economics training in senior high for every student". Krug <sup>7</sup> in reviewing home economics and its place in general education says:

There is considerable feeling that a course in marriage and adult family relationships should be provided and possibly even required in the twelfth grade. This course differs from others in homemaking in the omission of technical instruction in foods, clothing and childcare. It includes topics such as family responsibilities, outside employment for wives, child development, financial management, housing and the like. Whether or not such a course includes sex education depends on the convictions and attitudes of particular communities. It does not have to include sex education, for there are many other important aspects of marriage relationships.... There are many good reasons why the course should be offered and why it should be open to boys and girls whether they have had previous work in homemaking or not.

Krug attests to the value home economics can have for all young people. He also introduces an important point when he implies that a prerequisite in home economics should not be required. A home economics course planned specifically for boys would be one in which physical skills are not emphasized. Therefore, a prerequisite would not be necessary as it is for some types of girls' classes at the senior level.

In some localities, home economics classes tend to become a "dumping ground" for the academically uninclined or the low-interest, inferior student. Lemon, and Williamson and Lyle emphasize the importance of home economics for all students; the college-bound, the superior and the average. Lemon <sup>8</sup> suggests that educators:

...extend home economics instruction to all students in both high schools and colleges. Our programs must include more home and family living courses designed for boys as well as girls, the superior student as well as the academically average.

Williamson and Lyle<sup>14</sup> suggest that home economics:

...also has much to offer the college-bound boy or girl. All will be members of a family, work with people, be consumers, manage money, make decisions about use of other personal and community resources, and probably experience courtship and marriage. A course in the late years of high school to help them meet more effectively these important responsibilities could be of inestimable value to the academically inclined.

In conclusion, quotations from Anthony<sup>1</sup> who says that "Boys add spice to the homemaking department. . . ." and give ". . . directness and objectiveness to a program with their matter-of-fact approach to family living." She says further: "Any homemaking teacher who wants to combine surprises and fun with her work should take boys into her department. No other single class can offer such variety of activity and deep personal satisfaction."<sup>2</sup>

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