



FATHERING

I am the oldest daughter of eight children. When any of us called home and my dad answered the phone, he would barely say, "Hello, how are you?" before passing the phone to my mother. When we visited, he'd sit and watch the ballgame while we talked with Mom and filled her in on all our news. If we became too loud, he'd comment on our "yakking," just like "Good Old Dad." Although we loved him, we were never able to have a meaningful conversation with our father.

Then, about 10 years ago, my mother convinced Dad – against his better judgment – to take a course in self-awareness. I received a phone call from him shortly after he completed the course, and we actually talked for about 10 minutes! He asked me questions, listened to my answers and spoke about himself. When I hung up the phone, tears were streaming down my face. My husband couldn't believe it was my father I had been talking to.

Dad passed away a few years ago, and I am so grateful to him for reaching out so we could have some time together before it was too late. Abby, please tell "Good Old Dad" that his children are dying to be close to him. He should call them at home or take them to lunch and build a relationship with them outside the mother-child loop. It may be a little awkward at first, but it will be well worth it. *(Taken from a Dear Abby article)*

Children certainly benefit when such basic needs as food, safe housing, and health care are regularly and adequately met. But the above article is a clear indicator that a father's contribution to his child's well-being doesn't begin or end with his wallet. Research supports the idea that children with active fathers are:

- more ambitious;
- less susceptible to peer pressure;
- more competent;
- self protective and self reliant;
- more self confident with the respective male or female identities.

"Fathers change the world one child at a time." This quote is taken from information provided by the *National Fatherhood Initiative*. Following are ten things every father needs to know and do, which are taken from the same organizational publication.

1. Respect Your Children's Mother. One of the best things a father can do for his children is to respect their mother. If you are married, keep your marriage strong and vital. If you are not married, it is still important to respect and support the mother of your children. A father and mother who respect each other, and let their children know it; provide a secure environment for them. *When children see their parents respecting each other, they are more likely to feel that they are also accepted and respected.*

2. Spend Time With Your Children. *How a father spends his time tells his children what's important to him. If you always seem too busy for your children, they will feel neglected no matter what you say. Treasuring children often means sacrificing other things, but it is essential to spend time with your children. Kids grow up quickly. Missed opportunities are lost forever.*

3. Earn the Right to Be Heard. All too often the only time a father speaks to his children is when they have done something wrong. That's why so many children cringe when their mother says, "Your father wants to talk with you." Begin talking with your kids when they are very young so that difficult subjects will be easier to handle as they get older. *Take time and listen to their ideas and problems.*

4. **Discipline With Love.** All children need guidance and discipline, not as punishment, but to set reasonable limits. Remind your children of the consequences of their actions and provide meaningful rewards for desirable behavior. *Fathers who discipline in a calm and fair manner show love for their children.*

5. **Be a Role Model.** Fathers are role models to their kids, whether they realize it or not. A girl who spends time with a loving father grows up knowing she deserves to be treated with respect by boys, and what to look for in a husband. *Fathers can teach sons what is important in life by demonstrating honesty, humility and responsibility.*

6. **Be a Teacher.** Too many fathers think teaching is something others do. But a father who teaches his children about right and wrong, and encourages them to do their best, will see his children make good choices. *Involved fathers use everyday examples to help their children learn the basic lessons of life.*

7. **Eat Together as a Family.** Sharing a meal together (breakfast, lunch or dinner) can be an important part of healthy family life. In addition to providing some structure in a busy day, it gives kids the chance to talk about what they are doing and want to do. *It is also a good time for fathers to listen and give advice. Most importantly, it is a time for families to be together each day.*

8. **Read to your Children.** In a world where television often dominates the lives of children, it is important that fathers make the effort to read to their children. Children learn best by doing and reading, as well as seeing and hearing. Begin reading to your children when they are very young. When they are older, encourage them to read on their own. *Instilling your children with a love for reading is one of the best ways to ensure they will have a lifetime of personal and career growth.*

9. **Show Affection.** Children need the security that comes from knowing they are wanted, accepted and loved by their family. Parents, especially fathers, need to feel both comfortable and willing to hug their children. *Showing affection every day is the best way to let your children know that you love them.*

10. **Realize That a Father's Job is Never Done.** Even after children are grown and ready to leave home, they will still look to their fathers for wisdom and advice. Whether its continued schooling, a new job or a wedding, *fathers continue to play an essential part in the lives of their children as they grow and, perhaps, marry and build their own families.*

For more information on Fathering, visit: www.fatherhood.org