

Great dads give their children emotional security

By ROB KLENG

I do not spend as much time with my children as I would like. I'm a professional father and my work often keeps me in the office late hours, and I'm away from home about one week a month. The time that I spend with my children is limited, so the quality of that time must be of the highest importance.

My children are young, neither are school age, but I can tell you with certainty, based on my experience as a high school teacher and now a Head Start director working primarily with adults, that the foundations of connection provided by Conscious Discipline create strong connections, which produce security and lead to willingness.

Each initial interaction I have with my children, either in the morning when I leave for work, when I return in the evening, or when I come back from a work trip, has four components: eye contact, touch, presence and a playful situation. When I began to learn about the power of connections, I used models from the book "I Love You Rituals" by Dr. Becky Bailey to



provide a framework. Now these interactions come naturally to me.

My son was born with a breathing concern and his mom had a difficult birthing process, which left me as the only parent able to accompany him on a flight to a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. I spent the first days of his life with him. He was my first child and really my first actual experience with a baby. I al-

ways pictured myself raising a self-sufficient child, who could handle what life threw at him. This vision included being a no-nonsense father who wasn't emotional and left dealing with tears and diapers to mom. I found myself in a situation where I needed to provide 100 percent of the emotional support my young child needed and that reality did not align with my perception of what a father is.

My transformation was not immediate and I continue to grow every day to become an emotionally responsive father. I can say for certain that my initial perception of a good father was incomplete. Children that receive emotional support from caregivers develop into more successful adults.

Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. For dads, this means that children will not only learn what



Parenting Tip

is taught directly by you, like how to tie their shoes or clean a fish, but also by who you are. Daughters learn what a good relationship looks like from her father and will generally seek a partner of similar character to her father. A son models himself after his father's character and will be a reflection of his father's choices.

Providing security for your children means more than just food, shelter and safety from physical harm. Dads must foster strong connections with their children to create emotional security, which will lead to strong future connections. These connections are what will help you and your children get through difficult times. If you find yourself struggling to build a positive relationship with your child, connection is what is lacking.

When I ask her pick up her toys, my three-year-old daughter will sometimes still look at me with angry eyebrows and say with a deep raspy voice, "Go away bad daddy." However, I can happily report that by using the four principles of connection, the frequency is increasing of her randomly hugging my leg and saying, in a sweet voice, "Good daddy."

Rob Kleng is the director of Eastern Oregon University Head Start, a partner with the Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub, which works to bridge early childhood resources and prepare children for kindergarten. For more information visit www.bluemountainearlylearninghub.org.

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