



YOUNG FAMILY PROGRAMS

family focus

FATHERS ARE V I P S...VERY IMPORTANT PERSONS... IN RAISING CHILDREN

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A walk through our neighborhoods or a visit to local shopping malls quickly reveals that fathers are becoming more involved than ever before in the nurturance and rearing of their children. Changing economic and societal patterns have made this trend not only possible but acceptable, sometimes necessary and in nearly all cases very desirable.

What Makes Fathers Such an Important Part of the Parenting Team?

Fathers give needed support in nurturing children

In contrast to traditional beliefs that it was only appropriate for the mother to nurture or be emotionally close to children it is now recognized that kids usually benefit from having both parents actively involved in their upbringing. From interacting with two people, children learn that problems can be solved in a variety of ways...that people have different feelings and reactions. They learn that people have varied skills, strengths and approaches to life. They learn to seek help from different people for different needs.

The earlier that both parents become involved with their children the better! Numerous long range studies indicate that it is during the first five years of life when the foundation of a child's personality is formed. Thus there is probably no period of time when it is more important for both parents to actively participate in creating an environment which provides learning opportunities, encouragement, recognition, love and guidance for their children. Such surroundings greatly increase a child's chances for developing a vital sense of security and good feelings about himself.

As a Masculine Model, Fathers Help Children Develop Sex Role Behavior

Fathers play a vital role in helping a child feel good about being a boy or a girl. Since gender identity begins to develop when a child is about three, it is especially important for fathers to relate closely with their children during this formative pre-school period. For boys, fathers provide a model for being a man...an example of masculine feelings and interests. For girls, fathers provide a bridge for developing a trusting, comfortable relationship with men in the future. Because of the importance of models in developing gender identity, it is strongly suggested that in single parent homes growing children be provided opportunities to develop close associations with a person who is the same sex as the absent parent.

...And Much More

The impact of a father's involvement with his children obviously extends far beyond this limited discussion. Through his experience and by his example he may influence the economic, social and educational goals of a child or family. Additionally he provides a model for being a husband and a father.

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP DAD FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE ON THE PARENTING TEAM

For some men, involvement in child rearing comes automatically and naturally. For others it initially may seem somewhat strange and uncomfortable. Although the suggestions which follow are directed primarily to new or "expectant" fathers, the principles involved hold true and have application in nearly all stages of parenthood.

Notes for Dad

Set aside some time to learn about the pattern of growth that your child will follow. Reviewing books and magazines which discuss children and their development is an excellent place to begin. Taking time to observe and actually be with children will further add to this understanding. Both will help you enjoy your child more by building an appreciation of *what* to expect and *when* and *why*.

Start early! If possible join your wife for prenatal or childbirth preparation classes. Lend help and support in making arrangements for your baby's homecoming. The earlier you begin your involvement the easier it will be to enjoy your child and feel comfortable as a parent.

First things first! Begin your participation with your child in areas where you feel comfortable and at ease. One father might begin by heating a bottle of milk...another by reading to his child...a third by assuming full child care for an hour or two. Branch out from there!

Share your child's milestones with your spouse. This will not only foster a very satisfying form of communication between you and your wife, but will help you both better understand your child's development.

Notes for Mom

Collect an assortment of child development information to keep at home. Numerous popularly written books (see list below) are available in libraries or book stores which will offer suggestions in times of stress and can be used as general resources for improving parenting skills.

Encourage your husband to feel involved right from the beginning. During your pregnancy share with him progress reports from the doctor. Work together in making preparations for the baby. Take some time to discuss your attitudes about raising children.

Encourage your husband to take over some of the actual care of your child. Close physical contact allows time for special father-child communication and helps your husband to experience first hand your child's reactions.

Share your child's milestones with your husband... the first smile...the first tooth...the first day of school. When there is a full exchange of experiences you both can more completely enjoy and understand your child.

References and Recommended Readings (paperback editions)

- Billler, Henry and Dennis Meredith, *Father Power*, New York, David McKay Co., Inc., 1974.
Dodson, Fitzhugh, *How to Father*, New York. New American Library, 1974.
Elkind, David, *A Sympathetic Understanding of the Child: Birth to Sixteen*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1971.
Parents' Magazine and Better Homemaking, published monthly by Parents' Magazine Enterprises, Inc., Bergenfield, New Jersey.

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