

The Dad Difference: What fathers bring to parenting

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

It's a fact. Men and women are different. And while many would ascribe to the notion that "anything you can do, I do better," that's just not always the case. It's not supposed to be. Men and women weren't created to do all the same things in all the same ways ... we were created to do everything the opposite sex can't do.

Dads tend to see their children in relation to the rest of the world. Moms tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their children. Alone, neither style gives the child a well-balanced approach to life. Taken together, they balance each other out. Side note: Let me just say this is not a knock on single parents. We are all doing the best that we can and single parents have to put in twice the work. My hat is off to you; I have no idea how you do it all. Okay, let's continue.

Fathers are more than "babysitters" or second adults in the home. They bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring. They provide protection and support that is vital in healthy child development. In fact, in an analysis of over 100 studies on parent-child relationships, hav-



ing a loving and nurturing father was as important for a child's happiness, well-being, and social and academic success as having a loving and nurturing mother.

Children with fathers (or father figures) living at home tend to exhibit lower levels of behavioral problems. They get in trouble in school less than their counterparts without fathers in the homes. An adolescent's psychological well-being is positively associated with having a close relationship with his or her father. They are less likely to skip school, and they are less likely to get in trouble with the law.

Moreover, teens who report having positive relationships with their fathers are less likely to abuse drugs.

Many dads love their children more "dangerously." They roughhouse and encourage risk-taking. Dads teach a wider variety of methods of dealing with life's challenges and disappointments. They teach objectivity and the consequences of right and wrong. Dads tend to stress rules, justice and a sense of duty. A father's more active play style promotes problem solving and independence in his children.

For both boys and girls, growing up with a father appears to be associated with 80% less chance of incarceration later in life. Adolescent males who report having a close relationship with their fathers are more likely to have stable relationships and marriages in their own lives. Studies show that a married father is substantially less likely to abuse his wife or children than unmarried men. So, their children end up with fewer sexual partners and are even less likely to become abusers themselves.

Fathers help prepare their chil-

dren for healthy relationships by demonstrating what it means to be respectful to the opposite sex. Girls learn what they should expect from their husbands and boys learn how to treat women. In one study, researchers found that the number one factor in developing empathy in children was a father's involvement. Spending regular time with their children translated into compassionate adults.

Fathers and daughters also have an important relationship. Girls with present fathers are less likely to develop depression and more likely to delay sexual activity. They are 75% less likely to become pregnant prior to marriage and are less likely to enter into or stay in an abusive relationship than those without fathers in the home. Remember Frenchy's line from the musical "Grease" – "The only man a girl can depend on is her daddy!"

Children who grow up in homes with fathers are more likely to do well academically. They are twice as likely to go to college. They're also four times less likely to be poor. That follows through to adulthood. As adults, they are more likely to be better educated and make a better living than people who grow up without fathers in the home.

In this age of man bashing and anti-male sentiment, it's important to recognize and reward fathers for taking an active role in the raising of their children. You are creating a better future for all of us. Thank you, Dad. Job well done.

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