

Section II: How Does a Father's Presence or Absence Affect His Children?



The presence and active involvement of a father makes his children more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors, compared with children who are raised without a father (Dare To Be King – Urban Leadership Institute, 2006).

Conversely, boys and young men growing up without a father face enormous risks compared with males who are raised with their fathers. The following statistics from the Urban Leadership Institute's

Dare To Be King curriculum (2006) document those risks for children and youth.

| Children/Youth from Fatherless Homes | Children/Youth from Homes with Fathers |
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| 63 percent of youth suicides | 37 percent of youth suicides |
| 90 percent of homeless and runaway youth | 10 percent of homeless and runaway youth |
| 85 percent of youth who exhibit behavioral disorders | 15 percent of youth who exhibit behavioral disorders |
| 71 percent of all high school dropouts | 29 percent of all high school dropouts |
| 75 percent of all youth in chemical abuse centers | 25 percent of all youth in chemical abuse centers |
| 70 percent of youth in state-operated institutions | 30 percent of youth in state-operated institutions |

What accounts for these differences between fatherless homes and homes with fathers? Dr. Stephen D. Green's research focuses on the dynamics between fathers and their children and provides the following reasons why children need active fathers (Green, 2000):

20 Reasons Why Your Child Needs You to be an Active Father

1. **"Lets your child know that you love her.** Love involves more than saying the words 'I love you.' Fathers who love their children demonstrate their love by spending quality and quantity time together. Children who feel loved are more likely to develop a strong emotional bonds with their father and develop healthy self-esteem."
2. **"Provides your child with greater financial resources.** Research indicates that families with an active father are 'better off' financially. This means that children with active fathers will be more likely to have access to resources that facilitate healthy development (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, quality medical care)."

Section I: Where Are the Dads?



Fathers who live with their children are more likely to have close, enduring relationships with their children than those who do not. For many decades, however, the stability of family relationships within which children are raised has significantly eroded. The following statistics from the National Fatherhood Initiative's *Father Facts* (Horn & Sylvester, 2002) sketch a profile of the changing demographics of American families in which today's children are developing:

- Forty-three percent of first marriages dissolve within 15 years, and approximately 60 percent of divorcing couples have children. Roughly one million children each year experience the divorces of their parents.
- Nearly 20 million American children (27 percent) live in single-parent homes. Eighteen percent of the single parents who currently live with their children are men, while 82 percent are women. (Of the single parents who are fathers, 8 percent are raising *three or more* children under 18 years of age.)
- The number of single fathers in the U.S.—now 2.5 million—has increased more than six-fold from 400,000 in 1970.
 - Forty-two percent of single fathers are divorced, 38 percent have never married, 16 percent are separated, and 4 percent are widowed.
 - Seventy-three percent have an annual family income of \$50,000 or less.
- Compared to children born to married parents, children born to cohabiting parents are three times as likely to experience eventual father absence; and children born to unmarried, *non-cohabiting* parents are four times as likely to live in a father-absent home.
- From 1995 to 2000, the proportion of children living in single-parent homes slightly declined, while the proportion of children living with two married parents remained stable.
- Still, 24 million children (34 percent) today do not live with their biological fathers.
 - Approximately 26 percent of absent fathers live in a different state than their children.
 - Approximately 40 percent of children in father-absent homes have not seen their fathers even once during the past year.
 - Approximately 50 percent of children not living with their fathers have never set foot in their fathers' homes.

“It is easier for a father to have children than for children to have a real father.”

– Pope John XXIII

3. **“Provides your child with a positive male role model.** Children, regardless of gender, need positive male and female role models. Children tend to model behavior (positive and negative) that they witness on a consistent basis. Active fathers can promote positive behaviors by setting a proper example for their children.”
4. **“Provides your child with emotional support.** In addition to financial support, children also need emotional support from their parents. Active fathers listen and support their children when they experience joy, sadness, anger, fear, and frustration. Fathers who support their children emotionally tend to raise children who are more in-tune with the needs of others.”
5. **“Enhances your child's self-esteem.** Self-esteem refers to how a person feels about himself. Children with high self-esteem tend to be happier and more confident than children with low self-esteem. Active fathers promote their children's self-esteem by being fully involved in their lives and letting them know that they are highly valued.”
6. **“Enhances your child's intellectual development.** Children who are raised with actively involved fathers tend to score higher on measures of verbal and mathematical ability and also demonstrate greater problem-solving and social skills.”
7. **“Provides your child with guidance and discipline.** From infancy, children need proper guidance and discipline. Active fathers play an important role in teaching their children proper behavior by setting and enforcing healthy limits.”
8. **“Gives your child someone to play with.** One of the primary ways that fathers bond with their children is through play. According to researchers, there are differences in the ways fathers and mothers play with their children. Fathers tend to use a more physical style of play (e.g., wrestling) that offers a number of benefits to children, including enhanced cognitive ability.”
9. **“Provides your child with someone to talk to when she has questions.** Young children are full of questions. This natural curiosity helps them learn about their environment. Active fathers can be a valuable source of information for children who are seeking answers to life's important questions.”
10. **“Increases your child's chances for academic success.** Children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives are more likely to achieve academic success than children whose fathers are not actively involved. These academic benefits appear to extend into adulthood.”
11. **“Provides your child with an alternative perspective on life.** Research indicates that men and women often differ in their parenting styles; however, one style is not necessarily better than the other. Instead, it can be healthy for children to be exposed to different perspectives on life, such as a father's.”
12. **“Lowers your child's chances for early sexual activity.** Children with actively involved fathers are less likely to engage in early sexual activity, thus reducing their chances for teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.”
13. **“Lowers your child's chances for school failure.** Children with actively involved fathers are less likely to drop out of school than children with uninvolved fathers.”

14. **“Lowers your child’s chances for youth suicide.** Children with actively involved fathers are less likely to commit suicide than children with uninvolved fathers.”
15. **“Lowers your child’s chances for juvenile delinquency.** The benefits of having an active father throughout a child’s early years extend into the teen years as well. Children with active fathers are less likely to commit juvenile crimes than children with inactive fathers.”
16. **“Lowers your child’s chances for adult criminality.** The chances that a child will commit crimes as an adult also diminish when he grows up with an actively involved father.”
17. **“Provides your child with a sense of physical and emotional security.** One of the major benefits that fathers can provide to their children by being actively involved is a sense of security (physical and emotional). By being actively involved in a child’s life, a father promotes a trusting relationship. The child does not have to worry about being abandoned.”
18. **“Facilitates your child’s moral development.** Children need a moral compass to guide them when they face difficult moral choices. Fathers, like mothers, help children to develop a sense of right and wrong that serves as a foundation for establishing moral character.”
19. **“Promotes a healthy gender identity in your child.** Boys and girls benefit from having healthy role models from both sexes. Research points to the fact that mothers and fathers socialize their children in different ways. Fathers can help their children, especially boys, to develop a healthy sense of what it means to be a male.”
20. **“Helps your child learn important life skills.** Most of the essential life skills that children need to survive are learned within the home. Fathers have a unique opportunity to teach their children valuable skills that will enable them to grow up to be healthy and productive adults.”

From *20 Reasons Why Your Child Needs You to Be an Active Father*, by S. D. Green (2000).

Section III: Why Is Inclusion of Fathers Important in Systems of Care?



Fathers are an integral part of their families and communities. They are part of the solutions needed to address challenges. While sometimes not valued as much as they deserve to be, fathers bring a rich perspective to systems that have historically focused primarily on mothers or female caregivers.

When fathers are involved in their children's lives, the children they care for enter formal systems less frequently, less deeply, and for shorter periods of time. Because the majority of enrolled children in systems of care are male, inclusion of male caregivers in systems of care is especially critical. Building systems of care is hard work, and we need *everyone* involved.

How Can Systems of Care Best Support the Involvement of Fathers in Individual and Family Service Plans?

Over time, system of care communities have learned and shared successful strategies about working with fathers and male caregivers. Strategies have been identified at both the individual (child, family) level, as well as at the system level. (System-level strategies will be described in Section IV.)

The Individual Planning Team Should...

- Ensure that fathers have access, voice, and choice in the development, implementation, and revision of service plans.
- Make a conscious effort to recognize and understand the cultural implications of being a male caregiver.
- Be in the habit of asking caregivers, "Will Dad be a part of the meeting?" When setting appointments, ask the mother, "Can Dad be sent an invitation if he is not part of the household?"
- Make efforts to understand fathers' work schedules, and try to schedule meetings at times that are convenient for fathers.
- Ensure that professionals speak *with* and *to* fathers (eye-to-eye contact)—not *about* or *over* them in ways that can serve to exclude and eventually alienate them.
- Engage Dad by asking for his opinion/insight if he is not saying anything during a meeting.
- Seek fathers' input/ideas/concerns in advance of meetings that they are unable to attend.
- Follow up with fathers when they must be absent from meetings (e.g., due to work, immigration status, military service, incarceration status) to ensure they understand what has been discussed; to elicit their input, feedback, and suggestions; and to incorporate their ideas into their children's plans. Work with the custodial mother or legal guardian to include the father even when he is not the custodial parent or legal guardian, within the parameters the court sets forth during the process of divorce and after the divorce is final.

- Ensure that service plans are culturally and linguistically competent. They should meet the diverse needs of fathers by ensuring that cultural preferences, practices, and mores are learned, understood, and honored.
- Make every effort to discover fathers' strengths, needs, and key cultural considerations that are relevant to addressing the needs of their children in order to develop truly effective individualized plans.

“ My father didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it. ”

– Clarence B. Kelland