

Importance of Being a Father

(Source [unless otherwise specified]: The Father Factor: *How Father Absence Affects Our Youth*. National Fatherhood Initiative. www.fatherhood.gov [accessed 11/15/10])

Fatherhood can be a tricky thing. Just what is your role? Can you be a dad if you don't live with your children every day? If you care for children that aren't biologically yours? If you get deployed or incarcerated, can you be a dad from that far away? Are you really important at all?

Yes! You are important. And being a dad comes in many forms, and with many challenges. However, being involved and responsible in the life of your child, no matter what the relationship looks like, is critical to his or her well-being. The importance of father involvement is guided by the following principles:

- All fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children.
- Parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household.
- The roles fathers play in families is diverse and related to cultural and community norms.
- Men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood.
- Government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs and through its own workforce policies.

It doesn't take a college degree in child development. It doesn't take trips to amusement parks or expensive sporting events. It does take commitment and courage and love. Take time to be a dad today!

What is the Importance of Fathers?

Fathers come in all different varieties. Involved and responsible fathers that are present in the lives of their children contribute to improved outcomes for kids, families, and whole communities.

Recent research results show that fathers who live with their children are more likely to have a close, lasting relationship with their children. Other results show that children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have pride in himself or herself, show empathy (which is a deep emotional understanding of another's feelings or problems¹) and pro-social behavior (defined as "the phenomenon of people helping each other with no thought of reward or compensation"²), and avoid high-risk behaviors including drug use, truancy, and criminal activity.

Here are a few facts from the research highlighting the positive affect a father's presence in his child's life can have:

¹ <http://thesaurus.com/browse/empathy> (accessed 11/15/10)

² <http://www.alleydog.com/glossary/definition.php?term=Prosocial%20Behavior> (accessed 11/15/10)

Who Needs Fathers?

- Research results show that 24 million children (34%) live absent their biological father.
- Research does show that children living with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents are less likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers with absent fathers.

Can Fathers Reduce Child Poverty?

The presence of a responsible father significantly reduces child poverty.

- Research results show that children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor.
- According to the U.S. Census, in 2008, only 5.5% of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 10.3% of all children.

Can Fathers Help Children to be Physically Healthy and Safe?

The presence of a responsible father helps a child be physically healthy and safe.

- Research results show that a father's presence can promote healthy physical, emotional, and social development.
- A growing amount of research shows that children are healthier when fathers are involved in the daily care of their children's health and safety.

Can Fathers Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect?

The presence of a responsible father can help prevent child abuse and neglect.

- Research results show that the presence of a father in the home lowers the likelihood that a child will be physically and/or emotionally abused and neglected.
- Other research results show that compared to living with both parents, living in a single parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional or educational neglect.

Can Fathers Improve School Performance and Reduce Problem Behaviors?

The presence of a responsible father promotes improved academic performance and reduces disciplinary problems among children.

- Research shows that even very young children who have experienced high father involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem-solving capacity. Fathers' involvement seems to encourage children's exploration of the world around them and confidence in their ability to solve problems³.
- When non-custodial fathers are highly involved with their children's learning, the children are more likely to get A's at all grade levels⁴.

³ Pruett, Kyle D. 2000. *Fatherhood: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*. New York: Free Press.

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. October 1997. *Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*; National Household Education Survey. NCES 98-091R2. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

Can Fathers Prevent Substance Abuse?

The presence of a responsible father reduces the likelihood that children will suffer substance abuse.

- Research results show that father closeness serves as a protective factor against the use and abuse of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, and hard-drugs during adolescence.
- Therefore, reducing the number of fathers absent in the home reduces the probability that children will abuse illegal substances.