

Fathers have a support group of their own

■ A new group offers dads a place to grow into nurturers by sharing common concerns and learning from each other's problems and experiences

Adrian Ortiz
for the Emerald

Surrounded by children's paintings that hang at the eye level of a 4-year-old, in a room of clay-spotted carpet and building blocks, fathers have started to meet and ask questions.

Sitting in chairs made for their sons or daughters, they look at each other waiting for the answers — answers they hope will make them the best dads they can be.

Since mid-January, members of

“I wanted to create a place that dads could come and talk ...”

Dennis Reynolds
EMU Child Care
Coordinator

the Fathers Support Group have met to discuss what's on their minds. This new group, which meets every Tuesday at Westmoreland preschool, allows fathers to trade parenting secrets with each other. It also allows them to express their reservations regarding their parenting decisions while gaining reassurance that what they are doing is the right thing.

“My worst nightmare is making the same mistakes that my father made with me,” said Dave Gingold about his 4-year-old son Marceo. “I want to know if I've given my son the skills he needs to survive

in the world.”

Dennis Reynolds, the founder of the Fathers Support Group and a father himself, said he got the idea after hearing so much about women's support groups.

“I wanted to create a place that dads could come and talk about their concerns,” said Reynolds, the EMU child care coordinator.

Reynolds, who has worked at his University position for almost 10 years, claimed that he is dealing with single fathers on an increasing basis. Furthermore, the role of the father is changing. In the past, fathers were looked at as the disciplinarian, breadwinner or the “tough guy.”

Today, fathers must transition from disciplinarian to nurturer, a move Reynolds said he hopes to achieve through the group. Although the group is in its infancy, the concerns these fathers have are as old as children's excuses.

The dads, who sit surrounded by frayed children's books, broken crayons and unfinished projects, talk about the everyday battles with their children. One dad talks about how he struggles to get his child to brush his teeth before bed. Before his sentence is over, the other dads chime in with “I have the same problem,” and a visible sigh of relief washes over their faces.

A new problem these fathers encounter is leaving their children at day care.

“My son rips my heart out when he cries ‘Daddy, come back’ as I



Dennis Reynolds (right), EMU Child Care Coordinator, talks with Eric Cunningham and his two sons, Pat and Jack, about men's parenting issues and techniques at the Fathers Support Group meeting.

Ryan Starkweather Emerald

leave him at day care,” Eric Cunningham said, his hands tightly clasped in his lap.

The dads readjust in their seats when the discussion turns to such heart wrenching examples. Reynolds said he has heard and dealt with this behavior and reassures the fathers that this is just a stage that children will grow out of.

He said he also feels that because dads are dealing more and more with sensitive issues they need a place to go and feel com-

fortable talking. Reynolds hopes that more dads will hear of the group and more will attend the meetings.

The Fathers Support Group is just starting to tackle the problems of the organization, such as a permanent meeting time and attracting more attention. One father said that before he found out about this group he would just discuss his parental worries with the other parents at work.

Cunningham said this group is more supportive than that ap-

proach because of Reynolds' experience dealing with children. Cunningham said he also feels more comfortable because he is surrounded by dads who are present because they all have worries about their children's upbringing.

Even in the support group's early stage, Reynolds and the other fathers said they are just striving to be the best dads for their children.

To learn more about the Fathers Support Group, you can contact Reynolds at 346-4345 or at dreynolds@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Take the Test

[It's free, and you don't have to study!]

Practicing safer sex includes knowing your HIV status. For a limited time during spring term 2000, free HIV testing will be available to current University of Oregon students at the University Health Center. Call (541) 346-2770 to schedule a test with an HIV counselor. Students must present the coupon below at the appointment to receive the free test.

Funding for free HIV testing is provided by a grant by E.C. Brown and is available while funds last.

Know Your Status

Present this coupon to the University of Oregon University Health Center at the time of your HIV test to receive the free test. Call (541) 346-2770 to schedule your appointment with an HIV counselor.

This coupon is not valid to cover other services at the University Health Center.

Spread the protection,
not the infection