

Fastbreak For Fathers

a monthly e-mail to help you be the kind of dad your child needs you to be.

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In this issue: The gift every child needs.

OBSERVATIONS

In the month of December one question should take up residence in the soul of every father – What gifts do I have that my child needs?

This isn't a religious question, although it can be. And while gift giving is most often a material question, it by no means needs to be. It is a question for every man who has fathered a child. It is a question for every man who has fulfilled the role of father regardless of biology. It is a question for every day, but for most of us it is relegated to the holiday tickler file. I'm convinced that there is at least one gift that every father can give that every child needs . . . the gift of an emotionally available relationship.

I can almost hear you now . . . "Oh man, Rich you're sounding like their mother! I'm not sure I'm able to be, what did you say? Emotionally available? I know sometimes I'm emotional – read angry – and I want to be available to my kids but emotionally available? I'm not sure what that is, if I can do it, or even if I want to do it.

Fortunately emotional availability is a quality of relationship rather than a personality trait. Regardless of your temperament, childhood experiences, relationship history or gender . . . you have the potential to nurture the quality of communication and connection with your child. In fact, emotional availability isn't necessarily something you have or don't have, it is more of a continuum of connection that takes shape and evolves through time. Why focus on this aspect of your relationship? Because research repeatedly demonstrates that emotional connection is the most important element in a parent-child relationship.

Many dads assume, by virtue of their relationship, provision for the family and words, that their children know they are loved. Don't get me wrong, these things are important. But more important, is the relational connection that helps to ensure that your expressions of love are getting through. That is why, during this season of gift giving, I am searching for ways to become more emotionally available to my children. Because the last thing I want to do is give my child a gift that remains untouched, unopened and forgotten.



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RESEARCH

Based on over sixteen years of personal research and the rich history of attachment studies, Zeynep Biringen, Ph.D., associate professor at Colorado State University and a licensed child psychologist, has documented the following effects of good emotional availability on a child's future:

- Infants and children who have emotionally available relationships with their parents are more likely to develop a trusting and secure attachment to their parents characterized by an age-appropriate balance between autonomy and the need for connection.
- Children who have emotionally available relationships with their parents are less aggressive and less likely to be the targets of aggression from other children.
- Children from emotionally available homes have better peer relationships.
- Children who have emotionally available relationships with their parents are more attentive in school and suffer less from the effects of learning problems.
- Children from emotionally available homes seem to relate better with their teachers.



Biringen, Zeynep. *Raising a Secure Child: Creating an emotional connection between you and your child*. New York: Perigee Books, 2004.

ACTion Plan

How you develop an emotional connection with your child will depend to a large extent on the age of your child and the time you have with them. The following ideas are just a start that should prove applicable regardless of your child's age. See Zeynep Biringen's book and website noted below for additional ideas.

- Play with your child – spend time on their level doing things they want to do.
- Observe your child – make a point to observe and acknowledge your child's emotions.
- Talk about your relationship with the child's mother or a trusted friend – sometimes others can readily see what we are blind to.
- Seek to appropriately manage your anger – this doesn't mean you should never allow them to see your anger. It does mean you are taking the appropriate steps to express your anger under rational control to achieve positive results.

RESOURCES



Written by perhaps the foremost researcher on emotional availability in parent-child relationships, *Raising a Secure Child* is a practical research-based guide that will help parents nurture more fulfilling relationships for them and their child. The first part of the book explains the eight general principles of emotional availability, and uses a wealth of examples to illustrate these principles in action. Readers learn how to identify their own strategies for creating an emotional connection with their children, assess the strengths and weaknesses in their current parent-child relationships, and develop new ways of creating stronger, more nourishing emotional bonds with children of any age. The second half of the book applies the principles of emotional availability to a wide range of ages, situations, and special needs. Additional information and resources are available at the author's website: www.emotionalavailability.com

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Connections & Classes (Metro Denver & Beyond)



Congratulations to all the dads who participated in this year's FRED program. The following participants received gift certificates to the Tattered Cover book store: Ken Allen and his children Ryan, Caleb and Jacob; Daniel Connolly and his children Samuel, Benjamin, and Nathaniel; Dave Hall and his children Devin and Callie; Michael Mitchell and his daughter Kaitlyn; Don Tuleja and his daughter Ashelle.

Denver's WB2 Work and Family Segment – The WB's Morning Anchor, Natalie Tysdal discusses work and family issues with Rich Batten at approximately 6:40 AM every other Tuesday. Additional information on each segment is available at www.douglascountyextension.org (click on the WB2 logo). Recent & upcoming segments include: December 13 – *Youth Sports Report Card*, December 27 – *Parenting Emerging Adults*, January 3 – *Talking With Your Kids About Sex*, January 17 – *New Moms in the Workforce*.



Bringing Baby Home Workshop – January 14 & 21. A workshop for pregnant couples and parents of infants and toddlers offered by Sky Ridge Medical Center.

Fathers Fraternity – January 23 & 30. A workshop for new and expectant dads offered by Parker Adventist Hospital.

Sex Talks: How and when to talk with your kids about sexuality – January 12, 19 & 26. A three-session class designed to help parents begin and maintain an ongoing conversation with their children about sexuality.

All of the above are facilitated by Rich Batten. For more information and registration links visit www.douglascountyextension.org click on the family/consumer tab and then classes

You can't be the kind of dad that you want to be. You can't be the kind of dad that you wanted to have. You've got to be the kind of dad that your child needs you to be.

Roland Warren, The National Fatherhood Initiative

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