Bob: Monica Swanson remembers what surprised her the most about being a mother with boys—it was her anger.

Monica: It definitely caught me off guard. It made me doubt—like: "Why would God give have given me these boys if I don't even have the patience to parent them well?" I think recognizing that you're not alone—and recognizing that God is there to help you if you stop, and pause, and pull back and pray—because what you're going through is so normal, and that there are ways to deal with things without losing your temper.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, August 19th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. Are you a mom with boys?—and with anger? [Laughter] We're going to talk about how to deal with all of that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I have to tell you—when I saw this book, Boy Mom, I said to myself, “That's an Ann Wilson book”—[Laughter]

Ann: Absolutely.

Bob: —“if I've ever seen one.”

Ann: Yes!

Bob: Because honestly, I think of you as kind of a proto-typical boy mom. You loved being a mom of boys.

Ann: I did; in fact, I remember saying before we had kids—I told Dave, “My dream would be to have three boys”; but then I had them, and it was so crazy—I'm like, "Why did I want three boys?!”—[Laughter]—because it was just so busy.

Bob: I think a lot of moms are intimidated by sons and are like, “I don't know what to do with them.” But this was something you were ready for—

Ann: Yes.

Bob: —because you had brothers and sports and all of that, growing up.
Ann: Yes; I was excited. There's something about little boys and the relationship with the mom that's very unique. I'm a very active mom, and I know that some moms aren't. But there's still this beautiful orchestra that happens—

Dave: I love Ann—when she says, “active,” she's being humble. [Laughter] She would have a boy on her shoulders—a boy in a Snugli®—mowing the yard. And my neighbors would be like: “You don't mow the yard?! Why is your wife out there, mowing the yard?” I'm like, “I make her mow the yard—that's what I do.” [Laughter] She loved doing that.

I remember one time she took our boys, when they were teenagers—you know, football players—and trying to get in training and that kind of thing. I'm a college football player—I should be over there doing this—but no; my wife is over there, running the stairs, yelling at them: “You don't get your butt up these stairs, you're never going to play football. Let's go!” And they're like, “Mom; quit it!” [Laughter]

Monica: I love it.

Bob: We have got a boy mom joining us on FamilyLife Today, and let me welcome her. Monica Swanson—welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Monica: Thank you; it's so good to be here.

Bob: A mother of four boys who—at one point, when you were a new mom with a boy, who had a lot of energy—you took him to a psychologist—

Monica: Yes.

Bob: —for a diagnosis.

Monica: I did.

Bob: And what was the diagnosis? [Laughter]

Monica: He was diagnosed as being a boy. [Laughter]

Bob: So, what were the symptoms that you were looking at that you were going, “Something seems wrong here.”

Monica: That's right. I don't know if I was relieved or thrilled with that diagnosis. My first son had a fairly mild temperament, as far as boys go—as a baby and in his toddler years. So when my second son came around—and he was just so physical and seemed to just crave physical contact.
I know there’s a range of sensory issues, as people talk about more and more now, so he probably had a little bit of a sensory issue. He would do things like slam his body into random places. When I was at the gym, teaching—and he is in the kids’ club—I’d pick him up, and he’d have rug burns on his forehead. [Laughter] And I said, “What happened to him?!?” And they said, “Well, he just pushed himself around on the carpet, burning his own forehead.” [Laughter] I thought that “Surely, there is something really wrong.”

Enough things happened that I finally had a psychologist actually come to my home to observe him in our home and just thought: “Here we go. This is going to be interesting—he’s going to come up with something.” He spent a couple of hours, and that’s what he came up with—in the end, was: “Your son is a boy.” [Laughter]

Dave: And I’m guessing you had to pay him for that information? [Laughter]

Monica: Exactly. [Laughter]

Bob: Monica is married to a physician husband—Dr. Dave. You guys have lived on the north shore of Hawaii for the last 18 years. You’re a blogger; you've been sharing your boy mom wisdom with moms for years now.

Monica: Yes; eight-and-a-half years.

Bob: And a lot of this started as you just wrote an essay about what it was like to be a mother of boys. Other boy moms went, “Finally, there’s somebody who understands what I’m dealing with.”

Monica: That’s right; yes. I’d been blogging for a few years—sharing stories from our life, sharing encouragement, sharing some recipes from fruit we grow on our property, and all different things. It was when I wrote a post called “What a Teenage Boy Needs Most from His Mom” that I realized what a need was out there—how many moms, around the world, just were reading, and sharing, and commenting, and emailing, saying, “This is what I’ve been needing to hear—some good news/some encouragement.”

I think a lot of moms just have some fear when it comes to raising their boys—the outlook can be bleak if you see what's going on in culture and what the media has to say. Yes; that was the post that woke me up to what was going on in the world and how many moms needed some encouragement.

Ann: Why do you think that post had the most traction with teenage boys?

Monica: At first, I was a little surprised. I hadn't invented a new parenting technique—it's not like I came up with something brand new—but when the emails and comments come flooding in, I realized that the main thing was just how much I enjoyed my teenage
boys. I think so many moms love their little boys; they enjoy their little boys, but they fear that day that they become tweens or teens and start to pull away. They fear that day that people all make sound like—is maybe just a rite of passage—is that boys have to pull away, and they're going to quit looking to mom and dad for a source of wisdom or direction, and they're just going to look to their friends or culture.

When I talked about loving the teenage years—and I referred to the teenage years as actually the reward for the hard work of the earlier years—I feel like moms were just so relieved to hear that it might not be that bad.

Bob: Let me go back before the teenage years though, because I think a lot of moms—as soon as they see boys being boys, as soon as they see aggression, as soon as they see testosterone—

Monica: That's right.

Bob: —showing up in a three-year-old—

Monica: Right.

Bob: —they're like, “Something is wrong, and I need to fix this testosterone.”

Ann: You mean the skid marks on the head?—is that what you are referring to? [Laughter]

Bob: Whether it's carpet burns on a forehead, or a boy throwing things, or boys punching each other—these are normal boy activities—but a lot of moms just really freak out about it.

Monica: That's right. I especially hear from moms who are raised with just sisters—or maybe have older daughters and then they have a son—and they just think, “What in the world do I do with this?” I think that's normal. As a boy mom, you need to adjust your expectations. You need to recognize that God created boys in a very unique way; and with some help, channeling that energy, so much good can come from it. They are future leaders; they are warriors—they just need some help channeling all that energy.

Bob: Did you find yourself flinching when your boys started exhibiting aggressive tendencies?

Monica: I think so; I think to some extent. I grew up with only brothers; and I've kind of always been a little bit of a tomboy; also, very active. When it started happening in times I didn't expect it, it did scare me a little bit—that was the story behind the psychologist. But I also think that it just wore me out; I think I was surprised by how nonstop it was.

Ann: It's exhausting.
Monica: It wasn't just when I wanted it to happen. It was all day long, from the time they woke up; so, yes, it was something I had to adjust to.

Ann: I think those early years for moms with boys are exhausting, because they are so busy; they never stop moving. I remember thinking, “Is this my life?!”—like there's activity going on, and aggression, and big muscle movements going on all day long. I thought, “How am I going to navigate this?”

Monica: That's right.

Ann: Especially when they start hitting or teasing, I just thought, “I feel like I'm out of control.”

Monica: That's right.

Ann: How did you navigate those early years?

Monica: Well, I think the first thing that I did was realize how—and the psychologist actually did recommend this as well, so I'll give him some credit—I just realized how much they needed the physical activity and how I needed to find safe places to get out. As soon as I would expect them to live in this tiny little place we were living in—and get along and not hurt one another—that just wasn't reasonable.

So, for me, it was walking to a park; it was finding a safe place, where I could just say: “Just go; just run. Get it out.” And the earlier in the day, the better. And if you want them to nap, best to just get them out somewhere/anywhere. I think giving them the opportunity to be physical in a safe way was probably the greatest key to the beginning of it.

Dave: How did you balance the “be physical” and “be safe”? I've seen a lot of moms—you know, they're so cautious because they want their little boys—and girls but, definitely, little boys—to be safe that they don't let them—

Ann: —be boys.

Dave: —be boys. How do you balance that?

Monica: Yes; there's a fine line there. We've had a few broken bones—I'll say that. [Laughter] I think that it just takes wisdom—praying, asking God for wisdom—and realizing that there's a time when they're crossing a line. If they're rough-housing for fun, that's one thing. When you start to see that there's something more behind it, then you do need to step in and help coach them through that.
Yes; I think getting them involved—I mean, there’s organized sports; there's activities that you can do—that you know someone else knows what they're doing—and sometimes, that's the best way to turn to.

**Dave:** Yes; and it helps to live in Hawaii!

**Monica:** It does help to live in Hawaii. [Laughter]

**Dave:** You can go outside—

**Monica:** Yes; we did. And even as I wrote the book, and was recommending things like giving them plenty of physical exercise, I wanted to be sensitive to the people who live where they aren't in Hawaii and they can't get out. My husband and I both grew up in the Pacific Northwest. We both have memories of bundling up—me in the rain; I mean, I was near Seattle, so there was a lot of rain—but being cold/being wet and just doing it anyway. I think it's pretty safe.

**Bob:** You start in your book, *Boy Mom*, talking about the fact that boys need boundaries.

**Monica:** They do.

**Bob:** And part of the way they feel safe is when you, as the grown-up, say: “Here are the boundaries that are going to help keep you safe. Inside the boundaries, have at it!”

**Monica:** That's right.

**Bob:** That actually brings reassurance and comfort to them; right?

**Monica:** It absolutely does. And when they're young, I find that applies mostly to physical things; and then, as they grow up, those boundaries need to be applied to other things. Again, where you're giving them boundaries; but giving them the freedom, within the boundaries, to do as much as they want. I think that's super important. They need it more than they realize, and they appreciate it more than most parents think that they will.

**Ann:** Monica, what's that look like, practically speaking, when you talk about boundaries? Can you give us an example?

**Monica:** I think, when they're young—like I said—because they're more physical, it would be taking them to a safe place. It would be taking them to a park or somewhere, where you say: “You can go this far and no further. Just run; have fun.” Then, as they get older, it's more setting the boundaries in what you're allowing them to do—homes they go to/activities they get involved with—and being able to say: “I'm going to let you
do this,” and “Within this, go for it and have fun; but I’m not going to give you freedoms that maybe some of your friends have.”

Sometimes, that might be something online, where you know they're at a site/they're on a platform—something that you feel comfortable with and you're nearby. It doesn’t mean you give them free rein—you know, when they're eight and ten years old to just get on YouTube and explore. I think setting boundaries and giving them freedom within those boundaries.

**Bob:** Boys push boundaries; right? I mean, when mom comes along and says, “These are the boundaries”, it's almost like it's instinctive in a boy to say, “Let me see if you really mean that.”

**Monica:** Absolutely; that's part of it. [Laughter]

**Bob:** Are your boys boundary pushers?

**Monica:** They sure are. A couple of them more than others. I've found my second two—the youngest two boys are actually the boundary pushers. I wrote a blog post once titled “When Your Son Argues with Everything”—[Laughter]—just tips for dealing with that. My third son, especially—he may grow up to be a great lawyer; he may be a negotiator; he may be a leader—but he definitely wants to argue with things from the beginning.

What do you with that?—because you want to listen to them; you want to hear them out. That's one of those things that we've come up with—what we call an appeal process. It's where we expect them to obey us; we expect them to honor us as their parents; but if they really feel like they have a good argument, then we say: “We're going to listen to you. We want you to take some time to think about it. Gather your thoughts and then come to us and say, ‘May I appeal?’” I think it's reasonable to hear them out and let them appeal.

**Bob:** Daniel, in the Bible, is a great example of somebody who respectfully appealed—

**Monica:** That's right.

**Bob:** —and gained the king's permission to do things a little differently. There is a way to appeal that demonstrates respect and that expresses humility. A boy, who is just whining, shouldn't get mom and dad's ear—you don't give in to the whining—but if somebody comes and says: “Can I appeal about this?” and “Here's my argument…”—that should get a listen from mom and dad.

**Monica:** That's right; exactly. Even if we don't change our mind, at least, we can listen—and I think gives them—they feel empowered; they feel like they have a voice. I think that's really important as well.
Dave: Have you found that any of your sons have won their appeal? [Laughter]

Monica: They sure have. You know, they're pretty good at what they do, so they know how to present their case well.

Dave: It sounds like you are raising a little lawyer, too. [Laughter]

Monica: I might be. [Laughter]

Bob: We do have, on our website at FamilyLifeToday.com, a link to the article that you mentioned about when your son argues with everything.

Monica: Yes.

Bob: So, if a listener is interested in reading your tips on that, they can go to FamilyLifeToday.com for that.

Ann: One of the things I noticed in your book was—you talked about how these anger issues started to surface in your own life—that you didn't realize that you had. How did that come about? I think so many moms, that have young kids especially, think, “Where did this come from?” I remember looking at myself in the mirror, when I was yelling one time, thinking, “Who have I become?!"

Monica: Oh, absolutely. It definitely caught me off guard and it made me doubt—like, “Why would God have given me these boys if I don't even have the patience to parent them well?” The anger—the longer I've gone now, talking to moms and being online—I know, now, that this is so common; but it certainly caught me off guard and made me sad. I was so disappointed in myself at my anger issues.

I think recognizing you're not alone—and recognizing that God is there to help you if you stop, and pause, and pull back and pray—because what you're going through is so normal. Boys are going to test your patience; kids are going to test your patience—boys and girls alike. I think, for me, it was a matter of recognizing that what I'm dealing with is normal—it wasn't just me—and that there are ways to deal with things without losing your temper.

I'm sparky; I've got a lot of spunk—I don't just easily sit back and let things go; so for me, I needed to know that I could have a voice with my boys. I could be a disciplinarian, but I could do it right. There were a few years of real hard lessons, and a lot of prayer, and a lot of humility as I learned.

Bob: You know, we dove right into boys being full of aggression, and testosterone, and putting boundaries around them. You really pour a foundation; before you get into any of this, you say there's a foundation that's got to be present for any of this to work.
**Monica:** That's right.

**Bob:** And that foundation is: your boys have to know: “Mom loves you desperately,” and that love and that relationship—Dennis Rainey used to say that's the bridge on which a truckload of truth can be delivered; but if that bridge is out, the truth doesn't get there.

**Monica:** Yes; that is absolutely right. They need to know they're loved; they need to know they're safe. I think that communicating that over and over—you just can't communicate it too much. I think that foundation is key and that's why I put it at the beginning of the book.

**Bob:** What, practically, have you done to just let your boys know that “Mom is our biggest fan”?

**Monica:** I'm a real communicator and so—I will just speak in the words, just letting them know every day—you can't say it too much. And when you mess up—owning it. If you do lose your temper, asking forgiveness, and saying: “Mommy is sorry,” “Mommy is human, but she handled that wrong.” I think that just that communication is super, super important.

**Dave:** You know, early in your book, you mention—and we've been there—where you said to Josiah: “I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?” And he said—it's so classic—[Laughter]

**Monica:** —painful.

**Dave:** — he says: “Why do you keep asking? You're just going to do it again.” [Laughter]

**Monica:** Oh! I hate remembering that moment, but I will never forget it. I actually asked him, recently, if he remembers; and he doesn't. I'm like, “Good.”

**Bob:** That was a turning point for you.

**Monica:** It was a huge turning point for me. It was really when I started reaching out to people and saying: “Would you pray with me over this? This is something that I want to tell myself, ‘Oh, I just lost my temper a time or two’; but it was becoming habitual.” It was something that just became too normal—I think I normalized it. When he said that—big wake-up call and a time of big change for me.

**Ann:** I think that's a key thing—is having friends that can encourage us/that can pray for us—that can say, “I've been there; this is what worked for me,”—and other friends that will say: “I know. I had to apologize. I went through that.” I think having a community of women that will pray for us and be with us is really important.
Monica: Absolutely. I will say, though, when I went through that, we had really just been in Hawaii a short time. It took me a while to find good friends and community. The truth is—and maybe this will speak to someone out there, listening, that doesn't have that community—I waited for my husband to get off work on a Friday night. I drove myself downtown to a church that I knew had a prayer meeting on Friday nights. I just humbly went forward to some women, who I could tell were a few years ahead of me, and I just said, “I need you to pray for me.” With a lot of tears, I just received prayer from some women I did not know. That was hard; I wished I had a close community—

Ann: Yes.

Monica: —I did; I had friends I could call on the mainland. But I say, “Find people. If you don't have them, find them.”

Ann: Yes.

Monica: “They're out there.” There's a lot of us out there who've been there, and we'd love to encourage younger moms.

Ann: And church is a great way to start.

Monica: Absolutely.

Ann: And a lot of times, we have different organizations, where moms are there and we can offer help.

Dave: And I would add, just hearing that story—I don't know, Bob, if you think this—but I think, “Man, if a mom is that desperate to drive to a church—she doesn't even know the people”—the agony in your soul that you must have been feeling. Bob, I know dads feel it; but it's different for a mom. I'm thinking there's women/there's moms listening that are like, “I'm right there.”

Bob: I think the point in all of this, Dave, is that, for all of us, moms and dads, going through the challenges that we face, as parents—we've got to quit trying to be posers.

Dave: Yes.

Bob: We have got to acknowledge, to one another, in the midst of it: “It's hard,” and “It doesn't always work well,” and “We mess up, as parents,” and “We need help.” I remember clearly the nights that Mary Ann and I would drive to our small group meetings, thinking: “Our kids are going to be in prison some day”; [Laughter] because we just left the house and we know: “We're blowing it as parents. We don't know what we're doing,” and “These kids are going to be juvenile delinquents when they grow up.”
And then we’d get to the small group. We’d sit around and we’d talk: “So, how are things going for you?” We’d kind of quietly say, “Well, you know—some challenges here and there…” [Laughter] We’re posers!—right?—because you don’t want to say, “Oh man, our kids are going to go to prison.” [Laughter] And then the other parents would go, “Oh, we’ve got the same thing going.” We’d be like, “Really?!” What encouragement to know that we’re not alone in this.

**Ann:** Yes; I remember doing this—I bought our boys those little army guys—the little green guys—like in *Toy Story*.

**Bob:** Right.

**Ann:** I thought that: “This will be cool.” I pictured them sitting at the table and maneuvering them about.

**Bob:** “Let’s go!”

**Ann:** Yes.

**Bob:** “We’ll take the hill!”

**Ann:** Exactly. [Laughter] I find them out—all three of them—out on the driveway. They have attached, with duct tape, little firecrackers onto their backs. And then they had Barbies, where they had bigger firecrackers. [Laughter] I’m thinking: “This is what I mean when I say it’s good to talk to other parents—like, ‘Oh, yeah. My kids do that.’”

But you know what? This is why I love James 1—I clung to that, as a mom—when the Scripture says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously…”

**Monica:** That’s right.

**Ann:** And so often, we don’t go there first; we don’t go to God first. He’s saying, “Come to Me; I’ll give you wisdom.”

**Monica:** Yes; yes.

**Bob:** And then, to get wisdom from a book like *Boy Mom*.

**Ann:** Exactly.

**Bob:** And the encouragement—I think the readers of the book read this and go: “Oh, okay. Okay; we’re not alone in this situation that we’re experiencing—another mom has experienced this, and her boys are doing okay,”—you know. And then, the manifesto in the back—we didn’t talk about that. I just encourage listeners to get a copy of the book
and turn to the back and read this “Boy Mom Manifesto” that will help anchor you, as a mother of boys, to know: “This is what it’s supposed to look like for me.”

We’ve got copies of Monica’s book, Boy Mom, in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. The subtitle is What Your Son Needs Most from You. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order the book, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the book is called Boy Mom by Monica Swanson. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order, or call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, these kinds of subjects are things we are passionate about, here, at FamilyLife®. Our goal, as a ministry, is to effectively develop godly marriages and families who change the world, one home at a time. We’re not just talking about marriages and families in the United States; we’re talking about the worldwide impact of FamilyLife.

In fact, recently, we had the opportunity to show the movie, Like Arrows, which has been dubbed into Spanish. We showed it in movie theaters in Central and South America. We had tens of thousands of people in line to watch the film. Here’s what’s exciting though—these folks/many of them have signed up and started going through the Art of Parenting® video series, which has also been translated into Spanish. We’re getting great feedback from folks.

In fact, we’re hoping to be able to do this in Asia—in Mandarin—and in the 10-40 window, using the Arabic language. We’re hoping to get these translations complete. We had some friends of the ministry come to us later—excited not only about what’s happening with the Art of Parenting—but with all that is happening, here, at FamilyLife. They said, “We want to help add fuel to what God is doing through this ministry.” They have offered to match any donation we receive, during the month of August, dollar for dollar, up to a total of $500,000.

That’s why we’re coming to FamilyLife Today listeners and saying, “Would you help us take full advantage of this match?” Know that your donation is going to be doubled as a result of your generosity. And then, we’d love to say, “Thank you,” by sending you a copy of Dennis and Barbara Rainey’s book, The Art of Parenting, which you can use for yourself or pass on to someone—maybe your kids or someone at church, who’s in the thick of raising their kids.

We would love to have you join with us in the mission of FamilyLife. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to make a generous donation, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Thanks, in advance, for your partnership with us and for helping expand the ministry of FamilyLife Today all around the world.

And we hope you can join us back again tomorrow when Monica Swanson will be here again. We’re going to talk about how important it is for moms and dads to be helping to mold and shape the identity of their sons, so that our boys don’t think that their identity
is in what they do; but they understand that their identity is in who they are and who God made them to be. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com