

Extension Update

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FATHERS MAKE A CRITICAL DIFFERENCE

With Father's Day just around the corner, it's a good time to reflect on the critical role fathers play in the development and well-being of their children.

Fathers who are actively involved in their children's lives make a big difference.

Consider the following research findings:

- Children have higher IQ scores when fathers are more involved.
- Father involvement leads to high self-esteem in both sons and daughters.
- Children are more motivated to learn when fathers take an active interest in them.
- Boys show lower rates of aggressive behavior when fathers are present and involved.
- Young men who had fathers present during their childhoods are less likely to spend time in the juvenile justice system.
- Girls display less sexually precocious behavior when fathers are present and involved.

The majority of today's fathers do a wonderful job of carrying out their important parental role. However, when fathers are absent from their children's lives or otherwise non-committed and non-involved, children, fathers, families, and society pay a price.

Although some children who grow up without fathers fare well, fatherless children are more likely to have psychological problems, abuse alcohol and other drugs, become involved in

crime, live in poverty, and fail in school. Do bear in mind, however, that these types of social problems are far too complex to blame simply on absent dads.

The bottom line is children need their fathers, and fathers need their children. This is equally true for non-custodial fathers. The father-child bond is critically important, and we need to do everything we can to feed and nurture it.

Spending quality time with your child on a regular basis is one of the best ways to nurture the father-child bond. Putting your heart and soul into your time together is more important than the amount of time you spend. Your times together need not be long, but they should be enjoyable and relaxing. Free, simple activities are often the most rewarding.

Play ball, take a walk, go to the park, play card games and board games, be silly and make each other laugh. Strike up frequent conversations with your children on topics that interest them; and listen a whole lot more than you talk.

In gentle, age-appropriate ways, share your values and dreams, and listen with open-mindedness to theirs. Tell stories from your childhood or take turns reading to one another.

With young ones, cuddle up and read to them. Not only is this is fun, reading does wonders for their brain development.

If you live a long way from your child because of divorce, military service, incarceration, or other situations, do your best to arrange occasional visits, and phone and write often. Be creative in exchanging items of interest, sharing homemade audio or video cassettes, or in communicating via e-mail.

Fathers, need to have fun with their children, show appropriate affection, display interest in their school work, be firm yet tender in providing guidance, and model their values.

Every child is a miracle! As seasoned parents know, these little miracles grow up very quickly. Cherish them, guide them, and love them. In nurturing your children, you also nurture your own well-being and the community around you.

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