

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: Family Stories

OBSERVATIONS

When his children were overwhelmed by fear, Father Graham Hess, the main character in the M. Night Shyamalan film “Signs,” got down on their level, looked into their eyes and told them the story of their birth. “Morgan, on the day you were born . . .” Such is the power of family stories. They have the potential to mark, bless and encourage the listener with words that transcend current circumstances.

Family stories communicate meaning, significance, history and fun. They serve as a connection to the past and often provide a glimpse of the future. Daniel Taylor in his book, *The Healing Power of Stories* writes, “Families are united more by mutual stories—of love and pain and adventure—than by biology. ‘Do you remember when . . .’ bonds people together far more than shared chromosomes . . . a family knows itself to be a family through its shared stories. When we speak of being related, we are speaking of the relationship of characters in interwoven stories the family tells to us and tells about us.” As another author has put it, “Telling a story helps put things in perspective and helps us learn more about ourselves. Good stories sharpen our experiences; like dreams they help us sort out what’s really important amidst the confusing signals of everyday life. Parenting has its difficulties and bitterness, but it also has treasures that can enrich our lives.” Family story telling captures those treasures and shares them with others.



In addition to **communicating family history, stories help children to understand how the family makes sense of its world, express rules of interactions, and create beliefs about relationships.** They serve as a form of entertainment and a means to create shared meaning and values.

Isak Dinesen, best known by many for her memoir *Out of Africa*, said, “To be a person is to have a story to tell.” She is not alone in that thought. When reporters in Chicago (Chicago Journal, May 26, 1982) asked a group of urban school children what would happen if there were no stories in the world, one child responded, “People would die of seriousness,” and another answered, “There wouldn’t be a world, because stories make the world.” You may not feel like your stories “make the world” but they can definitely enrich your world and the world of your children.

A version of this essay was originally published by the author in the January 2003 edition of the Family Matters Newsletter
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/fammatrs/fm0301e.html>

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RESEARCH



A growing body of research and theory on family stories has developed in recent years. The process of telling family stories has been linked to central aspects of development, including language acquisition, affect regulation, and family interaction patterns.

Family Stories and the Life Course: Across Time and Generations, edited by Michael Pratt (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Barbara Fiese (Syracuse University) is a great place to start for those interested in the psychological research on family stories and their implications for development and change at different points in the life course.

ACTION Plan

The great thing about family stories is that a little effort can go a long way. Consider these **ideas to help you, and your family, capture your stories and share them amongst yourselves and others.** Place a check in front of those activities your family is already doing and a different mark in front of those you would like to start. Use the additional bullets to add your own ideas.

- Tell a story when a memory pops in your head. You may get a few “Oh Mom/Dad things are different now!” but for the most part kids love to hear about your experiences. Just don’t start out by saying, “I remember when . . . “!
- Have a regular storytelling time as a family.
- Ask relatives for stories they recall. Video tape grandparents as they tell their favorite stories.
- Make a list of virtues you would like to nurture in the life of your children. Think back over your life and your extended family’s history for stories that illustrate a particular virtue.
- Have family members write on slips of paper: the funniest thing that ever happened to me; the most embarrassing; the weirdest; the scariest, my best memory etc. use the slips of paper to jumpstart storytelling times around the diner table.
- Share with your children the moment (s) with them that you hold closest to your heart.
- Tell about the experience(s) in your life that you treasure the most?
- Tell your children your “Love Story,” . . . how you met, what attracted you to each other etc. frequently.
- Use holidays or birthday celebrations to tell stories specific to a particular child.
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RESOURCES



The Call of Story (www.callofstory.org/en/family) A practical and engaging web site that promotes storytelling within our families and communities. The site was originally developed as a follow-up to the American Public Television production "The Call of Story: An American Renaissance."

Connections & Classes (Metro Denver & Beyond)

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: November 29 – *Family Rituals and Traditions*, December 13 – *Youth Sports Report Card*, December 27 – *Parenting Emerging Adults*.



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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