

Your Family Matters

....because family does

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BEING A DAD

- What kind of dad are you?
- How important are you in your kid's lives?
- How do you want your children to look back on their relationship with you in twenty years?

In my psychotherapy practice I see many families. I am particularly pleased when both mom and dad come to see me for help dealing with their family situation or parenting concerns.

Over the years I've seen a huge shift. Dads used to see their role primarily as the breadwinner. Moms had the lion's share of responsibility for the home and kids, often holding down a job or career as well. A new perspective has been evolving. Men want to be more involved and have an major role in their children's lives. This phenomenon is wonderful. Everyone benefits. Yet with this change, there are challenges to face.

While many dads are actively participating in their children's upbringing, they often may not feel fully equipped to be a hands-on dad, especially if their own father was not. Dads have told me, "My father worked long hours and was too tired when he got home to be with me", or "He was the fun dad and my mother was the disciplinarian", or "My parents divorced when I was young. I only saw my father on the weekends and sometimes not at all, " or "My dad was tough and controlling. We weren't close the way I would like to be with my children," or "My dad was all about sports. That wasn't me (or that was me) but we didn't relate any other way."

Dads deserve lots of credit for striving to be good fathers in the face of what they experienced as children. Observation of generational patterns show that if dads think about how they were fathered -- sorting out what specifically was positive and what wasn't -- this increased awareness creates the opportunity for history not to repeat itself. By being conscious of various aspects of how they were parented, dads can now make better behavioral and attitudinal choices, instead of coming from reflexive and reactive habits.

In my psychotherapy practice, I see a generation of dads that is far more involved and effective. They are more emotionally related, interested in the day to day events in their children's lives and know their children quite well. In turn their kids are enriched by their relationship with dad and will likely want to emulate it, or want to have a husband who will replicate it, when it is their turn to parent.



Here are a few suggestions that may enhance your fathering:

1. It is okay for men to show their emotions. It doesn't mean you are a softy, it just means you have access to the full range of human feelings. It demonstrates to your children that you are emotionally accessible, that you understand their feelings and that you can be counted on to take them seriously.

Many dads feel their own fathers were not emotionally accessible and long for what they missed.

2. See your children as individuals, not copies of yourself. Sometimes, dad's get stuck wanting their child, particularly a son, to be like them. This is especially true, if dad is into sports. He wants his son to follow suit. I have seen sons, who are not cut from the same cloth as their dad, experience a great deal of pressure from their over-involved dads. These boys want to please their dad while at the same time feeling they are not accepted for whom they truly are. Some of these boys are interested in sports, but may or may not be to the degree of their dads. Dads need to temper their enthusiasm and pace their sports instruction. Some boys are not the least bit interested and need dad to pay attention to what excites their son.



3. Treat your sons and daughters with respect, warmth and appreciation. In this way sons can identify with what it means to be a dad and a male. In turn, daughters have the experience of relating to a man who treats them well. It is extremely important that children see their dad treating mom with the same respect and appreciation so they have a model for a healthy couple relationship. This becomes the basis for their couple relationship as they reach adulthood. Without this essential foundation, your sons and daughters self-esteem and future relationships are at risk.

4. Dads can be playful and provide discipline. Dads often say that they prefer time with their children be well spent. They don't want to have to discipline during the time their time together. Other dads take this on quite easily. Then, if there is an imbalance between parents; one that disciplines and one that doesn't, it creates a split where your kids will consider one parent as bad and the other as good. Both parents need to be able to set and hold limits comfortably, calmly and consistently, so their kids know that their parents are not pushovers nor controlling. Taking the middle ground stance, dads and moms can enjoy their kids and still take the necessary leadership in terms of setting limits.

Dads can do both - have fun with their children and still provide limit setting leadership.

5. Good parenting is a partnership. It makes a difference when you both parents pay attention to your individual parenting styles. Talk with one another about what is effective. Come to common ground. If your parenting approach is polarized with your wife, if either one of you is undercutting the other, it will be to your children's detriment as well as to your marriage. Kids are very sensitive to their parents and pick up the non-verbal and verbal cues when they are not working together.

Remember, our kids learn from what we do and how we behave. If our behavior is different from what we preach, our children will naturally imitate what we do. Many dads have told me they repeat to their children what was said to them knowing it wasn't appropriate, but feel they have no alternative. Sarcasm, put downs or unbridled anger teach children to behave the same way. Being willing to learn positive behavior is being more than half way there. The rest is self-awareness, finding tools that really work and implementation.

Fathers redefining their role in their children's lives find that there is a lot of room to expand and envision a new reality. This is a fantastic time to be a dad and an opportunity to change history, one dad at a time. Ask yourself:



- **What kind of father do I want to be?**
- **How do I want my kids to look back on their childhood?**
- **What kind of parent do I want them to be?**

Be part of your children's lives now as you would have wanted it for yourself as a young boy. When you are a grandfather, your adult son or daughter will have absorbed that legacy from you.

Be the kind of father you want to be!

WORKSHOP: Tune-up Your Fathering

In a safe environment dads will have the opportunity to:

- Be the father you want to be
- Rework outdated belief systems about being a father
- Discover techniques to bring out the best in your children

Sunday, November 15th 10-12 noon, Fee: \$50.

Contact Roberta Rachel Omin, LCSW to register: (914) 941-8179



Learn how Parent Coaching strengthens and deepens your family bonds

The choices we make define the lives we live!

**Please call (914) 941-8179 or email me at
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