

# Fatherhood: A Proactive Approach To Neglect

Presented by: Thomas Boxley, MHR

Program Development Specialist

University Of Oklahoma, National Resource  
Center for Youth Development

[Tboxley@ou.edu](mailto:Tboxley@ou.edu)

[www.nrcys.ou.edu](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu)

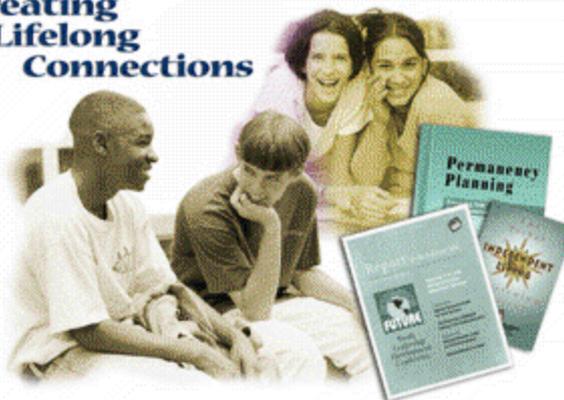
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## Creating Lifelong Connections



The National Resource Center for Youth Development, through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Children's Bureau, provides training and technical assistance to publicly administered and supported child welfare agencies.

**Our Web Address:**

**[www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/nrcyd)**

# Neglect :

- *To pay no attention to: ignore*
- *To fail to give proper care or attention to*
- *Habitual lack of care*

# Abuse:

- *To use improperly: misuse*
- ***To harm or injure by maltreatment***

# Why do men need to assume a more active role in the lives of their children?

- 24 million children (34%) live in homes without their biological fathers
- 20 million children (27%) live in single parent homes
- 1.35 million births (33% of all births) in 2000 occurred to single women
- 43% of first marriages dissolve within fifteen years, 60% of divorcing couples have children
- From 1960 – 1995, the number of children living in single parent homes tripled from 9% - 27%

**In relationship to abuse and neglect  
Children who live absent their biological  
father are 2 to 3 times more likely to....**

- Live in poverty
- Use drugs
- Be victims of child abuse
- Experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems
- Engage in criminal behavior

## **In contrast, children with involved fathers are significantly more likely to....**

- Perform well in school
- Have healthy self esteem
- Exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior
- Avoid “high risk” behaviors (drug use, truancy and criminal activity)

*Statistics taken from the National Fatherhood Initiative, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)*

# ***Fatherhood versus Fathering***

- Fatherhood – The active role of love support and provision that a man assumes upon conception and birth of the child
- Fathering – The act of conceiving a child.

## Important aspects of fatherhood:

Positive traits in the relationship between father and child that make a difference in the lives of children

- Effective communication – Listen to and talk with your child.
- Respect – *willingness to show consideration or appreciation (Webster's)*. Must be mutual.
- Instilling confidence – Don't accept, "I can't." Positively reframe, "Yes you can."
- Lead by example – don't expect youth to do as you say. They are more likely to do as you do.

# Important aspects (continued)

- Consistency – inconsistency sends mixed messages and creates instability, especially for younger children. Follow through on what you say.
- Instilling a sense of spirituality – the fact is that we don't live forever. It is important that the youth have a sense of higher purpose to draw strength from in times of extreme adversity. Whether that be in the context of organized religion or other sources, the sense of higher purpose and connectedness is what gives us our conscience (defined as one's own sense of proper conduct).

# Important aspects (continued)

- Honesty – children are so perceptive that they know when we are be truthful or dishonest, so why try dishonesty? When we model an honest approach in all of our interactions with youth, the chances increase that the honesty will be reciprocated.
- Responsibility – Take seriously the duties of fatherhood (changing diapers, waking children up in the morning for school, preparing meals, helping with homework, etc.). **It is the toughest job you'll ever love!**

# How do we as professionals in the many areas of youth services address these issues?

- Increase public awareness of the need for positive male interaction with children.
- Partner with existing resources in the community to provide this service to youth (community based mentor programs such as Big Brothers and Sisters)
- Solicit volunteers to provide this type of support on an agency by agency basis.
- Work with youth in the area of pregnancy prevention (nearly ¼ of sexually active teens report having unprotected sex – ***National Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention***).

# Legal aspects that promote fatherless children:

- Many state divorce laws unfairly favor women when granting custody.
- Child custody cases are heard in civil court: Judge hears arguments, makes ruling, “probable cause” is generally not established as a means to determine who is awarded custody.
- AFDC grants incentives (more support) for women that are single.
- Child support (financial) often creates an economic vacuum for fathers.

# Possible solutions to legal barriers:

- Support fathers that are in divorce/ custody situations by maintaining lists of attorneys that specialize in this area and providing these fathers with resources for parenting support.
- Educate self and community regarding current state legislation and the need for father friendly, comprehensive, competency based legislation in regards to child custody.
- Lobby for legislative change. ***Youth can drive this change!!***

# Focus Questions:

- What fatherhood programs can you identify in your city/ state and what services do they provide?
- Name one of the legal barriers that you are aware of in your state and strategize a possible solution.
- How was your father/ father figure influential in your life? If you did not grow up with this support, how did you compensate for the absence?