



The Science of Fatherhood

A growing body of research reinforces lessons about the essential role of fathers

by Soren Johnson

Here's a message you don't hear too often: As a father, you really matter. You are needed at home and in the wider world to do things only a dad can do. You can make all the difference in the lives of your children no matter their age.

Though common sense to many, these simple principles are often lost in our culture. But the truth is coming out in the best studies in psychology, social science and family dynamics. The bottom line is that a father is vital to the health and welfare of his children and the family. Mothers, of course, are indispensable and often take a larger share of child and home care. Yet due to distinctive differences in the ways mothers and fathers interact with their children, families thrive when a mom and a dad work together.

With this in mind, here are five facts guaranteed to bolster your image as a father.

1. Studies extol your role. The outcomes of children who have a father at home compared to those without a father tell a big part of the story. Research shows that in father-absent homes children are twice as likely to drop out of high school, seven times more likely to become pregnant as a teen, and many times more likely to abuse drugs, experience physical or sexual abuse or run afoul of the law. Be there, dad, to give your kids the love and stability they need to succeed in life.

2. You have an edge. Popular culture exerts many negative pressures on kids today, from addictive social media distractions to internet pornography. Yet parents still have the inside line to the hearts and minds of their children. So, use your home-field advantage by forming them in virtue from a young age and setting a good example. If your kids see you doing the right thing even when it's difficult, they will be more likely to follow your guidance and rules.

3. Your prayer is positive. Studies show that prayer has many practical benefits, such as better moods, lower blood

pressure, less stress and anxiety and increased willpower to overcome bad habits. Be a man of prayer at home. Show your boys, especially, that kneeling before God requires the strength of humility.

4. Your time counts. No pressure, dad, but from the time you see that little one for the very first time, the clock is ticking. You must make a decision then, and every

day after, to be an involved father. Yes to cuddling, to roughhousing, to making the ball games, rehearsals and special moments. The payoff is huge, as studies show that every hour you invest with your child will help them reap priceless benefits in terms of future health, relationships and career.

5. Your leadership is key. Don't leave the family's faith life solely to your wife. Not only is that a major personal mistake, but it could be a disaster for your children. A popular study indicates the outsized influence of a father on the religious practice of his children. In fact, it can be safely said that your faith serves as a model for your kids well into adulthood.

Go to Mass with your wife and children, pray together regularly at home, read the Sunday Gospel as a family the evening before Mass. The most powerful witness of faith that your children experience may very well be your own. So tell them what your Catholic faith means to you and the times when God has touched your life.

The ultimate role of a father is to help his children get to heaven. The benefits are eternal and the journey starts today.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is condensed from a six-part series that is available as a digital booklet. To get your free copy, email fatherhood@kofc.org. ♦

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