

Extension Education
News Column
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Dads Matter

By Natasha Dansie

He is the bread-winner. He brings home the bacon. He works overtime. He is her hero, her prince charming, and her protector. He is his coach, his horse, and his roll-on-the-rug wrestling partner. He is the storyteller, the comedian, and the rescuer. He gives piggy backs, underdogs, and knuckles. He is a superhero, a dance partner, and a taste-tester. He is Mr. Fix It, Mr. Mom, and “don’t back-talk me, Mister.” He tells dad jokes, he laughs at their jokes, he gets the inside jokes. He lets her paint his nails, do his hair, and sleep in his bed. He gives allowance, advice, and approval. He sets up tents, builds campfires, and whittles sticks. He is the rule maker, the rule bender, and the rule enforcer. He is security, warmth, and leadership. He is dad, and dads matter.

Dads matter more than they might think. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one out of every three children live without their biological father in the home. This amounts to 24 million children in our nation. This father absence is a contributor to nearly all of the social ill faced in America today. When a child is raised in a father-absent home, he or she is significantly affected. Children are at a four times greater risk of poverty and seven times more likely to become pregnant as a teen when raised in a father-absent home. A child raised without a father is more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect, more likely to go to prison, and more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. He or she is more likely to drop out of high school, suffer from obesity, and commit crime. Taking this information into consideration, many agree that father absence is one of the biggest social problems facing America today.

According to the National Fatherhood Initiative (2015), “Most Americans value fatherhood, believe children should grow up with a father, and believe fatherhood is more difficult today than it was decades ago.” Today’s fathers face a variety of challenges. One of the most often cited struggles that dads deal with is balancing work and family. Fathers are not only expected to support their family financially, but are also expected to be involved in the education of their children, and to be emotionally involved in lives of their children. A study conducted by the National Fatherhood Initiative in 2006 revealed that most men did not feel adequately prepared for fatherhood when they first became fathers. The good news is that there are fantastic resources available for dads that can help them strengthen the relationships with their children.

Healthy Relationships Utah, working in conjunction with Utah State University Extension, provides free, research-based courses for fathers and father figures. These courses are taught in 2-hour sessions over a period of 5 weeks and give fathers an opportunity to learn specific skills and techniques to help them engage with their children as fathers. Meals and opportunities for financial incentives are available. These courses are available for free to the public on a community basis. They can also be offered privately to a group of 8-12 dads. For more information, or to schedule a course, contact Natasha Dansie at natasha.dansie@usu.edu.

Healthy Relationships Utah offers a variety of research-based relationship courses for singles, couples, parents, and stepfamilies. All are offered at no cost. Learn more or register for a free course at www.healthyrelationshipsutah.org. (Funding for this project was provided by the United States

Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Families, Grant: #90FK0072. These services are available to all eligible persons, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or religion.)