

Top 10 Ways To Be A More Effective Father

1. Treat your children as capable

There is an unspoken language that happens between people which allows them to know if others really value them and believe they're capable. This language is especially evident in parents and children, and many children who are struggling are discouraged because they have parents who don't truly believe in them and who don't encourage them consistently. How do you encourage your children? You allow them to do age-appropriate tasks free of criticism and filled with encouraging comments. You discipline yourself to treat your children based on their potential, not always what you see in front of you. You include them in many activities and give them many opportunities to learn without shaming or guiltting them. Your children will reflect back what they get from you. Fathers who believe in their children have learned to believe in themselves. Seems like both parties benefit here, don't they?

2. Make time for your kids

This is a big problem for a lot of dads, but if there's a will there's a way. If you don't have much time to work with, make the time with your kids special. How about having a "date" with your son or daughter each week? Are there times when you can include them in your activities around the house or even when your working? If you're the father of a teenager, have you given up on the idea of spending time with your kid because it's difficult? They still need you to be involved in their life in a big way. It just might not always seem like it from their comments and behavior! Are there things you can give up in order to spend more time with your kids? (One round of golf each week?) Remember, this is an investment, and they won't be around for that long.

3. Taking care of yourself

It's really difficult to be nurturing and kind to your family if you don't take some time to be kind and nurturing to yourself. What is it that you love to do and that relaxes you? Time is such a big factor for all of us these days, it's vitally important to find the time each week to take care of yourself in some way and to reduce your level of stress. This will allow the real and genuine you to be with your family, not some angry, stressed-out version of you. If you don't know how to nurture yourself, now may be a good time to explore that area and to find some answers for yourself.

4. Be aware of your kids' lives

How much do you really know about your children? Do you know:

- What inspires them?
- What they're afraid of?
- Who their best friend is?
- What their favorite activity is?
- What they like and don't like about you?

- What their dreams are?
- What their favorite school subject is?

If you don't know a lot of these answers, you can always ask your child. There are a lot of fathers who don't know these kinds of details about their children's lives. They may be leaving it up to mom or they may just not feel like they have the time to find out. Whatever the reason, remember that your children benefit tremendously when you take the time to get to know all of the areas of their lives.

5. Improve your relationship with your own father. Yes, a poor relationship with your own dad WILL affect your relationship with your children. Here are the steps:

Step #1 Forgive your father for what happened in the past--it's not going to help either of you to carry all of this baggage around and it will hurt your relationship with your children if you don't. You may need some help or support around this issue—get it!

Step #2 Start forging a new relationship with your father. Start a conversation with him in which you mention how hard it must have been for him or about what his father was like. Don't wait--the opportunity can be gone at any moment. If your father has died or you can't contact him, write a letter to him or find some other way of doing it. What's important is that you alter the way you feel about the relationship and that you communicate that to him.

Step #3 Tell your dad how much you appreciate what he did for you. Find the positive in his actions, even though you may find it difficult to think of things. Remember that he may not have received much from his father and that's the only model he may have had. Does this all seem difficult to do? That means that you need to do it!

6. “Really” listen to your kids

The dirty truth is that many fathers don't listen to their children very well. While kids are talking to us it's easy for us to “put on the filter” and to hear what we want to hear. We can easily have our focus on judging them while they're talking to us and forming our own opinions and attitudes rather than really hearing them. What can you do to improve?

Step #1 Acknowledge that you can improve as a listener and let your kids know that you're going to try to do better when they talk with you. (This will help to put some teeth into your commitment)

Step #2 Reflect back to your kids what they say to you. Doing this is pretty good proof that you heard what was said to you. You can paraphrase it and you don't have to get carried away with it. (Saying, “So it sounds like you want me to go jump off a bridge,” to your teenage son may not be necessary). It is amazing to witness the power of great listening from a father and what it can do for a relationship. I think you'll like the results.

Step #3 Practice, practice, practice your listening skills. Want a good and willing subject? Try your partner!

7. Using positive discipline

Fathers, repeat after me: **Punishment does not work!** It may feel good for awhile and it may stop a problem temporarily, but it will come back and bite you in the behind. Fathers need to educate themselves on how to effectively discipline their children. Here are some simple steps to improve your skills at disciplining your children.

Step #1 Ask them calmly and respectfully to stop whatever behavior is happening that you don't like, or tell them what you have noticed that you don't approve of.

Step # 2 If the behavior continues, tell them that you will take away the object or privilege in question. Use a voice that conveys respect and calm but that means business.

Step # 3 Take away the object or privilege and tell them that they can try again later. Do not cave in to crying or persuasive arguments. Be firm and kind.

Step # 4 Give them another chance after a period of time. If the misbehavior continues, take away the object or privilege for a longer period.

Remember to try to give your kids choices at all times. Attempt to avoid power struggles and pick your battles. If your relationship is so bad that these methods can't be useful, first attempt to spend some time with your child and improve the relationship before moving ahead.

8. Have a great relationship with your wife

You are the main role model for your children, and your relationship with your wife is the main source of information for them. Here are some ideas:

- Make your wife a priority, don't let your relationship fade into the background because of the kids
- Be a great listener
- Establish a united front as parents, don't let your kids play favorites
- Date your wife on a consistent basis
- Concentrate on being kind more often and being right less often
- If you're divorced, help to create an atmosphere of cooperation and kindness with your ex-wife.

9. Nurture your kids

Show them how valuable they are by hugging them or by wrestling with them. This is the way you show them that you care. Share your feelings with them (age-appropriate, of course) and make it a practice of yours to invite them to share their feelings with you. If you lead the way you'll make it easier for them. Tell them what you love about them. Show them that men can be both strong and nurturing at the same time.

10. Get support for your fathering

This is one area where men can really be lacking. I've noticed that when women get together they can easily begin to talk about their kids and to get into some of the intimate details of their lives.

Fathers tend to spend more time on business or sports. It is crucial for fathers to find a way to talk about some of the difficult aspects of fathering that will be coming up and to have a sounding board or feedback from other fathers.

Choices here may be to form a weekly group of fathers that meets to discuss being a father and to make action plans that each is accountable for. Another is to get a coach to talk to each week to work on areas of need and to formulate a plan to improve your fathering.

What is important is that you have a way to process what you are going through as a father and that you feel supported enough to grow and take risks. Great fathers are required to grow and to change with their children. It's awfully hard to do that by yourself. Go get some help before it's too late!

Did you know that seeking help is actually a sign of strength?

Improve on any or all of these aspects of being a father and you'll improve your effectiveness as a father.

How important is this to you? Important enough to do something about it? Your kids will thank you.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, CSC

Dynamic Vision

651-766-9976

mark@markbrandenburg.com

www.markbrandenburg.com