

The Importance of Fathers: Being a Great Dad

[edited from Stephen F. Duncan, Family and Human Development]

Fathering is more than a biological necessity. Our children's growth and development is enhanced through active, involved fathering. Some keys to effective fatherhood would include:

Nurture your marriage first: An important key to good father-child relationships is to have a strong relationship with your wife. If things aren't going well there, it's easier for bad blood between you and your spouse to spill over into the parent-child relationship. It has been said that the best gift a father could give his children is to love their mother. If you are a divorced father, maintain a civil relationship with your ex-wife. Never bad-mouth her in front of the children. Maintain a cooperative parenting partnership.

Prioritize fatherhood: Plan your work around your family. Decide that father-child time is important. With calendar and planner in hand, schedule the activities of your children, the school concerts, the one-on-one times, then write in your other obligations and preferences.

Get involved with your child from the beginning and stay involved and connected.

Learn the fatherhood craft: Keep up with the language of child rearing. Talk to other dads informally or in support groups or parenting classes. Read articles about good fathering. In some families, the woman becomes the "expert" and Dad feels excluded. Don't let that happen to you.

Have regular one-on-one time with each child. Sometimes it's fun to talk while you're doing jobs; also be sure that there are times that you turn off the screen and give your kids your undivided attention. Schedule a dad-daughter or dad-son date occasionally. Go out to eat a favourite meal or to do an activity your child enjoys. Sit with them occasionally just before bed and talk about how the day went.

Show affection often: Even if older kids seem squeamish, all kids enjoy a hug and encouraging words now and then from their dad. With the older kids you may want to do this away from the sight of their friends!

Take your kids to work: If your situation allows for it, this is a great way to teach them about the world of work that you are a part of.

Stay connected when you have to be away: If work takes dads away, including because of your shift at work, set up a routine to stay connected, e.g. a specific time you will call that is convenient for all members of the family.

Teach them: No dad has every gift or skill. Use opportunities to share *your* talents.

Connect with your child at all levels: Make sure you have some contact with every aspect of your child's life. Visit the school, meet the teacher and other kids and have some contact with an afterschool activity. If you have seen where your children are and met their friends, you will have more to talk about and more interesting conversations. Parent involvement during children's schooling is critical to their school success, too, as well as to everyone's wellbeing and development.