

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: *What does it mean to be a good dad?*

Observations

In her, now classic, 1992 Father's Day Erma Bombeck column wrote, "One morning my father didn't get up and go to work. He went to the hospital and died the next day. I hadn't thought that much about him before.

He was just someone who left and came home and seemed glad to see everyone at night. He opened the jar of pickles when no one else could. He was the only one in the house who wasn't afraid to go into the basement by himself.

He cut himself shaving, but no one kissed it or got excited about it. It was understood when it rained, he got the car and brought it around to the door. When anyone was sick, he went out to get the prescription filled. He took lots of pictures . . . But was never in them.

Whenever I played house, the mother doll had a lot to do. I never knew what to do with the daddy doll, so I had him say, "I'm going off to work now" and threw him under the bed.

The funeral was in our living room and a lot of people came and brought all kinds of good food and cakes. We had never had so much company before.

I went to my room and felt under the bed for the daddy doll. When I found him, I dusted him off and put him on my bed. He never did anything. I didn't know his leaving would hurt so much."

I've read that column several times a year for over 10 years and it still brings a glint of moisture to my eyes. Why does it touch something deep inside of me? Because it speaks to the impact I have as a father – whether I recognize it or not. It speaks to the little things in life – that aren't so little in retrospect. And it speaks to the calling I have as dad – that inner voice that tells me that this is my most meaningful vocation. Who you are and what you do as dad leaves a lasting imprint on your children. In this issue of *Fastbreak* my focus is on some of the consistent characteristics of a good dad.

Ideas

Good fathers are loving fathers. It may appear obvious or perhaps vague, but it can't go without saying – the ability to effectively communicate love for your child is at the core of being a good father.

Communication may be defined as the process of creating shared meanings. Unless your child attaches the same meaning to your expressions of love you are not getting through. **A key question:** "What communicates love to my child at this point in his life?" If you don't know, ask – "What are some of the things I say or do that lets you know I love you?"

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Good fathers are involved fathers. John Gottman observed in his book, [The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child](#), "Unless fathers make a conscious effort to be a part of their kids' daily lives, many may find themselves drifting further away, losing track of the intimate details – the stuff that gives dads and children their common ground." Father involvement comes in different shapes and sizes but it is centered on common experiences. **A key assessment:** *Conduct a personal audit of the time you spend with your children. Are you allowing the "busyness" of life to take time away from maintaining your father-child relationships?*

Good fathers are responsible fathers. For the most part, I have always been a responsible person in the sense of being trustworthy, but it wasn't until driving home from the hospital after the birth of our first child that I felt the weight of being responsible in the sense of having a moral and legal accountability for the life of another. Being responsible for a child includes keeping a child's needs in mind and monitoring their well-being. It also can mean taking action to promote a child's well-being such as taking the child to a doctor's appointment, signing them up for a summer activity. It means knowing and understanding their needs and interests and doing something about them. Many fathers leave the actual oversight of their child's day-to-day activities up to the child's mother. **A key check-in:** *Ask your child's mother if there is a part of parenting that she wishes you would take more responsibility for.*

Research

Love see Rohner, R. ([Center for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection](#)) & Veneziano, R. (2001) The importance of father love: History and contemporary evidence. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 382-405.

Involvement see Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved fathering and child development: Advancing our understanding of good fathering. In C.S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.) [Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives](#) (pp.119-140). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Responsibility see Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998) [Responsible fathering: an overview and conceptual framework](#). *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277-292.

Connections

(specific to Douglas County Colorado)

The Parent University – Parenting classes for both dads and moms offered through the Douglas County School District. Call 303.387.0128 for more information, or follow this link to view an online course booklet: [The Parent University](#).

Father Fraternity – (Parker Adventist Hospital) Classes for new dads. Next series of classes begins May 11. Call 303.269.4390 for more information and to register.

My Dad is a Hero – Fourth- and fifth-grade students throughout Colorado are invited to nominate their dads, or the father figures in their lives, for a "My Dad Is a Hero" award. The program recognizes everyday dads for the unique ways they live the ideals of fatherhood. Entry forms are being sent to all elementary schools in the state. Follow this link to print out a copy of the entry form, rules and decision-making rubric: [My Dad is a Hero](#).

"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

"In my view, the 'best' level of father involvement is one that mirrors a high degree of direct interaction, instruction, and relating, coupled with intangibles such as love, mutual respect, and mutual delight (having fun), all in a manner that is consistent with ethical principles of the 'golden rule' adjusted for developmental differences between fathers and children and tailored to the individual needs of each child. Men who consistently do this across time and contexts are 'good fathers' who tend to have children who are developing positively."

–Rob Palkovitz, Professor, Department of Individual and Family Studies,
University of Delaware

Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved fathering and child development: Advancing our understanding of good fathering. In C.S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds.) *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (p 133). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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Fastbreak for Fathers is a publication of the *Douglas County FatherWork Connection*, a countywide, research-based, fathering education and advocacy initiative committed to increasing the probability of every child in Douglas County Colorado being intimately connected to an involved, responsible and loving father or father figure.

**The Douglas County FatherWork Connection is facilitated by
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