

Creating a Strong Family

Great Dads: How To Succeed



This curriculum may be used in several ways. It may be used as a learn-at-home course by an individual father. This might be helpful to dads who do not have much time to attend group sessions. However, the father must enjoy reading and be self-motivated to complete some of the activities.

The curriculum also may be used in small groups with a teacher or group leader. Because the information is for fathers, it is best to have a male group leader. The group also may be co-led by a male and female team.

The small groups are beneficial because they provide an opportunity for fathers to discuss the information and share ideas with other dads. The discussion questions may lead to opportunities for self-reflection and may motivate change. Fathers are encouraged to complete at least one activity in each section.

By Kathy Bosch, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Family Life Education

John DeFrain, Ph.D., Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

Contributed to Activities: Mary E. Nelson, Ph.D., Extension Educator

Sarah Purcell, M.S., Extension Educator

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Jeff Vaughn, Graphic Design

Linda Ulrich, Editor

Communications and Information Technology



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A man and a woman must both contribute to the conception of a child; mothers are given the biological capability to give birth and breastfeed. However, both fathers and mothers have a choice in the level of involvement in the parent-child relationship and in caring for a child. Mothers and fathers can take an active role in parenting and in the daily lives of their children. Both can teach, influence, nurture, discipline, care for basic needs, and role model values and beliefs to their children.

The list of things a father can do to be successful in his role is a long one, and everyone's list is likely to be a little different. There are multiple characteristics of fathers. Some are married, living with partners, single custodial or noncustodial. They may be parenting biological, adopted, step or grandchildren. Some are employed, working full-time, part-time, underemployed, unemployed. Some spend quality time with their children, others don't have access to their children. Some are workaholics; others may be addicted to drugs or alcohol. Fathers include men of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religious preferences, occupations and economic status. The commonality that brings fathers together, however, is that all fathers have a child or children.

Although society has tended to be patriarchal in many realms of life, including the workplace, religious groups and political arenas, some fathers have felt left out of the family circle. History has shown that fathers typically have been providers for the family and disciplinarians of children. However, contemporary culture is changing and more young fathers are becoming actively involved in their children's daily lives or are seeking an avenue in which to become more involved.

Fathers may feel left out or pushed away for many reasons. Sometimes this happens when the mother is breastfeeding the baby or is the primary caretaker during the child's early years. In many families, the father works full time to provide for the family and may not have much time to spend at home. Sometimes young fathers feel insecure around infants and young children and are unsure of how to care for children's needs. The majority of young moth-

ers with children under the age of 6 work out of the home. Fathers may still feel left out when the mother is very involved in the children's care. Many men are separated or divorced and are noncustodial fathers. Living apart from their children causes fathers to have many feelings of uncertainty and fear. For these reasons, it is important that fathers make a considerable effort to be involved in the family's daily happenings. Fathers must have an active role in helping care for their children and in helping the mothers fulfill their tasks and responsibilities. It is also important for mothers to support and encourage dads in these efforts. In some cases, mothers sabotage fathers' involvement and want to be in charge of their children's care. Some women find a great sense of pride and self-worth in caring for children, which historically has been one task given to women for which they received encouragement and recognition.

Here are suggestions for fathers who wish to rise to the lofty position of Dad. These ideas are developed from reading social and behavioral science research literature on fatherhood and working with parents over the past 30 years:

1. Be an involved, emotionally-connected father.

It's not an easy task to be a parent, whether a father or a mother. It takes a lot of time, energy and commitment. However, the rewards are often beyond measure. Perhaps the greatest gift is watching life unfold before your eyes. Right from the start when your child is a baby, you will get to see your daughter or son develop a unique personality and learn new things every day. As the years go by, you will be able to reflect back on the miraculous changes from infancy, childhood and then to adulthood. Most parents strive to help their children become capable young adults.

Spending fun time with the kids leads to a positive emotional connection with your family and helps strengthen bonds with Mom. This time together with your children should involve their care, such as bathing, diapering, feeding, supervising their

activities and play, and helping them with homework. As one father explained, “Being involved with the children helps me enjoy them more and it gives me lots to talk about with my wife. It’s like this wonderful journey we are on together as a couple, and it helps us grow closer.” Depending somewhat on geographical distance, noncustodial fathers can spend enjoyable time with children during visitations and be involved with their children often, if not on a daily basis. Regardless of a father’s personal living situation, he can be involved in his children’s care and factors that influence their well-being.

Discussion Questions

- What are the rewards of being an involved, emotionally-connected father?
- What are the barriers to being involved and emotionally connected as a father? How can you overcome these barriers?
- What are ways in which you personally would like to become more involved as a father?
- Who in your social network can help you become more involved as a father?

Activities

- Talk with your children about things they would like to do more often with you. Make a list and see how many of these things you can do together in the next few weeks. If your child is too young for a discussion, make your own list of fun activities that both of you would enjoy and begin doing them together on a regular basis.
- Involvement with children doesn’t always focus on fun things and play. Talk with your partner about ways she would find it helpful for you to be involved in the day-to-day care of the kids. For couples to be happy with each other and to be the best parents to their children, both must feel supported and that the load is divided fairly. Each family will have different role and task expectations.
- Divorced, non-custodial fathers and unmarried separated fathers are in a significantly different situation, but research consistently has shown that father involvement after marital dissolution or in other circumstances can be beneficial for everyone. However, details must be negotiated successfully among ex-partners and the children. “You can divorce your wife, but it’s not right to divorce your children,” one father explained. “My wife and I found that we weren’t happy living together, but we both agreed that it was good for the kids to still have both a Mom and a Dad, and that’s what we’re trying to do.” If possible, talk with your ex-partner and see if there are ways you could become more involved with the children that would be helpful to her, care for the children, be fun for the kids and help you feel better as a Dad yourself.
- Bedtime is a special time to emotionally connect with your child if you have been separated for the day or longer. Develop your own special bedtime ritual. Here are some ideas. Spend at least 15 minutes reading to your child in your child’s bedroom where the child is surrounded by the child’s favorite things. Being in a familiar place stimulates the senses, making the experience pleasurable and memorable. Let your child pick most of the books. After reading, ask your child what was the best thing that happened today. You also will want to share the best thing that happened to you. If your family likes to pray, take a few minutes at the end to pray.
- Take time to nurture your young child by rubbing the child’s head, tummy and back. Give lots of smiles and other positive facial expressions.
- Listen to your children. Listen first to understand, whether you’re resolving a problem, offering support or help, or just talking at the dinner table. Let your children know you value their opinions, even if they are different from your own. Listening helps you better understand your role as a father and show your love for your children.

2. *Be a father who expresses emotions appropriately.*

It is sometimes difficult for fathers to express their emotions. Sometimes they are better at being angry than being happy, sad or loving toward their partner and children. But, it is critically important that fathers learn to express their emotions in honest, loving, kind and effective ways.

Everyone has emotions. To be alive is to feel. But how you express feelings toward others affects whether you have a happy or an unhappy family and whether you have a happy or a disastrous, loveless marriage.

Too often, little boys are taught to be so tough they don't know how to be tender. They are told not to cry or express feelings of hurt; in effect, they are told not to be human. But the pressure of not being allowed to be human may cause explosive tensions to build. Rather than emphasizing toughness, it is important that all individuals, whether male or female, young or old, learn to be kind, sensitive and supportive to each other.

Think about it: You can teach yourself and others how to endure the pain of cancer and "tough it out!" Or, you can work together and help each other, and help develop cures for cancer and ways to lessen the pain of the disease. Similarly, you can teach yourself to be kind and caring toward your children and partner.

Fathers are important role models for children, and from a very young age children learn both good and inappropriate ways to express emotions. One counselor told of a mother whose husband would get so angry he tried to strangle her on several occasions. She fled to another city. In an individual counseling session with the mother and her 18-month-old toddler, the counselor observed the child becoming upset with Mom for not attending to his needs immediately so he walked over to her, climbed up onto her lap, put his tiny hands around her throat and began shaking her angrily.

Children pick up the best we have to offer them and the things that are not so good very quickly.

Discussion Questions

- How can you teach boys and girls to deal with their emotions in a positive and effective way? Discuss each emotion separately:
Anger.
Sadness.
Frustration.
Fear.
Physical pain.
Happy feelings toward each other.
Are there other feelings to talk about?
- What doesn't work when expressing emotions?

Tell a story that illustrates a situation in which you think you or someone else did a great job of dealing successfully with difficult emotions.

Activities

- Movies are very popular in American society and other cultures around the world. Watching movies gives you a chance to feel and express emotions. You get to laugh, cry and feel you are alive, all in a darkened room with other human beings who are feeling their emotions but retain their privacy in darkness.

Talk with your partner or your kids about favorite movies — the ones that give you a chance to have strong feelings. What kinds of feelings did you have in a particular movie? Why did it hit you this way? What made it so personally powerful to you? Did it relate to your life, too?
- Small children are steadily learning over the months and years how to express their emotions in positive, effective ways. Sometimes their emotional outbursts lead to equally emotional outbursts from fathers and mothers. However, as adults, parents must be effective in dealing with children's strong emotions and should not lose their temper, shout or scream. You are a role

model to your children, and you don't want to explode or do something you'd regret.

- As a dad, think about a particularly difficult time you had with your young child — an especially challenging emotional outburst. You are likely to see something like this again, so it's important to be prepared. Think about how you can be more effective and positive in responding the next time this happens; talk with your partner or other trusted people to share ideas on how to effectively respond. Then the next time your child throws a temper tantrum, you'll know what to do.
- Sit down with your children and some crayons and paper. Draw pictures of how each of you feel at different times. Happy pictures, sad pictures and so forth. Then talk with each other about what you can do to help each other when you are sad or depressed. This lets each family member know how important it is to work together for everyone's happiness.
- Powerful emotions are commonly expressed in families. In fact, it is hard to think of a human institution that is as emotional as a family. It seems to be one of the most likely places on earth where you feel you can be yourself. After a particularly emotional event in your family involving the partners and/or the kids wait a couple of days until everyone is settled down and more peaceful in spirit. It could have been a sad time, an especially happy time, an angry time, whatever.

After things have settled down, get together and talk honestly and openly about what was happening and why. If there was anger involved, don't waste each other's time blaming someone or each other. Instead, talk about what really was going on and why the emotions were so powerful. Was someone afraid? Hurt? Jealous? Feeling unappreciated and exploited? Before beginning the discussion, make sure you're in a frame of mind to work together and solve the problem, rather than make it worse. You will want to avoid attacking each other. Ideally, in a couple relationship the

mother and father will work together and support each other.

If the emotional event sparked feelings of sadness or joy, spend time together trying to explain what was generating these powerful emotions.

- When a difficult issue comes up do you feel tense or overwhelmed? Learn to recognize when you need to find ways that work for you. Ideas might be to take deep breaths and/or walk away from the situation when you first become overwhelmed. Make a conscious effort to calm yourself down.
- Let your child see you cry. A tear or two will show your children you are human.
- For dessert, put some of your favorite candy or fruit in a bowl. Have each family member pick out a piece of candy or fruit and tell something that makes him or her happy.

It's probably fair to say that one of the greatest difficulties for families is finding ways to express feelings effectively so that they do not continue to hurt each other but learn to love each other more.

3. Be a father who can resolve conflict.

Everyone looks at the world differently because they grow up in different families, in different cultures, in different periods of time, and even because individuals have different biological inheritances. Because of these many differences, it is inevitable that your views of life will be different from others. Individuals in families can differ greatly on how they perceive things.

Even the most loving couples can have considerable differences in their views on many important questions, including money, housekeeping standards, politics, religion, sex, parenting, in-laws and so forth. This sometimes comes as a shock to people,

especially young couples who love each other a great deal and believe that love will smooth out every difference. In actuality, researchers who study strong families and happy couples often find that these people may have very different views on many things but can get along well if they learn to see differences as a strength rather than a reason to argue and fight. Family life specialists are fond of saying, “Strong families have strong individuals in them: strong mothers, strong fathers, strong children.”

Sometimes fathers try to resolve conflicts in families by becoming dictators and “laying down the law.” They think that by firmly telling everyone what to do, harmony and order will automatically be restored in the household. What happens in the long run, however, is that a kind of guerrilla war ensues: The rest of the family members simply learn devious ways to ignore and lie to the person who is trying to dominate everyone else.

For this reason, it is recommended that fathers help create a more democratic family lifestyle. This involves a marriage and family in which individuals feel safe and comfortable, and can honestly talk about how they are feeling without being attacked or put down. Mothers and fathers must support each other in their parenting responsibilities. Specialists in family communication offer many helpful suggestions:

- ***Limit ultimatums.***
An ultimatum is a nonnegotiable demand, and it is the hallmark of dirty fighting. Fair discussion in a family emphasizes negotiation, allowing each person — even small children — some bargaining room. There are a few legitimate cases for ultimatums; for example, “The car won’t move unless you are buckled in your car seat.”
- ***If one loses, both lose.***
Don’t try to win an argument with your partner or your children. Try to figure out ways so that everyone can win and be happy together. A family is not a debating society or a court of law.
- ***Avoid accusations and attack.***
“You make me mad,” “It’s all your fault,” “You’re just like your mother,” and so forth. This type of negative communication puts others on the defensive, causes mistrust and builds walls. Family members are likely to get angry in return.
- ***Listen to your family.***
“We’ve been given two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we talk,” the old saying goes. Actually, you probably should listen five times as much, so you really know what your spouse and children are feeling. Another useful way of thinking about this is, “Listen with your heart,” so you can really hear.
- ***Never use sex to smooth over a disagreement.***
When people use sexual persuasion to get their mate to agree with them, the underlying issue or conflict remains unresolved and is likely to be raised again later. Sexual activity between partners should center on mutual love, trust and respect.
- ***Resist giving the silent treatment.***
Refusing to talk is an attempt to get even or manipulate your partner. Shutting out another person emotionally is a form of psychological abuse and has no place in loving relationships.
- ***Focus on the issue and the present.***
Arguments that leap from one issue to another get nowhere fast. Arguments that focus on the past do not work either. The question is not, “Where have we been?” The real question is, “How can we move forward together, happily?”
- ***Always try for closure.***
Strive to resolve conflict as soon as possible. It is foolish to carry on hostilities and hurtful to ignore problems without finding solutions. The sooner people reach genuine agreement, the better. There usually is a way to resolve a conflict if both sides genuinely love each other and feel their relationship is of utmost importance. Sometimes unsolvable differences make it necessary to agree to disagree. Family members must realize they are different people with different ways of looking at life, and this is OK. They strive to love, trust and respect each other.

Discussion Questions

- Think of a recent conflict you have had in your family — one that did not go well. Share your story with a small group of people. Then analyze what happened and try to explain what went wrong. See what the group has to add to your analysis.
- Think of a recent conflict you have had in your family that ended happily. Share this story with a small group of people. Analyze what happened in an effort to explain what went right. Can the group add any useful ideas to your thinking?
- Do you feel “good in your gut” about the way you handle conflict with your partner and children? If not, how can you manage conflict more effectively?

Activities

- In a small group, brainstorm what people think does not work when they are trying to resolve a family conflict.
- In the small group, brainstorm what people think does work when trying to resolve a family conflict. Have each person write down these good ideas in their own words.
- Try a weeklong experiment. Focus on the second list — the list of things that work in resolving family conflicts. During each family conflict that you are involved in for a week, use only the positive, effective ways of dealing with the conflict. At the end of the week, what have you learned? If you are meeting in a group setting, report back to the group.
- It’s important to remain calm when conflict happens. Figure out what works best for you. Is it to count to 10 so you don’t get upset or is it to walk away from people and situations that make you angry? Make sure you give yourself time to cool down. Put yourself in timeout! That way you have time to think about what is best. Fathers who

discipline in a calm and fair manner show love for their children.

4. Be a father who encourages involvement with others, while having adequate time for family activities.

Human beings are social beings. They thrive best among loved ones and friends. Strong families have deep bonds with each other and also have connections to people outside the family in their community. On the other hand, troubled families are likely to be isolated and insecure: “Abuse thrives in the shadows and behind closed doors,” it has been said. Examples abound of families who have shut themselves off (or individuals who have been forced into isolation) from the outside community and the tragedies that occur when abuse is present. Research indicates that those who are abused have often reached out for help and been negated, demeaned, ignored or blamed. It is crucial that individuals have a supportive network of family and friends they can talk to and trust. Children also need a supportive network of caring adults and other children.

Fathers play an important role in encouraging family members to grow and learn outside the family. Besides looking inward toward each other, it is important to reach out to extended family and make friends outside the family. Spouses wouldn’t have much to talk about at the dinner table if they always stayed home; children need the stimulus provided by school or other social activities with their friends. The key is finding a balance between family time and community time. Too much time spent in either direction can cause difficulties. In many families today, outside activities have taken control and family time suffers.

Discussion Questions

- Talk about each member of your family. What outside involvements are each engaged in? How

much time do they spent at home with each other?
How much time do they spend away from the family with friends and other social groups?

- Do you believe your family members have found a workable balance of inside-the-family and outside-the-family time? Does this balance work well for everyone?
- What might you do, personally, to help balance the family in this regard?

Activities

- Sit down with the whole family. Talk with them at length about these issues. It may take some convincing and organizing to get a family conference time set when everyone is willing and happy about sitting down for a discussion. If you assure everyone that this will be a genuine discussion rather than setting ultimatums, it should be easier to meet together. Parents must still set and have limits.
- How does each family member think the family as a whole is balancing family time and outside involvements?
- What would you like to see stay the same? What would you like to see change?
- Develop a plan and try it for a week. See how things have gone after this experiment, and revise the plan for a second week's try.
- Sharing a daily meal together is an important part of a healthy family's life. It's a great way to reconnect as a family when you have been busy with outside activities. Make eating together a priority. It deserves to be your No. 1 family activity. Eating together gives children a chance to talk about what they are doing and what they want to do. It's also a good time for fathers and mothers to listen and give advice. Most importantly, mealtime is a special time for families to be together each and every day. Single parents can also gather children around the table for a meal.

5. *Be a father who encourages involvement in a larger support network.*

Since babies, toddlers and children of all ages do not come with an instruction guide, parents often learn by trial and error. However, families do not live well in isolation or by being alone. Of course there will be times to be alone with each other but that is different than living in isolation.

Research on strong families over the past 30 years has made it clear that families who do well together have the courage to be connected to others and reach out for assistance when necessary. Life simply is too complicated to figure out alone. Even the best families have to get ideas, encouragement and aid from others. However, there are times when some families are so needy, desperate or struggling that it is virtually impossible for them to reach out for help. This is when a helping friend, extended family member or formal support worker may be able to offer assistance or make an appropriate referral. If you see a family in need, offer to help instead of being worried about what to say or do.

Extended family members — brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, grandparents — all are often quite happy to come to the aid of families who are under strain. Likewise, neighbors are often happy to lend a hand, as well as members of a religious community in which they might be members and friends at work or in other groups. Also, professionals in the community can be of great help in tough times. Keep asking until you get the necessary help.

Sometimes families need formal services (health care, social services, education and training, professional advice and counseling) outside of the family. It is helpful to tap into these when you need assistance or when problems are hard to manage. Teach your children the value of an extended support network by your involvement and encouragement to access resources.

Families are capable of solving most of their problems. But sometimes the world and circumstances conspire to create a problem for a family that the family is incapable of resolving. Every family usually faces this type of problem. Each individual benefits from living in human communities that are capable of helping families in need. Unfortunately, some families fall through the cracks and are not able to find support. It is beneficial to everyone to make sure that no family is left behind.

Discussion Questions

- Who is your family's support network? Who are the people and groups you can count on in a pinch?
- Do individual family members have different support people?
- How have you helped other families in tough times? How do you let people know that you are ready, willing and capable of being supportive when needed?

Activities

- Talk with family members around the dinner table or in the living room about who each person reaches out to when help is needed. This should be interesting to everyone: Parents will be interested in learning who the children's friends are and how they demonstrate their friendship. The kids will be interested to learn that parents, also, need friends and support.
- Also, talk with the family about professionals in the community. What professionals are important to your family already, and under what conditions would you reach out for professional help?
- Sometimes in a contradictory way it can be "more blessed to receive than to give." Society values independence so much that people find it difficult to ask for help. If you're an individual or a family that has a hard time reaching out, try this: In a situation in which you genuinely need help

— even just a little thing — honor someone you know and trust, such as a friend, an extended family member or a person in your community, by asking for help. Most people will be happy to help you, and then in return, they know they can reach out to you in a difficult time.

- See if the kids would like to try this activity, too. Are they having trouble with homework tonight? Would they like help from a friend at school? Encourage them to ask for assistance. Then, encourage your children to help friends in return when they're having some difficulty. Sometimes it is hard for children to learn how to do this. The key is helping them see that reciprocal relationships — friendships in which others help you and you help them — are the kinds of relationships that work best over the long haul. Life is not either give or take. It is both give and take.
- Visit with your partner about the people who are in your informal network of family, friends and neighbors, and in your formal network of professional service providers, such as medical staff, counselors and religious leaders. Are these people generally supportive or nonsupportive to you? Supportive people aid you, give help without obligation for something in return, provide emotional, physical or informational support, care about you as a person, couple and family, and are there when you need help, advice or support. Nonsupportive people, on the other hand, help with strings attached, blame, ignore, condone inappropriate behavior and are not dependable. Strive to have supportive people in your network.
- Go through your family's calendar for the next several months. Make sure you find ways to be involved in outside activities with your family, whether it is a religious organization, school or sports event. By connecting with others you can develop a larger support network. Continue to evaluate your calendar and ways to get involved.

6. *Be a father who is honest.*

What is it you want your children to remember about you when they grow up? That you were intelligent, hard working or maybe wealthy? Well, chances are they will remember how much you loved them, whether you spent a good deal of quality, enjoyable time with them, and details about your character, that is to say, what kind of man you were.

One of the most important aspects of a man's character is his sincerity and deep-down honesty. Young women, when asked what kind of man they would like to share their lives with, commonly list honesty among their top choices. Children, too, soon learn the importance of being able to trust their father's and mother's words.

From the time they are babies, children learn about life from the people who are their primary caregivers. Therefore, it is important that you model the type of behavior you wish your child to imitate. Honesty can be expressed in many ways. For example, being honest with your feelings and emotions, as well as being kind and fair, is one way to effectively communicate. Also, being honest and fair in your work or business is an attribute most parents try to achieve. An honest couple relationship is important for both partners. Being able to count on your partner to do what has been promised, live up to job responsibilities and expectations to provide for the family, nurture and care for all family members, and not risk family disruption by getting intimately involved with other people, are all important aspects of honesty in a couple relationship.

If one partner or the other violates any of these expectations, thus breaking promises made, this obviously threatens not only the couple but the children, and the whole family suffers. Part of honesty means being honest to oneself and acknowledging that promises are important and meant to be kept. "What good," it has been asked, "ever came out of a broken promise?"

Honesty is the best policy, as we all have heard

many times before. Sometimes people mistake honesty for brutal honesty, and brutal honesty is not honest behavior at all. Honesty is important for building bridges between people. Brutal honesty, where someone attacks another with words that may be true, does not aim at creating a happier relationship, but aims instead at hurting the other person deeply. Brutal honesty has no place in a healthy relationship.

Discussion Questions

- Were you ever dishonest in your childhood? How did you react? How did your parents react (if they found out)? An exception to the rule of not breaking promises would be in the case where partner abuse is present or children are being abused. Safety of their children must be the primary concern of parents. For more information on the impact of abuse on families and children, see *Parenting In A Difficult Situation*, on the Web at www.panhandle.unl.edu or contact the Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition at 800-876-6238. Outside of Nebraska, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233.
- Has there been a time when you were dishonest in your job/work? How did you react? How did others react (if they found out)?
- Has there been a time when you were dishonest with your partner and/or children? How did you react? How did your partner/children react (if they found out)?
- Can you think of a time when honesty really was the best policy? Share this experience with your partner and children. What were the benefits? What were the consequences? Remember, you are not only teaching your children to be honest, you must also role model honesty.

Activities

- Honesty is easy to talk about and hard to practice. It is doubtful that there ever has been a human

alive who has been completely honest throughout life. Share an example with your discussion group of a time when you expressed honest feelings with your partner or your family, the difficulty you may have encountered in trying to be honest and the benefit the family enjoyed because of your honesty.

- Share an example with your discussion group of a time when you were dishonest with your partner or your family, the difficulty you may have encountered in being dishonest, and any benefit you or your family may have experienced because of your dishonesty.
- For a week, strive to think about being honest in all your dealings with your partner and family. Report back to your family or the discussion group after the week is over about how the experiment went: what worked, what didn't work so well, how you think you increased the level of honesty you express at home.
- Fathers teach their children what is important in life by demonstrating honesty. Live your life as if your actions would be on the front page of the local paper or on a billboard in your neighborhood.
- Reward honesty by recognizing family members at the dinner table or at a family meeting.
- Share a time at dinner or at a family meeting when someone you know told a lie and the trouble that resulted from telling that lie.

7. Be a father first, then someday a friend.

One of the joys of fatherhood is having the chance to play with your children. Many fathers love to wrestle and rough-house with the kids. This is fun for everyone as long as someone doesn't get hurt. Mothers often enjoy watching such a spectacle. Even though she may not personally enjoy wrestling with the children, a mother might say, "They're having such a good time together. My husband acts like a big kid when he's playing with the children!"

There are countless fun opportunities for fathers to relive their childhood with their children: rolling on the living room carpet, building a tree house, playing ball in the front yard, going fishing, and so on. These are memorable times for Dad and the kids.

But the fun stuff, as mothers know only too well, is just one part of the parenting role. If a father chooses only to play and do fun things, he isn't being fair in leaving all the difficult decisions, messy cleanup jobs, discipline and other caretaking tasks to the mother.

In short, fathers can enjoy being a big kid along with their children, on occasion. They can enjoy the warmth of being a friend, on occasion. But children need more than that from Dad. The role of father has elements of the friendship role, but the role of father encompasses responsibility and is much deeper, broader and more important. Dads must be a father first, then someday a friend.

To do an effective job of parenting, fathers must be available to their children. Whether living with your children or apart, you can be available to them. Let your children know how to contact you when you are at work, traveling or away. Set some limits but allow them to e-mail or call you when they want to talk with you. Make time each day, or as often as possible, to talk with them about their feelings, school work and friends. Then let them learn about you, too. Tell them some age-appropriate things about your life and work. You may want to tell them stories about your childhood and family life or stories about how you spend your time away from home. Be creative in sharing your life with your children. They will learn to trust and respect you and will know they can depend on you.

What, then, are the elements of the father's role in the family? Here are some of them:

- Cooperate with the children's mother on a plan for how parenting responsibilities will be shared in the home. When both the dad and mom are satisfied with the agreement, follow through on this promise or modify it in the future to both parents' satisfaction. A plan can even be made when parents are separated or divorced.

- Reach an agreement with the mother that the couple relationship is very important to the health of the whole family, and that a healthy couple relationship is the foundation for long-term stability and the continuing happiness and well-being of the children. And live by this pledge. Single parents also must take care of their emotional needs and nurture relationships with trusted, respected adult friends.
- Work with the mother on effective approaches to discipline the children. If there is disagreement on discipline, discuss these different beliefs and approaches carefully and reasonably. Try to find an agreed-upon approach that benefits the children. Discipline techniques change as children grow and become more rational; the discussion of beliefs about discipline and techniques applied will continue for many years.
- Find a way to ensure that having children brings the couple closer together and deepens their bond, rather than pulls them apart. Researchers regularly find that the intense involvement of parenting, linked with job responsibilities and other cares outside the family, often leads to a loss of marital vitality. In short, couples get so busy with kids and other responsibilities that the couple relationship falters. Many couples, however, figure out how to maintain marital health while being good parents and effective at their jobs outside the home. It's not easy, but it can be done.
- Get support from the mother and others to assure that the father spends enough time with his children. Raising children is not a simple matter, but it brings great satisfaction if parents are creative enough to find ways to realize this. Dad needs to spend time with the children, just like mom needs to do this. They both have important things to teach their youngsters and both need to contribute to their care.
- Agree that a responsible father is just as important as a responsible mother. These roles are much more similar than different: Both dad and mom contribute to the well-being of their child by

providing finances for daily living expenses and each being responsible for the child's safety, health care, food, cleanliness, social connections, discipline, teaching about important things in life, and so on.

How does a father's role in the family differ from a mother's role? Well, he cannot give birth or breastfeed the baby. But, he is capable of playing all of the roles listed above quite capably. In some cases, he will be as effective a parent as the mother and will be able to equally share the responsibility of parenting. In some families, the father may even do a better job in nurturing and caring for the children. When the father is living with a partner, it is essential to discuss the attributes both contribute to parenting children.

One thing a dad can do that a mother cannot do: Dad can be a role model for the children, showing them how a man can be loving and caring for his young. Mom, of course, can show how a woman can be loving and caring for her children. But mothers and fathers grow up in somewhat different worlds. The world little girls grow up in is different in many ways from how little boys are socialized. Because society — for better or worse — socializes girls and boys differently, little children grow up to be somewhat different from each other as adults, and sometimes men and women are mystified and puzzled by each others' behavior. "Why did he do that?" a mother might sigh. "Women!" a father might exclaim.

Because women and men are somewhat different biologically, socially and emotionally, both have unique contributions to share with each other and their children. These differences can be used to strengthen relationships with partners and children. There is no doubt that children benefit by having both an involved father and an involved mother.

A father's unique role, then, is to show children that men are not only strong but tender, courageous and cooperative. A father is (usually) capable of defending the family from outside harm while nurturing all family members inside the home.

A father's involvement in the family benefits the children, the mother and himself to a great extent. One of the most satisfying roles in life is experiencing the joy of being a competent dad.

Discussion Questions

- As a father, do you get to be a big kid in the family on occasion? Why is that so much fun and so important?
- What other roles do you as a father play in the family?
- What roles does mom play in the family?
- Are there some roles that you would like to adopt that you aren't involved in now? How can you work with mom to increase your involvement in these areas? Are there some roles Mom would like to see you take on? Do these make sense to you? How could you find ways to oblige or negotiate? Are there additional roles you would like to see mom take on? What advantages do you see in becoming more involved in family life? These questions also apply to custodial and noncustodial fathers as long as the children's mother is involved in the children's lives.

Activities

- As a dad, share the roles you currently have in your family. What various tasks are you responsible for? Volunteer to try out a new role in your family. Experiment in this role for a week and share your experiences with the discussion group.
- Have a philosophical discussion with Mom about discipline. Don't get in an argument about who is right and who is wrong — that's useless. Instead, listen very carefully to each other so that you can actually learn from each other. It's almost guaranteed that you will have different views, because no two people are alike in everything, especially controversial issues such as discipline. See if you can come to an agreement on approaches to discipline. Remember: The word discipline

comes from the word disciple, which means to teach. It is very likely that all of your children will test your patience, disobey some rules or cause some trouble. So, what is the best way to teach your children about life, expectations for behavior and consequences for misbehavior?

- In most cases, fathers and mothers strive to keep their children and family safe from outside harm. Some circumstances are beyond their control that may prevent this, such as crime, violence, fire, natural disaster or other causes. Fathers and mothers, however, will do everything possible to avoid harmful circumstances.
- In your father role you can do some things that your children suggest. This allows them to involve you in their favorite activity and gives you an opportunity to share time with them. Who knows? You may even be able to do some teaching. Although it may not be your favorite activity, your involvement lets your children know they are important. For example, Monopoly™ may not be your favorite game but your children appreciate an opportunity to decide what to do and to spend time with you.
- Talk to your older child about a specific positive characteristic you noted in your child when that child was younger.
- Connect with your children as soon as you come home from work or when you meet after being separated for a while. Give each child at least five minutes of your time right away.
- Be available during part of your child's waking hours. The more time you are available, the more time you will have to interact.

8. *Be a father who takes his parenting job seriously.*

The responsibility to nurture children and be an important part of the family is critical to the well-being of all involved. It takes hard work and a positive attitude that says, “I’m learning something new every day but it’s an enjoyable challenge!” Although parenting takes a huge amount of patience, energy, time and wisdom, it is well worth the effort. In the long run, few satisfactions in life are as great as watching a child grow up into a healthy, responsible, happy and content person.

Kids don’t come with an instruction booklet or easy color-coded plug-in connections like a computer. They are complex organisms that demand skilled and knowledgeable parents. No parent starts the job knowing very much. Even if parents study child development and parenting issues before a baby is born, it is a responsibility that they grow into. Though people often say they raise their children, the fact of the matter is, children also raise their parents: They help parents grow into the mature, dedicated and kind adult human beings necessary to nurture a child.

For these reasons, it takes dedication and a serious effort to learn more and more about how to be a great dad. Talk with family members who have children about how to deal with complicated situations; grandmas and grandpas can be especially helpful. Talk with other parents — friends at work, thoughtful neighbors, people you trust and respect. Read, read, read newspaper and magazine articles and books from the library. Attend parenting classes in your community that provide an opportunity to learn more and discuss ideas with other parents. Contact extension educators in your community and members of the Fatherhood Initiative Network. Check out parenting videos from your local library. Look on the Web. The University of Nebraska—Lincoln has the UNL For Families Web site that is packed with ideas and information about parenting and family life education: UNLforFamilies.unl.edu.

Dads must talk with other parents, as it is very easy to feel inadequate around your kids when you don’t know what to do in a particular situation. Rather than getting angry at your children for being, basically, just children, it is better to talk with other parents who have experienced the same thing. Your child is not much different than anyone else’s child, and you probably have similar questions that other parents ask. Even when you think you are an experienced parent, children can throw you for a loop! The extended network of family, friends and support professionals can assist you with being the best father possible.

To be a great electrician, athlete, rancher, surgeon, clerk, businessperson, teacher, truck driver, whatever: All take energy, dedication, time, knowledge and commitment. Being a great dad is no different, and perhaps even harder. Remember, it is essential that you have a supportive network of family, friends and trusted mentors.

Being a great dad is not a part-time job. Parenting is a full-time job and a lifelong commitment.

Discussion Questions

- Did your father take his parenting job seriously? What experiences did you have as a child? Were they mostly positive or mostly negative? If you didn’t have an involved father in your childhood, did you have a surrogate father or a significant adult male in your life? How did this person make a difference in your life?
- Do you take your parenting job seriously? Why or why not? If yes, how will your children benefit from your fathering? How will your partner benefit? How will you benefit? If you do not take your parenting job seriously, what might be some things you can do differently to improve your success as a father?
- Do you know a father who does not take his parenting job seriously? Without mentioning names, how does this father parent his children?

How might you encourage him to be more effective in his fathering role?

- Talk about some of the new things you have had or wanted to learn recently about how to raise a happy, healthy child. Who helped you figure this out?
- Who is an important source of ideas and information in your life as a dad?

Activities

- Those who are actively involved in parenting children know that being a parent is difficult. In your discussion group, discuss both the difficulties and joys of parenthood.
- Brainstorm together what you like about being a dad and have a recorder write the thoughts down on the board or on a big piece of paper. Finally, make your own personal list after listening to everyone's ideas. Write down your list and put it on the refrigerator or somewhere prominent in your home for you and everyone else to read and enjoy. Fatherhood works best when you stay focused on the positive things.
- As a dad you're probably really good at some things. Pick one aspect of your fatherhood responsibilities that you're especially skilled at and hone your skills so you're even more proficient. Get ideas from other parents on how they succeed in this area, add your own ideas and try becoming even better over the coming week. Tackle one task or change at a time.
- As a dad, you undoubtedly have areas in which you have room for growth and improvement. Identify an important area and, again, talk with your partner and other parents, read, think about it carefully and come up with a plan for improvement. See how far you can go in learning how to succeed this week. The results can be amazing.
- Allow your child to take a friend along to the store or play a game with them occasionally. This is a good way to get to know your children's friends and their parents while you model the importance of asking permission ahead of time and of parents knowing where their children are.
- Read to your children. When they are older, read the same book together. This will give you great discussion starters.
- Make a schedule of your child's school day. This will allow you to talk about specific parts of the day.
- Check with your child's school to see if it has a Web site and what information is available. Some schools put their newsletters, assignments and/or a short synopsis of their current studies on the Web. This could even allow fathers who are not able to be with their children daily to have a chance to stay involved in their children's lives. Many teachers respond to e-mail, which allows opportunities for parents to ask questions as they think of them and teachers to respond when they have a free minute.
- Start a collection together. Maybe you collect rocks, leaves, pennants, souvenir coins or something of interest to your child. This will allow you to teach organizational skills to your child and build memories. You could document where, when and why you brought something home. These can be great conversation starters as you recall events or times together when your children are adults.
- Take your child to your job site and let your children know where you go when you leave for work. Meeting your co-workers lets your child put faces with names. Helping them see your world of work helps your children see work as a reality.
- If you are a father-to-be, attend prenatal doctor appointments with the mother-to-be.
- If you are a new father, attend newborn checkups with your child's mother.
- Work together as a team with your child's mother

to share all parenting tasks. This includes feeding, bathing and dressing, plus getting to doctor, dentist and eye doctor appointments.

- Discuss with your partner concerns and issues you have about your child's health, safety and development.

9. *Be a father who loves and/or respects his children's mother.*

Our friend Kathy Simon was fascinated by the question, "What makes a good father?" She spent a number of years studying the question and surveyed more than 700 fathers who felt really good about being dads. Kathy wanted to hear the fathers' thinking about their successes, in their own words. She asked them scores of questions, and one of the most important questions was:

"What is the greatest gift a father can give his children?"

We assumed that the No. 1 thing successful fathers would talk about would be something about enjoying time with the kids, sharing life with them or enhancing their self-esteem by enjoying their company and doing things together. Kathy agreed that these were important pieces of advice for dads to remember. But, as Kathy delightedly informed us, *"The greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother."* Mothers can almost instinctively feel the wisdom of these words. Fathers, too.

To be a great dad, you need to be a great partner as well. You need to nurture the children, but you also must nurture the children's mother. When moms are happy, kids are likely to be happy. When moms are stressed and unhappy, kids will feel it deeply.

Even in situations where parents don't love each other or live together, it is very important to find ways to treat the mother of your children with kindness and respect. If you continue the war after the

split, you're not only hurting the mother, but the children, and ultimately, yourself. Everyone loses when there is bitter conflict and retaliation. Your children's mother must be included in your "circle of care" even if you don't love her. This shows her you care that she is your children's mother and teaches your children valuable characteristics that will empower them for life. (For more information on co-parenting during and after a divorce, read about the Parents Forever Program on the UNL For Families Web site at UNLforFamilies.unl.edu. Better yet, get involved in a discussion group such as Parents Forever. You may be divorced from each other, but you still are both responsible for the children. You need to find ways to work together successfully at parenting, just as you learn how to manage conflict or difficult people on the job.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think? Is loving their mother really the greatest gift you can give your children? Share your thoughts with your partner or discussion group.
- If a father doesn't love the children's mother, how can he show her kindness and respect?
- Do you love your children's mother? If yes, how do you show her and tell her? Is it evident to your children that you love their mother? If not, do you show your children's mother kindness and respect? Is it evident to your children that you are kind and respectful to their mother?
- Are you spending quality time with your partner? If yes, how do you achieve this?

Activities

- Try being especially loving with your partner for the coming week. Don't tell her what you're up to but simply make an extra effort to go out of your way to be kind. Watch closely how she responds. And if it works, keep it up.
- To maintain couple strength and marital health,

it's important to have some down time with your partner, together away from the kids. It does not have to be a long time, but it should be a regularly-scheduled time. Many couples find that life is so busy it is important to write down times for their dates together on the calendar. These dates don't have to cost much money, and that's important if you are managing on a limited income. If you are meeting with a group, discuss ways you might strengthen your partner relationship. Gather ideas if you need to improve quality time with your partner.

- You can have a great time together simply going for a walk and holding hands, going to another couple's home for a game of cards, having a picnic on the living room floor when the children are in bed or talking about life while cuddling on the couch. If you have several extra dollars, a dinner out at a restaurant can always be fun and cement your bond as a couple. Whatever you choose to do together, make sure it gives you time to talk with each other about how your lives are going and ways you can make life even better for each other.
- Together with your partner, assist your child in joining 4-H or some other youth organization. This will give you activities to work on together with your children that promote communication and learning. You may all pick up a new hobby.
- Set aside a certain time each day just to talk without distractions to your children's mother. Choose five to 10 minutes of your day that is prime time, not leftover time. Share with each other positive thoughts and feelings. Take time to enjoy each other! Let the children know that this is your time to connect with each other.

10. Celebrate the differences and similarities in parenting styles between father and mother.

Although there may be some obvious differences in

parenting styles and characteristics between mothers and fathers, there are probably more similarities than differences. How men and women differ will depend greatly on how they were socialized in childhood, their philosophy about gender roles and stereotypes, and life experiences. Chances are that their values, priorities and goals will be similar. For instance, both the mother and father probably want their kids to be safe, well-cared for, have basic needs met, attain a good education, have opportunities to learn, be socially involved, get to experience things that they didn't have the chance to, and so on. Celebrate these similarities.

Some differences may cause conflict or may be resolved. Some differences really won't matter much, especially if you answer "no" to the questions, "Will this really matter five years from now?" "Will this really help or hurt my child?" However, some conflicts or differences can turn into major problems and disagreements over how you parent. For example, you may want to use time-out when disciplining your child; your partner may want to spank for misbehavior.

You may, however, even celebrate some of these differences because they may strengthen the parent-child and partner relationships. Differences between mother and father may complement each other's strengths and negate each other's weaknesses. For example, if a father likes to play outdoors, he can play with the children to help them get exercise and use some energy. If a mother prefers being indoors and enjoys reading, she can read books to quiet children before bedtime. Another example might be that dad likes to cook; mom likes to garden. Mom can encourage the children to help in the garden with weeding, watering or harvesting. Then dad can work in the kitchen with the children to prepare a family meal. If mom has more energy and patience in the evening, she may be the parent to help bathe children and get them to bed. On the other hand, if mom does not like to wake early in the morning, dad may be the parent to help the children get breakfast. (Note: These examples all depend on the children's ages and developmental levels.)

Activities

Think about the special talents you have. What are your strengths? These are the areas you can excel in as a father. Are you the parent who likes swimming? Take your child to the pool and teach her/him to swim. Are you the parent who likes soccer? Sign your child up for soccer and maybe even be the coach. Are you the parent who likes to garden? Plant your flower garden and vegetable garden with your children. Are you the parent who likes board games? Play games together nightly. What are the special talents your partner has? You can complement each other and strengthen each other's parenting skills by recognizing what each contributes to parenting your children. Times together, such as playing and doing activities together, are special memories that often last a lifetime.

11. *Be a father who takes care of himself.*

It is extremely important that you model healthy behaviors and live a healthy lifestyle. Avoid excessive drinking, smoking or the misuse of other drugs. Eat healthy foods and exercise. When you take care of your physical health, you are influencing your children in positive ways. Your emotional, mental and spiritual health are important, too. You can nurture friendships that build your self-esteem, talk with other parents or seek professional counseling to help you work through tough problems. Taking parenting classes or reading books are ways you can strengthen your mental health. Don't neglect your spiritual well-being, either. Take time to understand yourself and your beliefs, and know what you want to teach your children. Simply, take time to enjoy life. When you take care of yourself, this reflects positively on the way you parent your children.

Discussion Questions

- Are you taking care of your body physically? Do you exercise at least three times a week? When was the last time you had a medical physical exam or went to the dentist?

- Are you taking care of your emotional health? When was the last time you spent time with friends who are supportive of you in your fathering role? How often do you talk about your feelings and problems with someone you trust or love? Are your friends also part of your partner's and children's lives? Why or why not?
- Are you taking care of your mental health? When was the last time you took a class to learn something that interests you? Have you read a good book lately? Maybe you can share the book with your partner and then talk about it together.
- Are you taking care of your spiritual health? Have you taken time recently to meditate, reflect and nurture your spiritual needs? Have you spent time with those who help you grow in your faith? Are you teaching your children your values and priorities and how to live their lives according to your beliefs? (Note: Children must be allowed to adopt their own belief system, but you are a strong influence.)

Activities

- Physical exercise is important for good health. Adults need at least 30 minutes of exercise three times a week. Choose some sort of exercise you like to do and ask your child to join you. You can walk together, run together, ride bikes together, play basketball together. All these forms of exercise help you stay fit, and when you are exercising with your child, you also are building a healthy relationship with each other.
- Fathers can provide the lead to get the entire family involved in regular physical activity. Schedule an activity weekly. This can be a boost to everyone's health, offer time to be together and be the basis for some happy family memories.
- Go for a bike ride with your children or as a family.
- Play Frisbee.
- Let your children teach you a new game.

- Try a new vegetable or fruit or fix them in a new way together with your children.
- Let your children help you do a task or hobby. Even with woodworking, a young child can hold a board, help measure or get tools for you.
- Coach your child's sports team or, better yet, help with practices. More than one or two adults working with children is helpful.

12. Be a father who doesn't hesitate to ask for help.

If you have a partner relationship that is distressed or unhappy, you and your partner will benefit from seeking counseling or professional assistance. Many trained professionals can help you work through problems you may be having in your partnership, job or with parenting. Give your best to recognize your part in the problem and to make suggested changes. Take the necessary time to nurture your partner relationship or to improve your parenting skills. Counseling only works when both partners want the relationship to survive or improve.

Parents should not stay together simply for the sake of the children. Children do not thrive in families where there is constant conflict, belittling, silence, mistreatment and distrust. Sometimes it is in the best interest of all parties, including the children, to dissolve the relationship.

If you are living with an abusive partner, you will want to seek individual counseling so the abuse doesn't escalate after counseling sessions. The abuser needs extensive treatment and counseling. Ask someone for help. If one person cannot help, ask another person until you get help. Be persistent. When situations get heated, uncomfortable or abusive, others in your network tend to back away from getting involved. However, many trained professionals, counselors and support advocates can help you.

Discussion Questions

- Has there been a time when you and your partner would have benefited from going to a counselor? Did you go? Why or why not?
- If you did not get help, what were some of the barriers that kept you from getting help?
- If you did get help, what are some of the benefits that you have seen as a result of counseling?

Do you know the definition of abuse toward a significant partner? Unfortunately, abuse occurs all too often—in about one in five partner relationships. What can you do to help prevent abuse? Do you know where to get help if you are in an abusive partner relationship? The Nebraska Statewide Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Hotline is 800-876-6238. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is 800-799-7233. Toll-free numbers do NOT appear on your telephone bill.

Activities

- Discuss with your partner the behavior you display toward her and the children. Does she ever view the behavior as dominating or controlling? Talk with her about how you will make changes. Is your partner's behavior ever dominating or controlling? Talk together about how she will make changes. (Note: If you are in an abusive relationship, this activity is not recommended.)
- Is there a local shelter or outreach services for women who have fled from abusive partners? Are there any local services for a man who is abused? With your partner and older children, find out what your local shelter might need in the way of supplies. Maybe you can provide some good used towels or sheets, or take a sack of groceries to a designated place. This activity teaches your children that you care about others and that you want to contribute to resources in your community that help others.

- Do you know a family that doesn't have much food? If so, find out if family members are using food stamps. You may want to help them fill out an application or refer them to someone who can.
- Some religious groups, schools or workplaces sponsor a child or family during the holidays. Is there something you can give to help with this cause? How might your partner and children contribute? It doesn't have to be a big thing to make a big difference in someone's life.
- If you need to talk with a friend, meet that person for a cup of coffee. If you have not been feeling well, make a doctor's appointment. If you need a dental checkup, make a dentist appointment. If you need legal counsel, make an appointment with a lawyer. If you could benefit from seeing a counselor, make an appointment. Take care of yourself and your family by allowing others to help you when necessary. You cannot fix all problems by yourself. Let your children see that you care for yourself and seek assistance when necessary.
- Talk to your father about the joys of fathering. Also, ask your father for advice on different issues.

GREAT DADS—HOW TO SUCCEED: EVALUATION

Please take several minutes to fill out the following questionnaire. It will help us determine the effectiveness of this course and assess your need for more information. Check all that apply.

?. Was there a section that was not helpful to you? Why or why not?

1. I am a: male
 female

2. Age: _____

3. I am a: father stepfather
 teacher male helping partner parent
 mother stepmother
 childcare worker grandparent
 foster parent/guardian professional helping clients
 other _____

4. I am: married separated single living with partner

5. Ethnicity: Caucasian/White Arab American
 African American Native American
 Latino/Hispanic Asian American
 Other

6. Estimated annual household income (gross):

7. Religious preference: _____

8. How important is religion or spirituality to you?

very important moderately important not important

9. How many children do you have living with you? _____

10. Ages of children: _____

11. How many children do you have contact with on a daily basis?

12. Where do you live? rural area town small to mid-sized city large metropolitan area

13. Indicate how often you do the following when your children misbehave:

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|----------------------|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Ask for help | | | | | |
| Cry | | | | | |
| Explain things | | | | | |
| Ignore | | | | | |
| Listen | | | | | |
| Spank | | | | | |
| Take away privileges | | | | | |
| Throw things | | | | | |
| Use time-out | | | | | |
| Yell | | | | | |

14. Rate yourself on how successful you are with these parental behaviors:

| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|--|--------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Setting guidelines or determining rules | | | | | |
| Determining the consequences for misbehavior | | | | | |
| Following through with consequences | | | | | |
| Responding calmly to the child's misbehavior | | | | | |
| Being confident in the use of discipline | | | | | |
| Accessing resources or help | | | | | |

15. Who offers you the most support with parenting? Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend (same sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> Case manager |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse/Partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend (opposite sex) | <input type="checkbox"/> Support advocate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other family member | <input type="checkbox"/> Co-worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minister | <input type="checkbox"/> Social worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please indicate relationship) | | |

16. This information has increased my knowledge regarding fathering roles _____

17. This information has helped me practice a new skill in regard to parenting. _____

18. This information has helped me identify someone I can ask to help me when I need help. _____

19. As a result of reading/studying this information, I will assume more responsibility for my children's well-being. _____

20. To help us understand family dynamics and how to better assist parents and children: Have you ever been involved in an abusive partner relationship either as:
 an assaulted person Yes No an abuser Yes No

21. What would you like to learn more about?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing own strengths as a family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information on fathering | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting in difficult situations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence/abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Building my self-esteem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building self-esteem in children | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basic living skills (job skills, personal care health and wellness, home management) | |

22. I took this course in a class setting.
 I read this material by myself.
 I took this course using hard copy printed materials.
 I took this course using the computer (Web-based).

23. Would you be interested in receiving a newsletter or a series of fact sheets on fathering?
 yes maybe no
 If yes, you may contact Kathy Bosch at the address listed at the end of this evaluation form.

24. What is the most important thing you learned from this course?

25. What principles from this course helped you the most with parenting?

26. Was there a section that was not helpful to you? If so, why?

27. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the overall effectiveness of support from people in helping you be an effective father.

Scale: 1 = never 2 = sometimes 3 = about half of the time 4 = often 5 = always

- ___ Your family of orientation (your parents and your siblings)
- ___ Partner's family of orientation (his parents and his siblings)
- ___ Friends
- ___ Neighbors
- ___ Religious leaders and members/religious organizations
- ___ Counselors, therapists and mental health services
- ___ Community groups/organizations
- ___ Advocates for women in abusive situations (support groups, shelter and outreach services)
- ___ Teachers, extension educators and educational system
- ___ Police, sheriff and law enforcement
- ___ Lawyers and legal system
- ___ Case workers, social workers and social services
- ___ Nurses, doctors and medical services
- ___ Co-workers, supervisors and workplace
- ___ Other (please specify) _____

28. Would you be interested in receiving a newsletter or a series of fact sheets on fathering?

- yes maybe no

If yes, you may contact Kathy Bosch at the address below.

Please return to:

Kathy Bosch, Ph.D., Extension Family Life Specialist
 University of Nebraska Panhandle Research and Extension Center
 4502 Avenue I
 Scottsbluff, NE 69361
 Phone: (308) 632-1244
 Email: kbosch2@unl.edu