

There Are No Part-Time Dads

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Some studies show that only about 8 percent of divorced fathers get to live with their children for as much as a third of a year. For example, only half of the 2200 children in a survey had seen their father in the past year and only 15 percent had seen him once a week (Furstenberg & Cherlin. 1991). But thank goodness there something more important than being able to spend a lot of days with your kids.

I once had a job where I was traveling for a University that provided military enlisted men with a chance to complete their education. I had a young son in grade school but from the time he was in first grade through the sixth grade I was gone more than there. The job required me to work regular office hours through the week but then travel to military bases every other week-end to conduct this week-end education program. For six years of my kids young life I would get off work on Friday, then fly out to some base and teach all day Saturday and Sunday and then fly back on Monday. I was back in the office on Tuesday. I knew I had to also get more education if I was ever going to have a better job so for the first three of those six years I would leave work on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon and drive two hours to Memphis to work on my Ph.D.

Add those numbers up. That's not much time for being daddy. I missed a ton of week-end ballgames and other activities. I wasn't usually there when he was sick. I was gone a lot. Like most part-time dads, I felt a ton of guilt over not being there. I did finally change jobs and locations so I could be around more but by then he was well into junior high.

Years later he had graduated high school and off to college. I went to a visit in St. Louis and one afternoon and we were talking as we went to pick up pizza. I struggled with the words but said I was so sorry for missing all those years, all those week-ends, sorry for not being there. He looked at me and said, you say that but I always remember you being there. We were always playing little hoops in the driveway. He reminded me that I was there was I always his catcher when he was in little league. He said he just remembered me always being there for him. Wow what a relief! He goes on to say that when his wife and he went on their trip to Montana to hike, who was it he asked to go with them? It wasn't mom, even though he said he was closer to her when I was young.

All In Dads

Being a good Dad has nothing to do how close you live to your kids or how often you see them. Like most dads I wanted to be around more but wasn't. There are no minimum hours where you are no longer your child's dad. Being a good Dad is about "be there", it's about the quality not the quantity of the time you have with your kids. It's like playing a poker game called "Texas Hold Em". In the game a strategy is when you sense a weakness in your appointments to push what chips you have to the center of the table and declare "I'm all In!". It's a strategy that will win you the pot or mean you're out of the game and you go home early.

The difference is when you are all in when raising your kids it's never a losing strategy. If you're dads there is no part-time dad you are or are not there. Being a dad has nothing to do with time it is all about developing that relationship. Some dads only

see their kids a few times a year but in this day in age there is no excuse in today's wired world for not keeping in contact all the time.

Dads who only see their kids part-time or most of the time are way more important than even many assume. Some things about your kids never change. Whether you see your kids a lot or just occasionally, it's true that your kids will usually talk to their moms more about their social lives. But it is dads that they are going to turn to for solving other problems and to get advice on their education and jobs. It might be surprising to some to know that it is Dads, not moms that kids look to the most for encouragement of self-reliance. Dads are normally seen as more strict but the truth is that probably they need it. Being a dad is not about time, it is not about distance that matters it is how hard you work at staying connected that matters. 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.

Dads are important. It's only when sons have little or no relationship with their biological dad and who also live with their unmarried moms who tend to act socially immature. They are often aggressive, delinquent, act defiant and can be psychologically or emotionally disturbed. On the other hand, teenagers and young adults who have close relationships with their fathers are less likely to become clinically depressed, to develop eating disorders, and to develop anxiety disorders.

It is never too late to be a dad. I am living proof of that. Teenage girls often become less clinically depressed after they start spending more time with their divorced fathers. But it's not so much being there as it is to be there. You will lose a customer,

blow a deal or miss a golf shot if you're not concentrating. Why would you expect it to be any different when talking to your kid. Don't get distracted, be there. Turn off the TV, clear your mind, concentrate.

What You Can Do

Let's not kid ourselves, when you are gone a lot as I was or live in another part of the country and weekend visits are no longer possible, seeing your kids is difficult. It's difficult for you and your children. Your kids are not only dealing with their parents being divorced but must also have to adjust to not seeing you as often. Unfortunately, dads often give up at this point. That's the killer for your relationship it's not lack of time but a lack of effort. It's not only unfortunate, it's destructive because it doesn't have to be that way. When you find yourself thinking this is "Too hard, I can't be a real parent just seeing them two times a year". Remember you are as important to your kids health as their mom, maybe more so and just because it's hard doesn't mean anything.

It's a world of Skype, text, phone calls and family website you do not have to be there to be there. Today's technology that lets you be in two places at once. It lets you do what you need to do without physically being there. You 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 connected dad for your kids. We don't ride horses to work. The age of brick and mortar is over. Distance does not matter like it used to. The virtual world allows you to do things dads a generation ago could not imagine. I worked for several months on the other side of the world in China

but was able to see my kids daily using Skype. There are family web-site that you can share pictures and happenings. You can even go old school and write letters and mail post cards.

One Dad who travels all over the world bought a map for his kids. The world map was hung on the wall and his kids had fun using stick pins so they could play “Where’s Dad, Now”. He also sends his kids postcards from cities he is in and they find him on the map and put a stick pin and uses Skype and e-mail to help keep the connections.

So it’s hard, so what. Are promotions easy, is meeting quotas easy. Is it easy to sell your products and “do the deal”. No it isn’t but does that stop you. Put as much or more effort in building relationship you have with your kids as you do at building relations with your boss and your customers. You don’t win by giving up and in fact that is the only way you can lose with your kids is to just give up. Communicate by whatever way you can. Don’t entrain, just talk about what you did today. Let them share you boring old world. Tell them what hat you learned today, what made you simile today.

Occasionally, do something special for you and your kids to do when you don’t see them face to face very much. Maybe write in a journal or notebook on something you guys agree on like what did I learned today or something funny. If your gone a long stretch at a time, write in it all week or month and then when you see your kids swap your notebooks.

You can make video tapes, DVD’s CD’s, whatever it takes, stay connected. No excuses. Distance and lack of face to face is no problem. You can work and live in diverse parts. You can parent the same way. Giving up is just a cop out especially with

so much of our wired world right there in the palm of your hand. Dads can have a tendency to give up when they see their kids less. That is the worst thing you can do. In fact it is the only sure cardinal sin. Sometimes dads can't cope with the divorce so they move away, work too much and remarry put all their energies into that family. Sometimes it's a response sometimes to constant conflict with your ex. Sometimes it's your own feelings of guilt or anger and sadness that make dads a run away. The problem is your kids are the real losers. They feel unwanted, abandoned and mad.

Remember children who are able to maintain a close relationship with their father tend to be more socially mature and to have fewer problems related to dating and sexuality - particularly if their divorced mother has not remarried. Dads are needed more than even they know. Your kids are more important than anything else you are going to do.