Fathering a Child:

Dos and Don’ts

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Section 003

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**Introduction**

It may not be readily apparent, but a father plays a very important role in raising a child. While it is true that many children with non-resident, abusive, negative, and/or apathetic fathers end up being very successful, living lives that were seemingly unaffected by the acts of his or her father, this doesn’t seem to be the norm. Studies have shown that a father’s positive influence in the home is a benefit to children in the home overall, and that a supportive and positive motherly influence might not be enough for full child development (Cabrera, 2007) (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984) (Cabrera, 2000).

Before jumping into the paper and its focus, I want to mention the importance of the relationship of the father with the mother. It will not be brought up as a major factor in the paper, so I want to say now how important the relationship between the father and the mother is. It has been shown that a child whose parents are highly satisfied in their marriage has a stronger positive connection with his or her father and mother. He or she also performs better in problem solving situations (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984). It appears that the quality of the child’s development is much stronger while the parents are in harmony. In the words of Elaine S. Dalton during the October 2011 General Conference, she says, “How can a father raise a happy, well-adjusted daughter [and I would also say, son] in today’s increasingly toxic world?... ‘[it] is to love [her] mother.’”

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a few key issues when it comes to fathering (and parenting in general). The goal will be to discuss proper and improper ways to overcome or resolve the issues. These issues, along with the proper and improper ways to overcome or resolve the issues, include: childhood development: doing what the child is interested in and teaching essentials, versus forcing knowledge and skills into a child and choosing the child’s path in life; and conflict resolution: authoritative resolution and high warmth/high expectations, versus inappropriate control of the child.

**Issue: Childhood Development**

There are conflicting views as to whether a father’s involvement in a child’s life actually makes a difference in a child developmentally. It appears that more recently, studies have found that father’s involvement is indeed beneficial, if not crucial, to a child’s development (Cabrera, 2000).

As far as raising a child goes, his or her mental, physical, spiritual, social, and emotional development is definitely the highest priority. This aspect of his or her life is, as a father, extremely hard to be involved in. Work, school, and other activities (church, community, etc.) often keep a hard working father away from family for most of a child’s developing years. This makes those rare occasions when the child is exposed to the father extra special and extra important. What the father chooses to do with this time will either help the child, or damage the child, tremendously. This time that the father has with the child will be the focus for this section.

What should a father do when spending time with his child? First, a father should spend time with the child doing things that the child is interested in. This helps the child in many ways. Doing this helps create a strong, positive bond between the father and the child. This will also help the child find his or her strengths and weaknesses, train in his or her future career, and will give the father great opportunities to teach the child many things that the child will likely be interested in learning.

Second, a father should spend time teaching the child other necessary knowledge and skills when the opportunity arises. Sometimes this can be accomplished by setting aside some time to teach to him or her a topic that the father considers important. For example, a father could set some time aside to teach his son about how to treat women, or priesthood duties. Also important are teaching opportunities that arise while out and about, not necessarily a planned teaching session. A father should be aware of these teaching opportunities so he can spot them when they appear. This, and the father’s example are generally the best ways to teach a child the things he or she needs to know.

I feel like President N. Eldon Tanner’s father was a great example of this, “my dad used to counsel with me about the work we were doing together, and even though I was very young I can remember the feeling of real importance it gave me to have him express his confidence in me and ask for my advice about certain things. He let me know he depended on me and that I was part of the program.” (Tanner, 1977).

Now, what should a father *not* do when spending time with his child? A father should not force a child to learn any knowledge or skills, especially those that aren’t necessary for the child’s development. For example, I knew a family where the parents (particularly the father, however) forced their children to play chess, and get good at it. This father had the idea that chess would be a great benefit to his children’s development mentally, and could potentially help them in other aspects of their life. They would learn to be great critical thinkers and deep thinkers generally, so that when those skills were necessary for their careers or family life later, they would be prepared for it. I became good friends with his children and talked with them about this issue in their lives. Each of them were brilliant chess players, but none of them enjoyed it. The best of the children couldn’t stand the fact that he was forced to play chess. He wanted nothing to do with it. He wanted to go into ballet, and his father told him that he could have nothing to do with ballet. He very much disliked his father for this reason, and couldn’t live his dreams.

This is an enormous detriment to a child’s development. While the child is learning knowledge and skills, they aren’t learning the ones that they are interested in. They aren’t allowed to explore other paths; they aren’t allowed to make their own choices. Even if the father isn’t as strict with the children, but isn’t there for the child’s development, that child may not receive the knowledge and skills necessary to be a strong individual and a healthy contributor to society.

**Issue: Conflict Resolution**

Resolving conflict and inflicting punishment for wrongdoing is very tough to do correctly, without injuring the child in some way. In the book Successful Marriages and Families, it mentions four different ways to handle conflict and punishment. There are two categories, warmth and expectations. For each category, there is either high or low. So, the four different ways are: high warmth/high expectations, high warmth/low expectations, low warmth/high expectations, and low warmth/low expectations. As would be expected, fathers who show high warmth and high expectations end up having positive results. In a study done by Xiayun YinZhihua LiLinyan (2012), it was shown that the children of those fathers who exhibit the other three methods (but more especially fathers who exhibit low warmth/high expectations) were more likely to have “disorders such as major depression, dysthymia, social phobia, agoraphobia, panic disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, and alcohol dependence” (p. 1406).

I believe that my parents are a good example of the high warmth/high expectations method. My parents have always shown show much love and support for us, even when we mess up and make big mistakes. When we make a mistake, they always remind us of how much they love us, regardless of the mistakes we have made. They will, however, punish us according to the mistakes we made and don’t let us off easy.

A friend of mine, on the other hand, had a mother who would show high warmth/low expectations, and his father would show low warmth/low expectations. This friend always knew that his mother loved him, no matter what he did. She showered him with affection. However, when he made a mistake, his mother or his father never punished him. He got away with nearly everything. This, I believe, gave him reason to commit bigger and bigger mistakes, until those mistakes finally got him in jail. It wasn’t until then that he realized he should stop. I believe this would have never happened if his parents were high warmth/high expectation parents.

There are many ways to poorly resolve conflict and punishment with a child. The three other methods have already been mentioned. There are some more specific ways, however, that must be brought to attention. They are: love-withdrawal, guilt induction, disappointment, shame, possessiveness, and protectiveness. I want to focus especially on guilt induction.

I have witnessed guilt induction first hand, so hopefully the experiences that I have received will be beneficial to this paper, and to my wife and I as we are raising our children. A good friend of mine has received guilt induction from her mother many times. This has been quite stressful and, in my opinion, damaging to her. Her mother will often be of the opinion that what she wants is the right thing to happen. She will get it into her mind that her daughter needs to do something, and will ask her daughter to do that thing. Occasionally, her daughter will say that she doesn’t want to do that thing, or proposes another option. Then her mother will proceed to tell her that she is wrong in thinking that she shouldn’t do it that way. If this thing involves family, her mother will tell her that not doing that thing will ruin family relationships, and that it will be all her fault. This is very often the case. Sometimes, she will even go so far to say that if she doesn’t make the choice she wants to make, it will ruin her relationship with her.

One incident that occurred was when her sister was painting a painting for her and her husband. Her mother thought that she didn’t appreciate the painting (which wasn’t the case at all, it was a blind assumption), and decided that it was in her best interest to convince her daughter to do things the way she wanted. She talked to her about the situation, which was a good thing. She told her that she thought she and her husband didn’t appreciate the painting. This was also a great thing to do. Her daughter told her that she definitely liked the painting and still wanted it. Her mother, oblivious to what she just said, then continued to tell her that if she didn’t want the painting, then she was going to take it away from her. She told her that it was her fault that her sister was offended that she didn’t appreciate the painting (which wasn’t the case at all, another assumption she made), and that it was going to ruin her relationship with her sister, her mother, and very possibly her children’s relationship with her sister and her mother and father. She told her that it was going to be all her fault, and that if she didn’t immediately call her sister, apologize to her, and tell her she wanted the painting, then she was going to keep the painting and not allow her to take it.

This type of conflict resolution was entirely ineffective. My friend did what her mother wanted her to do, but entirely against her will. She thought that she was a horrible person for not wanting to do what her mother suggested. She, however, was also extremely upset with her mother for making her feel the way she did. This type of conflict resolution is entirely ineffective. There was a resolution, but it was entirely one sided. No compromise was made, and her mother showed no warmth. The mother got what she wanted, but her daughter felt worthless and horrible. My friend is finally starting to realize that she isn’t worthless, and that the only reason why she is feeling this way is because her mother is inducing this guilt. This is very abusive on my friend’s emotional well-being. This type of conflict resolution should be avoided entirely.

**Conclusion**

For a father, it is very important to consider involvement in his child’s development and conflict resolution. Everything the father does makes a difference in his child. Is the father there for his child, helping his child learn essentials and helping him or her discover his or her interests and how to strengthen those skills, or is the father inducing guilt within his child? Is the father showing his child high warmth with his high expectations while trying to resolve conflict and punishment, or is he cold or has low expectations? If fathers know how to act when situations arise, he will not only avoid harming his child by improperly handling a situation, he can also use that situation as a great teaching tool.

I learned a lot from this study, and know that I will be a much better father because of what I learned. It is so important to raise our children in love and righteousness! I know the quote, “no other success in life can compensate for failure in the home,” (McKay, 1964) to be completely true. Also, another quote I found while researching this topic is exciting to me and I believe to be especially true, “fatherhood, in a sense, is an apprenticeship to godhood.” (Church Educational System, 2003, p. 200). I will be sure to apply what I learned so I can help my children become just like the Savior.

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