

Frequent Flyer Dads

When the first frequent flyer program was launched by American Airlines on May 1, 1981, few could have predicted the degree to which these programs would impact the traveling public. Twenty-five years later frequent flyer miles are more widely distributed than any other form of currency, save the dollar, and members of these programs have redeemed their miles for close to 280 million travel awards.

I once had a job working traveling and teaching at military bases. The problem was that at the time I had a young son in grade school. From the time he was in first grade through the sixth grade I was gone more than I was around him. I worked regular office hours through the week but then would travel every other week-end flying into military bases to put on a week-end education program. For six years I would get off work on Friday, and then fly out getting in late that night at some military base. Then I would instruct all day Saturday and Sunday and then fly back on Monday and be back in the office on Tuesday. I would need more education if I was ever going to have a better job so for the first three of those years I would leave work at 5 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon and drive two hours to go to night school

That much flying and work does not leave much time to be a daddy. There were lots of week-ends that I missed. I missed week-end ball games and track meets. I missed some holidays. I was often not there him when he was sick. Like most over

worked Dads felt a ton of guilt over not being there. After many years, I was finally able to change jobs and took it in no small part to be around more but by then he was well into junior high.

Busy, Busy, Busy

"Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save." Will Rogers, Autobiography, 1949

Modern life is just busy, busy, and busy. A few years later he had graduated high school and off to college. I went to a visit him in St. Louis and one afternoon and we were just talking outside a convenience store. The guilt got the better of me. I struggled with the words but said I was so sorry for missing all those years and all those week-ends. He just looked at me and said, "You say that but he always remembers you being there for me". I cannot possibility express what a relief it was to hear him say those words. He went on to say he knew I was gone but that when I was there he knew he was important to me.

You see being a good Dad has nothing to do how close you live to your kids or whether you have them only rarely. I wished I could have been around more but I wasn't. There are no part time dads, there is not a distant limit nor minimum hours needed to qualify you for the dad position. Rather, being a good Dad is just about your ability to "be there" when you can be there. It's about quality not quantity. In a poker game called Texas Hold Em a common strategy of players is to push what chips you have to the center of the table and declare "I'm All In!". It's either win big or go home early.

The difference is that when it comes to being a dad, there is no such risk. It's always a successful strategy. If you're only around your part time be "all in". Many long distant or frequent flyer dads don't get to be around the kids as much as they would like but it's more important to just be there when you get a chance to place your bet.

How You Can Matter

Your kids need you. It has absolutely nothing to do with how much time you are there. It is what you bring to your kids poker table that matters. They just have a tough time getting it from anywhere else they are going to be. Studies show that girls who live with their unmarried dads have higher educational goals and higher achievement test scores than girls who live with their unmarried moms. While it is true that your kids will usually talk to their moms more about their social lives it's you that they turn to for solving other problems and to get advice on education and jobs.

They will also look to you for encouragement for help in becoming more self-reliance. They will no doubt see you as more demanding and judgmental than their moms and they are probably right. So what, that's your job and usually that's what they need. But remember rules without relationships simply won't work. It is about how to get and stay connected. So find something that is special between the two of you recycling, books, movies, building something and spend time together doing it. Connected kids do just fine. Studies show that kids who remain close to their dads usually end up being more self-reliant, self-disciplined, self-motivated and more academically and vocationally successful. That is a pretty good legacy.

You can use my parenting site to take a self-test to see how connected you are to your kids. Just go to dkeithdenton.com and click on the parenting tab and take the self-test. It is free and can give you some insight about what it means to be connected but you'll need to adapt it to your particular situation. The primary purpose is to help you begin to focus on how to keep connected with your kids. Frequent flyer dads and long distant dads can be a powerful influence but only if it's a priority. It means finding other way to stay connected. Luckily, we live in the information age where you may be gone physically but can still be there through the internet, Skype, Facebook or family websites. There is no limit to how you can stay connected, it only requires effort.

But unfortunately, dads who are not around much often just give up. It's the most destructive thing you can do to your kids to say, "I'm just a part-time dad, what can I do?" When you are thinking this is "Too hard, I can't be a real parent just seeing them two times a year" remember your as important to your kids health as their mom, maybe more so.

Hard Wired To Succeed

When you travel a lot or live in another part of the country and weekend visits are no longer possible, seeing your kids is even more difficult so look for other ways to stay connected. It's difficult for you and for your kids but you can still be there even if you are up in the air or on another side of the earth. Today's technology lets you be in more than one place at time. You do what you need to do without physically being there. You can bank on line and pay your bills on line. You can get a degree on line, you can shop on line. You can date on line, watch sporting events on line, hell you can even have an

affair on line. So what's to say you can't do something really meaningful on line, like be a dad? Distance does not matter like it used to. The virtual world allows you to do things your parents could not imagine.

Here are tips for frequent flyer dads for long-distance parenting. Use e-mail, text, tweet and blogs to keep in the loop. Use Skype and other visual tools to see them and them to see you. I worked for several months on the other side of the world in China but was able to see the family daily using Skype. Create a family web-site that you can share pictures and happenings. Even go old school and write letters and mail post cards.

One Dad who travels all over the world bought his kids a Map of the world so they could hang on the wall and got fun stick pins so they could play "Where's Dad, Now". He sends his kids postcards from cities he is in and they find him on the map and put a stick pin.

Nothing Worth While is Easy

You did not get to where you are at my taking the easy road. Doing the deal would not have occurred. You can't just tell people, you have to sell them. Promotions are not handed out randomly. It takes drive ambition and determination. That's the same attitude you have to have in keeping connected when the call is long distance. But you have more support today staying connected than any past generation.

Dads who only see their kids part-time begin to think of themselves as part-time dad. Be careful how you define the problem. The problem defined demands a solution. There is no such thing as a part-time dad. You are either all in or don't play, either you

are a dad or just a sperm donor. You may not be able to be there as much as you would like but that's not as important as simply staying connected. It's your connection not the distance that matter most in this hard wired world.

Dads can be gone for a lot of reason, there is work, and there are those that can't cope with the divorce so they move away. It's a response sometimes to the conflict with your ex, or your own feelings of guilt, anger and sadness at not being able to real dad. So they disengage. They focus on something else, usually work or another family. The problem is your kids are the real losers. Divorce in itself is not bad, it is simply change. It is how it is handled that determines if it is good or bad. Handled badly and your kids feel unwanted, abandoned and mad. Being gone a lot or living far away is not bad, it depends on how you close the distance. It is a modern world, you don't need to get on a horse and ride to the next village. The internet and your effort mean we all like in the same village. Research shows that children who are able to maintain a close relationship with their father, regardless of distance or location, tend to be more socially mature and to have fewer problems.