

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: Navigating Work & Family

OBSERVATIONS

Men often talk of balancing work and family commitments. I think the metaphor of balance sets us up for failure. I suggest that the image of navigation is a more realistic picture. To successfully *navigate life*, with particular attention to the responsibilities associated with work and family, dads must have a clear understanding of their desired destination, develop some fundamental skills and be prepared to make necessary adjustments in order to stay the course when conditions change. Ideally this is not a task any of us should face alone.

Dads need to intentionally seek out relationships with other fathers who can encourage, support and challenge them. I'm not suggesting that you start a support group just some sideline conversations. The next



practice, game or other child-centered event you attend ask one of the other dads what strategies they practice to navigate the often-competing demands of work and family. I'm convinced you will come away with some ideas and a realization that you are not alone.

Take our Daughters and Sons to Work â Day

Erma Bombeck in one of her classic Father's Day columns wrote, "Whenever I played house . . . 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." Barbara Schneider, a University of Chicago sociology professor, wouldn't be surprised by this action. In a continuing 10-year University of Chicago study of 250 young adults she demonstrates that many teens don't understand the career paths open to them or the steps needed to travel the path of their choice. In part this is because few teens gain a meaningful understanding of work from their parents.

The Ms. Foundation for Women encourages adults to expose children to the world of work. This year April 28th has been designated *Take our Daughters and Sons to Work â Day*. For more information visit www.daughtersandsonstowork.org.

IDEAS

Navigating the Transition

It is impossible to maintain a separation of work and family. As James Levine writes in his book *Working Fathers*, “Men don’t shelve their father-part at work, or their worker-part at home. Each aspect of their life deeply affects the other.”

The following navigational tips for successfully making the transition from home to work and back again are adapted from a chapter in the book, *Ask the Children: What America’s Children Really Think About Working Parents*.



From home to work

- **Organize the night before:** Getting clothes set out, lunches made, and homework or work ready to go the night before can prevent last-minute crises.
- **Get up in time:** A parent of two school-age children advises: “This may not work for non-morning people, but I always feel so much better if I can have some time to myself before everyone else in the household gets up.”
- **Good-bye rituals:** A father who drops off his children at child care before he heads for work says: “We would have terrible struggles in the morning until I set up a game we do every morning. We play Simon Says: Simon Says get your coat. Simon Says get your lunch. Go out the door. Whoops—I caught you because I didn’t say Simon Says so you can’t go out the door until I say Simon Says.”
- **Backup plans:** Don’t wait until your child is slightly sick, it’s a snow day, or your child care falls apart to make a back up plan. Find people or a place in your community for backup care.
- **Going-to-work transition:** Whether you travel by foot, car, bus, train or plane it is helpful to develop a consistent routine that helps you begin to focus on the tasks ahead of you.

From Work to Home

- **Phase out:** Some parents use their last moments at work to switch out of the work mode: Meditate at your desk for a few minutes before you leave. Cast an extended gaze at the family photo before heading for home.
- **Transition ritual:** Practice the “Mister Rogers technique” – Fred Rogers always took off his jacket and put on his sweater and sneakers at the beginning of his television show. Many parents change their clothes as a symbolic act of shifting from their work selves to their parent selves.
- **Meet your children’s needs:** If the children are tired or hungry, there is a greater chance that your initial few moments at home will look like a scene from some B – rated movie.
- **Hello rituals:** In most homes the family dog does a much better job of greeting others than the people do. You may not have a tail to wag but especially your small children will get a kick out of an enthusiastic hello every evening.
- **Expect your children to save their troubles for you:** Children typically save their pent-up feelings from the day for the people they feel most comfortable with—you. Although it doesn’t seem fair that they are on their best behavior with others and not us, the fact that they can share their feelings is an indication that they feel safer and more supported by us than by others.
- **If you have had “one of those days,” take care of yourself if you can and be straight with your children about it.** On tough days, some mothers and fathers often say they walk in the door and head for a quiet room, where they rest or compose themselves (after their hello ritual of course!). Even 5 minutes alone can help. It is important to be honest with your children, saying that you are tired, you need some time to recover, and when you’re in a better mood you can have a better time together. Some children think it is their fault that you’re upset or that you’re rejecting them, so it is important to dispel these feelings: “You didn’t do anything to upset me. I just had a tough day at work.”

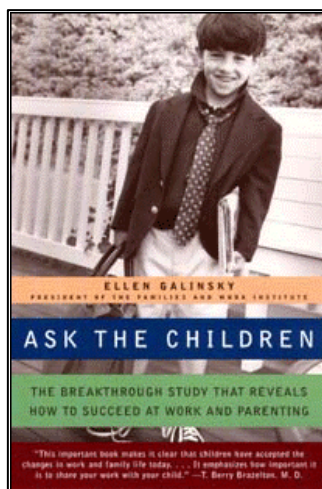
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RESEARCH

The Fall 2004 (Vol 2 No 3) issue of *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice About Men as Fathers* is devoted to Work/Family Issues for Fathers. Guest Editors Kerry Daly and Rob Palkovitz present five papers that deal with different aspects of work and family issues as they relate to fathers:

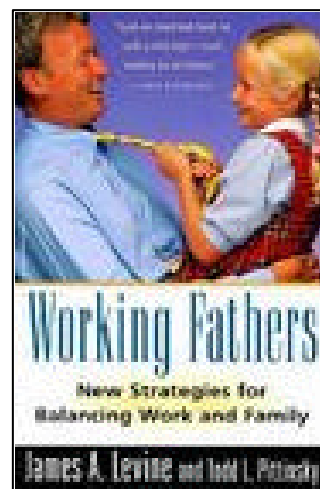
- Eyeing the Edges: Theoretical Considerations of Work and Family for Fathers in Midlife Development (Palkovitz & Daly)
- The Interweave of Fathers' Daily Work Experiences and Fathering Behaviors (McDonald & Almeida)
- You Can't Eat Love: Constructing Provider Role Expectations for Low-Income and Working-Class Fathers (Roy)
- "It's Almost like I Have a Job, but I Don't Get Paid": Fathers at Home Reconfiguring Work, Care, and Masculinity (Doucet)
- Men's and Women's Eldercare-Based Work-Family Conflict: Antecedents and Work-Related Outcomes (Barrah, Shultz, Baltes & Stolz)

RESOURCES



Ask the Children: What America's Children Really Think About Working Parents. Ellen Galinsky (New York: Morrow, 1999) Based on a landmark study that asked children and parents for their views on work and family life, this volume contains great information – that may surprise you – and ideas to successfully navigate the most important roles in your life. www.familiesandwork.org

Working Fathers: New Strategies for Balancing Work and Family. James Levine (San Diego: Harvest, 1998) One of the first books to address the issues men face in the area of work and family. Levine provides fathers and employers with practical strategies for enhancing the quality of both work and family life.



“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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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. Images copyright © 2005 Douglas County Extension and its licensors. All rights reserved.

The Douglas County FatherWork Connection is facilitated by
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