

USU Extension Offers Courses for Fathers

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The relationships we have with others greatly impact our personal health, professional effectiveness and quality of life. HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org, a Utah State University Extension initiative, provides free, research-based relationship education courses for couples, singles, parents and stepfamilies. In 2016, HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org also began offering fatherhood-specific programming, since historically, fathers and father-like figures have been an underserved population.

As part of the programming, fatherhood courses provide specific information to help fathers learn the skills to become the best parent they can be and to most fully enjoy that role.

Brian Higginbotham, USU Extension family life specialist and program director, said fathers who attend the programs learn valuable relationship, parenting and work-related skills.

“Even if you already have everything under control, you’ll learn additional ways to enjoy the fatherhood experience,” he said.

For example, Mauricio, a father of three, said the *class helped him get even closer to his kids and do the things he wishes he could have done with his dad. “I would recommend this class to all fathers,” he said. “You don’t have to be ‘bad’ to take the class. Good fathers need to take it too. It will help you.”*

Below are a few tips taught in the fatherhood course instruction.

1. Model Mistakes and Good Problem Solving

As a dad, it is okay for your children to witness you making mistakes. This shows them that you are human, and it also gives you the chance to model good problem-solving skills. For example, on a short hike, you may purposefully leave your own snack at home and say to your kids, “Oops! I forgot to bring my granola bar, and I’m hungry. I definitely won’t forget my snacks next time!”

2. Give Your Children the Chance to Make “Affordable” Mistakes

Consequences of mistakes grow costlier the older children get, which is why it is so important to allow them to make plenty of small, or affordable, mistakes while they are young. For example, you may say to your kids, “We are leaving in 30 minutes for a short hike. You get to be in charge of putting together the snacks you would like to take.”

3. If a Mistake is Made, Show Empathy While Holding Your Child Accountable

The most loved and respected dads are the ones who deliver firm consequences with a strong dose of empathy. If a child forgets to bring a snack on a short hike, instead of getting frustrated with him or her, say something like “It is sad that you forgot your snacks, and now you’re hungry. We can’t drive all the way home to get them. Hang in there.” Using an empathetic delivery allows children to stay accountable for their mistakes, but it lets them know that you still love them.

4. Give your Children the Same Task Again

Later that week, you may say, “We are leaving in 30 minutes for a short hike. You again get to be in charge of putting together the snacks you want to take.” When you give your children responsibility for the same task again, without nagging or reminding them of their previous mistakes, this sends a very powerful message: “You are smart enough to learn from your mistakes.” This puts them in the driver’s seat to move forward and have a better outcome the next time.

Higginbotham said USU Extension’s fatherhood programming includes research-based curricula. Home Run Dads uses a sports theme to help fathers strengthen their relationship with their child(ren) and learn skills for healthy relationships; 24/7 Dads helps fathers care for

themselves, their children and their relationships; and InsideOut Dad® is offered exclusively to incarcerated fathers looking to connect with their children.

The free online fatherhood courses are facilitated by professional family life educators and include approximately 10 hours of instruction over five weekly 2-hour sessions. Class size is limited. To register for a course, [click here](#) or visit HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org.

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