

# WHAT ABOUT DAD?

## Ten Steps Toward Better Fathering

Years of experience tell us that good fathers are really no different than good mothers. Regardless of their sex, parents of well-adjusted children have similar characteristics - - they are loving, warm, involved, and supportive. Many fathers have these characteristics. Men, however, often have problems finding ways to express these characteristics and being involved in the lives of their children. Involvement for many men means asking Mom how the kids are doing (instead of asking the kids directly) or making sure a roof is over their heads and food is in their tummies (instead of spending time with them).

### **Self-questioning**

What can a man do to further nurture and develop his love, warmth, involvement, and support of his children? The first thing he needs to do is understand himself. What kind of father did he know? What attributes did he admire in his own dad or grandfather? Which did he not like? Is he repeating some of those behaviors? Does he want to? Once a man thinks about his own experience as a child, he can then think about the experience he's giving his own children. He may ask himself, "Am I the dad I really want to be remembered as? What do I need to do differently? What things am I doing well?" Based on the answers to these questions, a man may have a better understanding of his own fathering style and philosophy.

### **Learning about his children**

The second thing a father could benefit from is learning more about the developmental directions his children take. Knowing what to expect from children at certain ages can help him understand what types of activities and topics of conversation are appropriate. Understanding that around 21 months of age, for example, most children become very

attached to their mothers and may prefer them over dad is reassuring. Realizing that most 10-year-olds haven't yet developed the ability to think abstractly will help steer conversations away from theoretical discussions. There will be times when the father-child relationship is more close than at others. This is especially true during adolescence when many teens are trying to sort through all the parts of their identity. A successful relationship with a teen requires effort, tolerance, patience, and open, honest communication on the part of a parent.

### **Recognizing a child's uniqueness**

The third thing a dad can do is accept that all children are unique and have special abilities and talents. A father needs to accept his unathletic as well as his athletic children, his not-so-bright as well as his very bright children. A father should also understand that he may relate to one age better than another. Some dads are best with babies, many prefer school-age, while others do best with teens. However, just because a man may relate better to one age group doesn't excuse him from involvement with them before or after the child moves through it. A father needs to relate (at least to some extent) right from birth.

# TEN STEPS TOWARD BETTER FATHERING

## 1. **Use genuine encounter moments.**

The self-esteem of children is greatly influenced by the quality of time spent with them, not the amount of time. Busy lives cause many parents to think about the next thing they have to do instead of focusing attention on their children. If children don't receive enough "encounter time" with a parent throughout the day, they may misbehave to get their parents' attention (negative attention is better than no attention). Create encounter time by seeking out your children throughout the day.

## 2. **Actions speak louder than words.**

Statistics reveal that children receive more than 2,00 compliance requests a day. As a result, many become "parent deaf." Instead of nagging or yelling, search for action in your child. This can be done by first teaching or showing your child what you would like them to do, then asking if they need something from you to help them get the job done.

**3. Give children appropriate ways to feel power.** If parents don't find ways to help empower children, children will find inappropriate ways to feel their power. Ways to help them feel powerful are to ask for their advice, give them choices, let them help with household management (balance the check book, chores, shopping) even if you can do these tasks yourself with less hassle. Children want to feel they are part of the family and they must feel needed.

**4. Use natural consequences.** When parents consistently interfere in situations, they rob children of learning opportunities. Allow consequences to do the talking, rather than constant nagging or reminding. Children have lessons to learn. If we don't allow them to learn these lessons while they are

young, life will be very unpleasant for them when they are adults.

**5. Use logical consequences.** Often the natural consequences may be too severe or too far in the future to be of practical use. When this is the case, logical consequences are effective. It is important for consequences to be logically related to the behavior in order for them to work. If a child forgets to return an over-due video and he is grounded for a week, he will only resent the punishment. Instead deduct the fee from his allowance, or allow him to work off the money owed. This way the child can see the logic of the discipline.

**6. Withdraw from conflict.** If a child is throwing a temper tantrum to test the patience of his or her parents, or speaks disrespectfully, parents should leave the room and tell the child when they want to "try again" to come talk. Don't leave in anger or defeat.

**7. Separate the deed from the doer.** Never tell a child that he or she is bad, stupid, lazy, etc. Instead, help the child recognize what it was about their behavior that was inappropriate or intolerable. Behaviors may be wrong, but children still need to feel loved, no matter what they do.

**8. Be consistent and follow through.** Children need to receive consistent messages from their parent. It is equally important to follow through. If a child knows he or she is not to have candy after 8:00 pm, no matter how much pouting, tears, pleads, or demands, don't give him or her candy after 8:00 just to shut them up.

**9. Parent with the "end" in mind.** Most parents look for the most expedient solution. This often results in children

who feel overpowered. It is important to keep in mind the way you want your children to be as adults and be more thoughtful in the way we parent.

**10. Be kind and firm at the same time.** Parents often become frustrated when their children do not comply or behave. Frustration can easily lead to anger. As parents, it is very important to remain as calm as possible. Being firm doesn't require yelling.

Resources:

"Ten Keys to Successful Parenting,"

<http://www.fishnet.net/-pparents/keys.html>.

"Families Meeting the Challenge", Kirk  
Blair of The Ohio State University  
Extension Service

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