

Fatherhood

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November, 1998
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Fatherhood

(Two Hour Session)

Program Description

Whether a father is absent or present (emotionally and physically) in his child's life makes a significant difference in later developmental and behavioral issues of the child. This program will look at the important roles fathers play in the lives of their children. Various issues related to modern fathering will be explored.

Program Objectives

- To discuss the kinds of roles that fathers play in their children's lives
- To explore the benefits both fathers and children can receive from positive interactions.
- To discuss ways that fathers can be more involved with their children.

Intended Audience

Fathers with school-age children and/or single mothers

Materials Needed

Easel pads, markers, and masking tape.

Overhead projector.

Transparencies included in lesson plan.

Handouts included in lesson plan.

Topics and Suggested Time Frame

Introduction / Ice Breaker	15 minutes
What is a Father?	15 minutes
Father Absent / Father Present	25 minutes
Break	10 minutes
Fathers' Importance	10 minutes
Characteristics of Effective Fathers	10 minutes
Fathers as Moral Leaders	6 minutes
Strengthening the Bonds	10 minutes
Summary	2 minutes

Introduction

Introduce yourself, give the group a brief overview of the Cooperative Extension Service and describe what will be covered in the workshop. Have the participants introduce themselves and tell the first names and ages of their children.

Ice Breaker

Ask the participants to recall any television series that has a father as one of the main characters. It can be a current series, reruns or one from a number of years ago. Write the titles on newsprint. Some examples that might be listed:

Empty Nest	Full House	Father Knows Best
Home Improvement	The Waltons	3rd Rock from the Sun
Mad About You	The Cosby Show	Andy Griffith
Coach	The Nanny	Family Affair
Roseanne	Rug Rats	Something So Right
Picket Fences	I Love Lucy	Family Ties
Frasier	All In The Family	My Three Sons
The Simpsons	Sanford and Son	Ozzie and Harriett

After the list has been completed ask, What kinds of father-figures or role models are presented? If your list contains ten or less, there would probably be time to discuss the father's role in each of the TV series. If you've made a longer list, you might need to limit the discussion.

Briefly summarize the discussion of television's portrayal of fathers. Then ask the participants, Is it realistic? Is it fair? What were the best examples?

Relating to Your Own Father or Father Figure

This section centers around a participant discussion of their relationship with their own fathers as they were growing up. For some, this may be a difficult experience. Some may have never known their father. Encourage the participants to think of someone who may

have served as a father figure. If no male role model comes to mind, ask them to think about what they might have expected from a father in their lives.

Divide the group into smaller groups of 3-4 persons. Give each group a newsprint pad and markers. Ask each group to discuss the positive and negative aspects of the way they were fathered. Have them develop two lists. Then have each group talk about how they think they were affected by their father's approach to fathering. Based on this discussion, each group should develop a third list that includes 3-4 ways they think they have been affected by their father's approach to fathering. Have them post the final lists in the front of the room.

If you believe the individuals would be willing to talk about what's on their lists, ask a representative from each group to do so. However, they might not be comfortable with this, so you may need to briefly summarize the information for the group.

Some key points that will probably evolve:

- Many fathers will follow a very similar approach to the way they were fathered (usually because that's all they know).
- Many fathers will say they want to do a better job than their own fathers did with them.
- Some, as adults, may have improved/resolved their relationships with their father.
- Others may want to consider rebuilding their relationship with their father. (Be careful here. All situations are very different and could become difficult to deal with in this setting. However, several writers/researchers have discussed the importance of reconciling feelings about one's own father.)

Summarize this discussion by saying that we can learn a lot from reflecting on our own past history, but it's also important to move forward in a positive way.

What is a Father?

Good fathering is hard work, but the most important kind of work men can do (Pickard, 1998).

Definitions are not always easy. Fatherhood is the act of being a father, as opposed to merely "fathering" a child. Few studies have examined how men come to define their fatherhood. They are likely to view their role as fathers based on how they were fathered, their perception of what a father ought to be, their spouse's perception of fathering responsibilities, the portrayal of fathers in the media and entertainment industries, and the influence of public perception of their role. Practically speaking, the different dimensions of fatherhood would include bread-winning, nurturing, modeling, socialization of children, involvement in their children's lives, moral and spiritual development, and providing a sense of stability.

Fathers are diverse. They come in all sizes, shapes, and colors, with different backgrounds, different ideas, different world-views, different aspirations for their children, and different ways of connecting with their children. Because the roles of fathers are so diverse, we should not attempt to define a role or even to identify specific roles that would apply to all fathers or all children or all families. For example, researchers have found differences in patterns of

father involvement by race. White youth are two to three times more likely to live in a two-parent family than are Black youth. However, non-resident Black fathers are nearly one-and-one-half times more likely to visit their children on a weekly basis than non-resident White fathers.

Father Absence

(Overhead 1)

Father's absence, whether physical and/or emotional, is a critical problem in our country. Currently, more than 27 million children-39% of all US children-now live apart from their father. In a typical year, well over one-third of these children won't even see their dad. More than half of all European-American children and three-quarters of all African-American children born since 1975 will live some portion of their formative years with only one parent; and in the vast majority of these cases, it's the father who is absent. Research shows that the costs of father's absence are high. Key findings of several studies in recent years show that:

(Overheads 2 and 3)

- Children with little or no contact with their fathers are more likely to drop out of school
- Become involved in drug and alcohol abuse
- Girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens
- Boys are more likely to become involved in crime and violence.
- While father-absence is not the only variable contributing to these kinds of social problems neither can it be ignored.
- In short, fathers play a key role in the successful socialization of children.
- Unfortunately, even when a father is physically present in the home, he may be emotionally absent.

(Overhead 4)

Three major emphases are identified in the literature on father absence: the impact of father absence on intellectual or academic achievement, gender-specific development, and general behavioral adjustment and aggression in male children. Beyond the emotional and behavioral consequences of father absence, there are striking economic consequences for the children. Over 65 percent of children living with never-married mothers are living below the poverty line. This compares with 10 percent of children living in two-parent families.

Father Presence

(Overhead 5)

The consistent and frequent presence of a father makes a powerful difference in the development and socialization of a child. The involved father's role is in encouraging

independence, assertiveness, and a self-concept that involves acceptance of one's intellectual, physical, social, and gendered self.

Fathers play a large role in nurturing their children and can foster creativity, a positive body image, moral standards, and social competence. The notion of "father presence" extends the role of the father beyond physical and financial boundaries to include emotional and care-giving responsibilities.

Numerous studies have emphasized that fathers' availability and involvement reduce aggressive behavior in boys. Meaningful paternal involvement also improves the well-being of younger children. Fathers' expressiveness and intimacy with their children appear to have the greatest long-term implications for children's development

Let's take about a 10-minute Break

Why Are Fathers So Important For The Well-being of Children?

(Overhead 6)

The answer is embedded in the larger question of why families are important. The family's importance is nothing short of ensuring the continuity of civilization. The family does this in two ways: first, by propagating the species, and second, by socializing children.

(Overhead 7)

The father has an important potential role at each developmental stage that his children pass through. During pregnancy and birth, the father-to-be plays crucial roles in the transition of the family. Fathers can be perfectly adequate caretakers of infants, performing most of what mothers do, and their parenting styles, often different from those of mothers, contribute to infants' physical, social, and cognitive development.

In the toddler years, the father has a role in shaping the child's gender role identity, in assisting the child to gain appropriate autonomy, and in helping the child to identify and modulate emotions.

In the preschool years, the father's presence is crucial in helping his child work through basic gender identity.

Fathers act as important mentors for school-aged children, and paternal involvement is associated with higher achievement in school.

For adolescents, fathers serve as role models, advisers, and authority figures during a turbulent time of life.

Young adult children look to their fathers for support and advice during their transition into adult roles including parenthood, and fathers find themselves in new parenting roles in becoming grandparents.

Research findings document the importance of father's influence on their children in the areas of self-esteem and academic achievement in each of the developmental stages.

Characteristics of Effective Fathers

(Overhead 8)

Fathers have the opportunity to spend quality time with their children that may contribute happy memories to last a lifetime. While each father is a unique person who parents in his own style, there are some characteristics that effective fathers have in common.

They are involved in the day-to-day lives of their children. They help their kids find answers for problem areas. They are interested in what is going on at school. They participate in community and extra-curricular activities with their children. They are a presence in their kids' lives.

They demonstrate unwavering love, communicating to their children in words, affection, smiles, and actions just how special each one is. And letting them know that their love for them will last forever, no matter what.

They provide support for their children, financially, emotionally, mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. They encourage and assist their youngsters in the development of all aspects and aspirations of life. They are not ashamed of their children.

They practice appropriate discipline, taking into account the age and personality of each child. What works with a school-age child may not work with a teenager. Fathers discipline with respect and with love, the goal being to help socialize their children in positive ways.

Good fathers set limits and are firm. They let their children know their beliefs and expectations but rely on explanations and reasoning rather than force.

They schedule time on a regular basis to interact with their children, whether going to some special event, working in the tool shed, doing chores together, sharing ideas, engaging in a joint hobby, or just "hanging out". They really listen to their children, trying to be sensitive to the meaning of the words spoken and the emotional feelings behind those words. They realize that their time with children is really an investment in them. Fathers are busy persons, but rather than saying, "I don't have time," they might consider asking, "How much time will it take?" Taking time for the child when the child needs that time will be much more important than taking time for the child when it is convenient for the father. Many fathers of adult children reflect back to those days when the children were home and wish they had invested more time with their children.

They provide consistency in their children's lives, providing a stable environment that children can depend on every day. Fathers set certain standards and values which they teach their children, and which they themselves adhere to. Consistency, however, does not mean being rigid. Dads also need to change and adapt to the changing needs of their children.

Although many fine single parents embody these qualities and valiantly raise their children to healthy adulthood, blessed is the child who has two parents working together to provide all of these things.

Fathers as Moral Leaders

(Overhead 9)

Generative Fathering (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) is a book which provides a clear outline for good fathering and presents a broad perspective on fathering responsibilities that include moral and ethical leadership. Some topics that emerge are:

- Development of moral and spiritual beliefs in children.
- Parents as teachers of values.
- Fathers as models of masculinity.
- Fathers as moral guides.
- Moral leadership and shared responsibility in the family.

The allure to fathers in the 1990s to become a moral leader comes from some of the circumstances of our times and changing families. The growing number of fathers who have abandoned their children has created a sense of guilt and urgency on the part of most men to work to be more involved and present fathers.

The concerns about social toxicity in our communities also triggers in many men a need to protect their children from the toxins of a social environment that supports violence, greed, nastiness, sexual exploitation and hopelessness (Garbarino, 1995).

The sense of moral collapse of society triggers a protective instinct from men. Fathers want to protect their children and families from violence, drugs, guns and the growing sense of hopelessness.

Ways to Strengthen Fathers' Connections With Children

Sometimes, those fathers who really want to be involved in the lives of their children are discouraged because society still tends to equate parenthood with motherhood. In order to provide positive opportunities for involvement, persons who interact with fathers must begin to see those fathers as participating partners in the parenting process.

(Overhead 10)

At home - Share responsibilities of caring for children with their father. Setting up regular dates with dad gives kids and their father time to connect without interference and mom time to do something for herself.

At work - Don't assume that men have no family responsibilities. Meetings should be scheduled at times respectful of family obligations and co-workers should show respect not condescension for men who put their families first.

At school - Fathers should be invited to be room coordinators, book readers, active participants in academic progress conferences (whether or not they live with their child).
At the doctor's office - Dad's opinion counts too. Health care professionals need to recognize that dads today play an active role in the physical care of their children.

At school programs - Whenever possible, children with parents who live apart should receive two invitations to school events. Faces shine twice as brightly when they see both parents in the audience.

In legal situations - Dads' rights to see their children should be honored. Keeping a parent and child apart is painful to both of them. Only cases of mental, physical or sexual abuse warrant separating a child from her parent.

In divorce - Feuding partners must be ever mindful of resolving conflicts without putting kids in the middle. This requires being objective about your children's needs (and not confusing them with your own) and compromising when the situation warrants.

In parent education classes - Educators should plan courses with more than mom in mind. Researchers have found that men have special needs in parenting: more guidance about connecting with their children and, in some cases, assistance with anger management.
In fatherhood programs - It's fun to have activities where dads can do things with their children and other men. It's also healthy for men to have a separate forum to connect with other fathers about parenting issues that may be bothering them. Combination events with child care when dads meet without their children can help satisfy these twin needs.
In marriage or family partnerships - Dad's ability to contribute to his children needs support and respect from mom. He may not do everything to mom's specifications, but he deserves encouragement for trying to be involved in his children's lives. Encouraging rather than chastising is an effective way to help fathers "get it right."

Source: Seeds of Promise Report, Children, Youth & Family Consortium, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN. Phone: (612) 625-7248 for more information on the report series. Reprinted with permission granted exclusively to members of Family Information Services.

Action Plan

Distribute the handout entitled Action Plan, and have the participants spend about 5 minutes filling it out. Tell them that it is for their eyes only. They could also be sealed in self-addressed envelopes and mailed to the participants in 2-3 months as a reminder of their plans.

Summary

Increasing amounts of research are being conducted on the father's role in today's families. These findings document the importance of the father's role, the profound influence of fathers in children's growth and development, and the characteristics that good fathers have in common.

Most likely to succeed on all fronts are the children whose parents are married and living together in relative harmony. And in cases of divorce, children do best when parents can set aside the conflicts that eroded the marriage and agree to work together as co-parents.

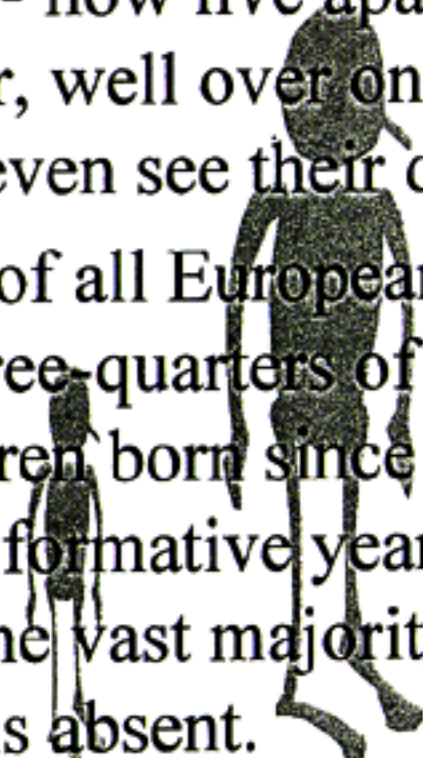
References

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- Levine, J. A. & Pitt, E. W. (1995). New expectations: community strategies for responsible fatherhood. New York: Work & Families Institute.
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- Pickard, M. J. (1998). Fatherhood in a contemporary society. *Family Relations*, 47 (2).
- ALSO credit lines for Missouri notebook and NNFR

Internet Resources on Fatherhood

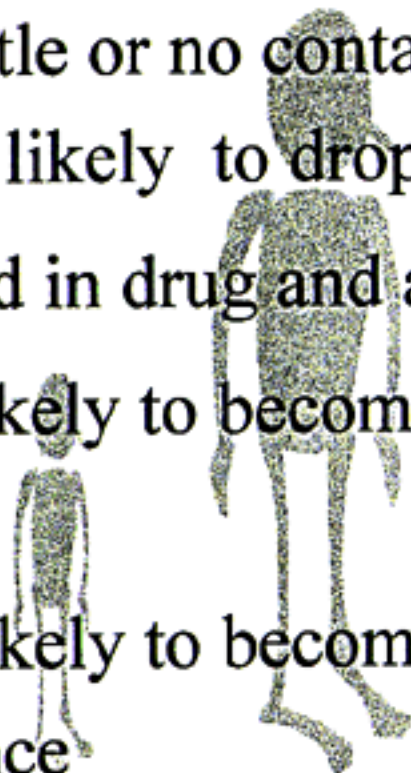
- National Fatherhood Initiative - <http://www.fatherhood.org/>
- The Illinois Fatherhood Initiative - <http://www.4fathers.com/>
- Your Mining Company Guide to Fatherhood - <http://fatherhood.miningco.com/>
- Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools - <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/fathers/index.html>
- National Center on Fathers and Families - <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>
- FatherWork - <http://fatherwork.byu.edu/>
- Fathernet - <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Fathernet/>
- The Fatherhood Project - <http://www.fatherhoodproject.org/>
- National Center for Fathering - <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu>
- Father to Father - <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Fathernet/ftf.html#guide>
- Fathering Magazine - <http://www.fathermag.com/>
- DHHS Fatherhood Initiative - <http://aspe.hhs.gov/fathers/ft-home.htm>
- National Extension Parent Education Model - http://www.cyfernet.mes.umn.edu/parenting_practices/preface.html
- Father support and Father Involvement - <http://npin.org/respar/texts/parfami/fathe897.html>
- National Parent Information Network - <http://npin.org/library/pre1998/n00288/n00288.html>
- Parents Place Fathers' Page - <http://www.parentsplace.com/readroom/father.html>

Father Absence - a critical problem

1. Currently, more than 27 million children - 39% of all US children - now live apart from their father. In a typical year, well over one-third of these children won't even see their dad.
 2. More than half of all European-American children and three-quarters of all African-American children born since 1975 will live some portion of their formative years with only one parent; and in the vast majority of these cases, it's the father who is absent.
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Father Absence - the costs are high

1. Children with little or no contact with their fathers are more likely to drop out of school
2. Become involved in drug and alcohol abuse
3. Girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens
4. Boys are more likely to become involved in crime and violence



Father Absence - the costs are high

5. While father-absence, whether through divorce, death, or abandonment, is not the only variable contributing to these kinds of social problems, neither can it be ignored.
6. In short, fathers play a key role in the successful socialization of children.
7. Unfortunately, even when a father is physically present in the home, he may be emotionally absent. Often, men don't know how to effectively involve themselves in the lives of their children.

Father Absence - the costs are high

Three major emphases are identified in the literature on the impact of father absence on:

- Intellectual or academic achievement
- Gender-specific development
- General behavioral adjustment and aggression in male children



Father Presence

1. The involved father's role is in encouraging independence, assertiveness, and a self-concept that involves acceptance of one's intellectual, physical, social, and gendered self.
2. Fathers play a large role in nurturing their children and can foster creativity, a positive body image, moral standards, and social competence.

Why Are Fathers So Important?

- A The answer is embedded in the larger question of why families are important.
- B The family's importance is nothing short of ensuring the continuity of civilization.
- C The family does this in two ways: first, by propagating the species, and second, by socializing children.

Why Are Fathers So Important?

The potential role of the father at each developmental stage that children pass through.

1. During pregnancy and birth
2. In the toddler years
3. In the preschool years
4. For school-aged children
5. For adolescents
6. Young adult children

Characteristics of Good Fathers

While each father is a unique person who parents in his own style, there are some characteristics that “good” fathers have in common.

- *Involvement*
- *Unwavering Love*
- *Support*
- *Discipline*
- *Time*
- *Consistency*



Fathers As Moral Leaders

Generative Fathering (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1997) presents a broad perspective on fathering responsibilities that include moral and ethical leadership. Some topics that emerge are:

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- Moral leadership and shared responsibility in the family.

Strengthening the Connection

➤ At home.

➤ At work.

➤ At school

➤ At the doctor's office

➤ At school program



➤ In legal situations

➤ In divorce

➤ In parent education classes

➤ In fatherhood programs

➤ In marriage or family partnerships