

## The Importance of Father's Time

by Seth Metcalf

Take a look around. If you really want to, you can pick up the phone and call China. If you want a package from Germany tomorrow, you need only click a mouse or, at most, make a phone call. Technology's ascension has changed not only business, but the family as well. Most children no longer play in the park and hunt frogs, but rather watch television and surf the Internet. With the resources like these available today, it seems that much of the developing influence previously reserved for parents lies in the media. Consequentially, our children are receiving their values from media moguls who are inspired by the dollar instead of the heart. We cannot allow society to corrupt the minds of the future. As fathers, we have a responsibility to do something to save our children, to rescue them from the values portrayed in video games and on television. Much of what is available now in the media will only contribute to the downslide of society into a state of moral apathy.

To reverse this process, we need to look at the problem on the most basic level. 'Parental involvement' has come to mean that Mom helps with the homework and activities. Finding the necessary time to spend with our children is, indeed, more and more difficult because of the ever-increasing demands of a competitive marketplace; but as society slips away into a moral state of numbness, our greatest trump card as fathers may just be ourselves. An increased amount of father-child involvement has proven to increase a child's social stability, educational achievement, and even their potential to have a solid marriage as an adult (United States 4).

Fathers have a lot of responsibility. Much of their time is spent at work providing for the family while their wives are at home. Because their time with their children is limited, the question for fathers arises: In what ways can I as a father influence my children for good? Just as women and men differ from one another, so, too, are some of the influences they have on their children inherently different. While mothers are often seen as the nurturer, fathers often have an important role when it comes to playing with their children and teaching them how to do physical tasks. Fathers tend to be more focused on 'doing practical, educational things rather than talking about doing things.' As they are more physical with their children than moms, dads play an important role in developing their children's motor skills and ethical limits in regard to physical interaction (Horn 37-39). Children of these highly interactive fathers are also more curious about the world around them and develop greater problem solving skills (United States 4).

The window of opportunity through which to provide that vital influence starts very young. In fact, it's safe to assume that dads have an effect on their children even before the little ones begin speaking. One study showed that at as early as five months babies had already been influenced by their interaction with their fathers. Those infants that had more contact with their fathers were more vocal and playful when placed with a friendly, but unfamiliar male. (Horn 39) This is in large part due to the fact that children begin at a very young age to establish patterns of trust and to form their social style. Developing so

early, it is not safe to assume that a child is immune to negative influences before he can fully interact with his surroundings. When fathers acknowledge this, they can guide their children to receive the influences of their environment in a positive manner. A father's guidance will help children attain a higher level of social stability.

The well-liked are often those who conform to the trends of the crowd. Although this is one way to be popular, there are other ways children gain acceptance of their peers. When parents use the home to teach their children how to interact with the world around them, their children develop better relationship skills which will aid them throughout their lives. As they grow, children will find that their ability to work together and communicate with their peers brings the same kind of approval as simply conforming but with a higher level of confidence. This social acceptance often leads to a greater sense of self worth which plays a crucial role in academic achievement. Excellence in both academic and social spheres is strongly linked to the child's relationship with its father. A study done by Kevin MacDonald found that when children spent more time playing with their fathers, their teachers consistently rated them as well-liked by their peers (Horn 39). Children glean much more from their interaction with their fathers than we realize.

When fathers take an active role in their children's lives, it not only helps them to develop healthy friendships and achieve good grades, but it will play a major role in their success as adults. Those adults who say their fathers were highly involved in their lives attend more schooling and have a higher average salary than those with lower father involvement (Peters 106). It is apparent that a father's interest in his child carries over to the child's own ambition to succeed. What then are we to do to assure that our children achieve the success noted in these studies?

As a general finding, researchers note that although time with children is important, it isn't necessarily the amount, but the quality of that time that matters. Especially when our time is limited, we need to make sure that the opportunities to be with our children count. One example can also give you a needed break from the hustle and bustle of work. Playing with your kids can be a positive experience for both you and your children, especially when they are young. This time needs to be free of distraction. Children tend to feel their surroundings more than analyze them, so they notice when they don't have the full attention of their parent. Additionally, by playing with your children, you allow them to release energy built up from school or other activities, and this aids to develop a stronger personal bond. Simply through your eager interaction with them, they will trust you more, creating the foundation for healthy relationships throughout their lives.

Another opportunity for fathers, especially when their children are young, is bedtime. Hopefully, the night has calmed down and there is an opportunity to have quality time alone with the children. Simple things such as reading a book or recounting the day's events have the potential to make a child feel more secure while deepening the father-child relationship. When children learn to respect and love their parents, they are more willing to communicate and accept the guidance they will receive later in life. Parents, in turn, respect their children for their social maturity. Mutual respect promotes sensitivity

and understanding toward others and plays a crucial role in how well our children are able to work together with others in all aspects of their lives (Horn 37).

Some of the fondest memories I have from my childhood are those spent working with my father. It's true that I wasn't always excited to go work in the yard, but once into it, I enjoyed the time it afforded me to get to know my father on a more mature level. Working together gives you time to talk without having to 'have a talk.' It was through working side by side with my father that I really developed a respect for him and his experiences in life. Because of these times together, I am willing to turn to him for counsel. By nurturing our relationship, my father prepared me to deal with others generously on a personal level. His influence wasn't only effective because of the wisdom that he possessed, but more so because I knew that he really cared. His concern motivates me to extend that same level of caring to those around me.

The world is demanding. As fathers, we don't hold all of the answers to repairing society. Despite all your attempts as a father, your children may still have unresolved social issues; there is no cure-all in fatherhood. As a father, you hold some of the keys to unlocking the hopes and dreams within your children. When they are grown, you hope that they look back on you as their hero, someone who shaped their life for good. John Gottman, a family researcher, indicated why it is that fathers have such a deciding effect on their children's lives. He states, 'We believe the reason fathers have this extreme influence on their children is because the father-child relationship evokes such powerful emotions in kids' (Horn 39). Spending quality time with your children can unleash this huge potential to guide them to happy, healthy development.

#### Works Cited

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