

Sheldon D. Nix, Ph.D., M.S.W.
Darrell V. Freeman, M.A.



A FATHER FOR LIFE



A Project Manhood™ Resource

About This Book

History

In 1987 Dr. Lulu Nix, former Director of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was funded by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention in the National Institutes of Health, and by the Pew Charitable Trusts, to pull together a team of experts from around the country to design a cutting-edge, multi-media parent-training curriculum to be used by the National Institute of Integrated Family Services at Temple University, which Lulu Nix headed up. Dr. Sheldon Nix was a part of that curriculum development team.

The curriculum the team developed, **Project PROUD**, was then used in two different programs conducted by the Institute, as well as by a group of Philadelphia churches. Evaluations of the programs conducted by an outside evaluator found Project PROUD to improve parenting knowledge and skills. It was also found to be easy to use with fidelity.

In 1991, Dr. Sheldon Nix created Project Manhood™ (www.projectmanhood.com) which enabled churches and other organizations around the country to empower men to succeed and to train boys to be men. He published two faith-based curricula, ***Becoming Effective Fathers and Mentors*** which taught men key elements of being a man, a father, and a mentor to boys, and ***Let the Journey Begin***, a curriculum for boys. These curricula have been used in dozens of churches around the country.

In 2010, Dr. Sheldon Nix tapped Darrell V. Freeman, M.A., author and national expert on working with men, relationships, and youth, to assist him in further developing Project Manhood. Together, they have taken the proven Project PROUD curriculum and “Fatherized” it—made it more focused on men and updated it based on the latest research and training concepts.

A Father for Life is the result of this 22-year effort to help parents raise up healthy, successful, responsible and self-sufficient children ready to fulfill their purpose and make a positive contribution to this world.

We hope it helps.

What You Get

The Father’s Guidebook

What you have in your hands is the guide for fathers. It gives all of the key concepts related to becoming an effective father.

The Exercises

As a reader of this book, you also have access to the workbook which can be downloaded from our website: www.projectmanhood.com. These exercises are an essential part of the learning

process because they help you not just to read and say “Oh, ok, that makes sense” but to plan out exactly how you are going to implement these concepts with your family.

Web Resources

Because becoming an effective father takes time, and there are many obstacles and issues, we have created a Project Manhood web community that will give you additional ideas, a newsletter that we email to you regularly, text messages to inspire and strengthen you, and additional tools and resources to help you help your children become wonderful.

Be sure to sign up! It's free. Go to www.projectmanhood.com and register.

Leader's Guide

Interested in teaching *A Father for Life* for your church, nonprofit, or community? We have a leader's guide that includes:

- A Leader's Manual
- PowerPoints for each session
- Videos for each of the “C's”
- Other tools

You can find all the details at www.projectmanhood.com.

Christian Version

One final note. Because so many churches have utilized Project Manhood resources over the years, we have created a specifically Christian version of both this father's guidebook and the powerpoints. All the key skills and concepts are the same, but in addition to being grounded in the research, participants can see the biblical basis for each chapter.

Details are on the website.

Table of Contents

About This Book	3
History	3
What You Get	3
SECTION I: Who Young People Are and What They Need	9
Chapter 1: Becoming Youth-enized: A Call to Understand Your Children’s World	10
Overview: Why Understanding Your Children’s World Matters	10
Their World Impacts Them Profoundly	10
You Can Only Help Them on the Field as a Coach, Not in the Bleachers as a Spectator	11
What A Youth-enized Father Is	11
A Youth-enized Dad Thinks Young	11
A Youth-enized Dad Is Truly “There” for His Child	12
A Youth-enized Dad Understands What Is Influencing His Child	12
A Youth-enized Dad Gets Involved	13
A Youth-enized Dad Believes In His Children	14
Key Action Steps	15
Chapter 2: A Father for Life...for Life	17
The Purpose of Being a Dad	17
The Length of Time You are a Dad	18
Chapter 3: The Brand Called YOU – Being the Kind of Dad Only You Can Be	19
The Brand Called YOU – and Why It Matters	19
Your Brand Is a Promise to Deliver	19
Key Action Step: Position Your Brand Well	20
Chapter 4: Your Goals as a Dad - The 40 Strengths Kids Need Today	23
Overview: The Search Institute Developmental Assets	23
Other Things to Teach Your Children	26
Key Action Steps	27
Section One Practice and Preparation	29
Exercises for Chapter One	29
How Youth-enized are you?	29
My Youth-enization Action Plan	29
Exercise for Chapter Two: Are You a Father for Life?	30
Exercise for Chapter Three: Your Father Brand	30
Exercise for Chapter Four: The 40 Assets	31
SECTION II: The 6 “C’s” of Being a Star Dad	33
Chapter 5: Copying – They’re Watching!	34
Why It Matters	34
The Components of Copying	34
Kids Observe Your Behavior	35
Kids Interpret Your Behavior	36
Kids Mentally Rehearse the Behaviors They Learn from You	37
Kids Imitate Your Behavior (In Their Own Way)	37
Intentional Copying – Being a Good Coach	37
Key Action Steps: How Copy-able Are You?	37

Practice and Preparation Time _____	39
Your Negative Influences _____	39
Your Positive Influences _____	39
Going Deeper: Identify Your Inter-Generational Patterns _____	39
Chapter 6: Communication, Part 1 – How to Listen so Your Kids Will Talk _____	41
Overview: Why Communication Matters _____	41
Questions to Ask Yourself _____	42
What to Listen For: A Crash Course in Psychology _____	43
The Case of the Girl with the Boyfriend _____	43
What This Means for You as a Father _____	46
How to Listen – The Four Components _____	52
Evoke Your Child’s Story _____	52
Encourage: Getting the Story Fully Told _____	54
Clarify: Make Sure You Both Understand the Real Story _____	56
Respond Appropriately _____	59
Some General Listening Tips _____	59
Key Action Steps _____	61
Practice and Preparation Time _____	63
Evoking the Story _____	63
Encouraging the Whole Story _____	63
Clarify _____	63
Respond _____	65
Role Play _____	65
Chapter 7: Communication, Part 2 - How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen _____	66
Overview: Why Talking To Your Kids Matters _____	66
What to Avoid When Talking with Your Kids _____	66
Barriers to Your Children Wanting to Listen to You _____	66
What to Avoid _____	67
The Components of Good Daddy Talk _____	67
The Right Time: What a Difference a Day Can Make _____	68
The Right Tactics: Knowing What You Need to Accomplish _____	69
The Right Temperature: Making Your Tone Match Your Tactics _____	70
The Right Talk: Picking Your Words Carefully _____	70
15 Crucial Communication Situations and How to Talk About Them With Your Kids _____	72
Questions to Ask Fathers _____	72
Key Action Steps _____	73
Practice and Preparation _____	75
Right Time _____	75
Right Tactics _____	75
Right Temperature _____	76
Right Talk _____	76
Go Do It! _____	76
Chapter 8: Closeness – The Power of Love, Attention and Affection _____	77
Improving the Parent-Child Relationship Through Understanding and Affection _____	77
The Components of Closeness _____	78
Physical Closeness – The Power of Presence and Touch _____	79
Emotional Closeness – The Power of Affection _____	80
Mental Closeness – Knowing the Thought World of Your Child _____	81
Cultural Closeness: Knowing and Accepting Your Child’s Music and Other Tastes _____	83
Key Action Steps _____	83
Practice and Preparation Time _____	84

Physical Closeness	84
Emotional Closeness	84
Chapter 9: Coaching –Positive Discipline and the Domino Effect	87
Overview: Why Coaching Matters	88
It Helps Kids Learn About the Real World	88
It Helps Kids Become Self-Disciplined Through Internalization	89
The Components of Coaching	91
Communicate Your Standards, Rules, and Expectations	92
Teach Strategies for Meeting Your Expectations	92
Check Up – Learn to Monitor Your Child’s Behavior Constantly	96
Correct Them to Help Them Learn	97
Correct with Love	97
Correction Strategies – Using Positive Discipline Techniques	98
Key Action Steps	100
Practice and Preparation Time	101
Warm-Up Activity	101
Rule Style	101
Making a Contract	102
Strategies	103
Positive Discipline Approaches	103
Chapter 10: Co-Parenting - Working Together to Raise Healthy Children	104
The Need for Co-Parenting, Regardless of Relationship Status	104
The Power of Two: Putting the Pieces Together...Together	104
The Components of Co-Parenting	105
Communicating with Your Co-Parent	106
Cooperating with Your Co-Parent	108
Collaborating with Your Co-Parent	108
Continuing with Your Co-Parent	110
Some Things to Re member About Co-Parenting	111
Co-Parenting for the Good of the Children	111
Who’s Parenting Whom?	111
Co-Parenting and Location	111
The Barriers to Co-Parenting	112
Relationship/Family Barriers	112
Legal Barriers	113
Hostility Barrier	115
Lack of Trust Barrier	116
Incarceration (Jail) Barrier	116
Child or Partner Manipulation Barrier	117
Breaking Through to Co-Parenting	118
The 10 Commandments of Co-Parenting	118
Key Action Steps	119
Practice and Preparation Time	122
Chapter 11: Commitment – Giving Time a Chance	123
Why Commitment Matters: The Power of Time	123
The Components of Commitment	124
Give Regular, Quality, Sufficient Time	124
Give Them Your Real Thoughts and Feelings	126
Give Your Resources	128
Give the Willingness to Change: Self-Growth as a Form of Commitment	129
Key Action Steps	130

Practice and Preparation Time	130
Section IV: Conclusion and Next Steps	131
Bibliography	132

SECTION I: Who Young People Are and What They Need



Chapter 1: Becoming Youth-enized

Understanding Your Child's World

We are going to give you very specific insights and skills in this book for being a good father, skills that have been demonstrated to be most effective in raising great kids. But in this chapter we are going to first issue a call to arms. We freely admit that we are going to start with *preaching* rather than *skill-building*. **We make no apologies for calling you as a father to become youth-enized!**

OVERVIEW: WHY UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILDREN'S WORLD MATTERS

Our youth, believe it or not, are in their own world. Don't be disappointed if we tell you that **either you are not in their world or you are not a priority in their world.**

Understanding the world of youth is being able to place yourself in their shoes, place yourself in their thinking and in all that is important to them. If you want to know what failure is like (and we don't think that you do) then know this: when it comes to our youth, if you continue to be overly focused on you, your stuff, your problems, your issues, your frustrations, your financial woes, your trouble(s) - even if you have plenty of them all - you will lose your children one way or another.

Their World Impacts Them Profoundly

Understanding the world of young people must start with the parents. The reason being is that much of who they are and what they become is directly and indirectly a result of both what is going on inside them and what is going on in the home, in their school, and in their peer culture.



When you are trying to help them change and grow, you have to know what impact each of these forces is having on them so you know what to target with the six skillsets (the "C's" we will be teaching you in this book.)

You Can Only Help Them on the Field as a Coach, Not in the Bleachers as a Spectator

Also, as a father you can no longer get to know your child through the hard work of others (their momma, other family members, school teachers, coaches and their accomplishments). For you as a dad, that could very well end up being too late for you and your child.

You must make it your point, dad, to enter their world by going into it, not just looking at it or them from a distance (see Chapter 10 on Coaching where we talk about checking up on your children for another angle on this). This chapter is about you going in and not being an observer or onlooker. Your children do not need a dad who is looking from the outside in but a father who is “in it to win it”, guiding, coaching, correcting, teaching, providing, and opening up the doors and opportunities that are ahead of them.

Children need their father’s involvement. You will take them so much further if you make an early commitment to be involved in their world. And, as an added benefit, know that you will gain much more for your own life if you are on the field with them as coach rather than in the bleachers as a spectator.

WHAT A YOUTH-ENIZED FATHER IS

In order to father/parent or co-parent your children and our youth of today and to engage in their lives, you must become “youth-enized”. Youth-enized parents have some key characteristics:

They know the value of putting in. Putting in:

- The **T**eaching,
- The **T**raining,
- The **T**ime,
- The **T**alking, and
- Being **T**here for young people.


Youth-enized dads do this so that they can get close enough to their children to influence what they do in life and get out of life.

A Youth-enized Dad Thinks Young


You have to begin to **think young** even if you are not young. You may ask the question why? Simply because thinking young is the only way that you are going to really get into the mind of today’s young people. You have to think their thoughts and go back to the way you thought in your younger days (but update your thinking to today’s reality to make it really work).


How to Know Your Kids See You as Youth-enized?

Do they go out of their way to speak to you? 

Do they look forward to seeing you & being around you? 

Do they tell their friends about you & talk about you? 

Do they want you to be at special events in their life? 

Do they repeat and remember the things that you say? 

Do they tell you what is going on in their world? 

(No one is asking you to be 15 again but you know what **you** did at 15 and you know the life. Now bring it up to today and you will see some things that you were not seeing before dad. Did you get that?)

In other words, to be effective and impactful as a father, you must think the way that your son or daughter is thinking (but not forget the fact that you are the parent and not their childhood friend.) Let's be clear, no one is literally asking you to do the impossible – be a teenager again. But you can be asked and you will be asked to **think like they think and to remember the way you used to think in the past**, so that you can understand them and their world of today.

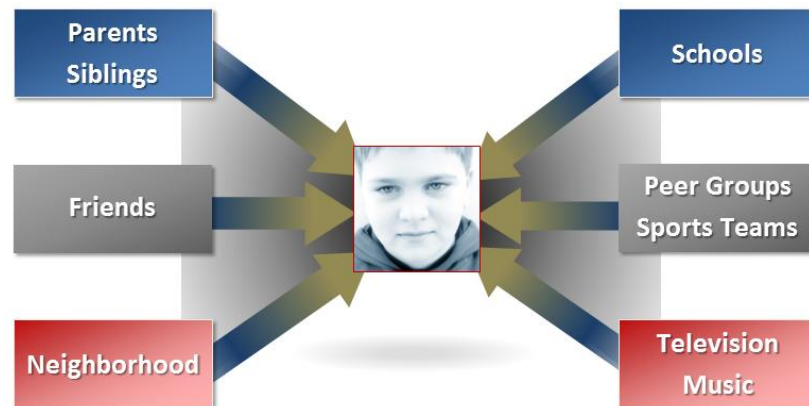
A Youth-enized Dad Is Truly “There” for His Child

As a father, getting to know your child is just as vital (as you already know). The question is not, “Should I” as a father do this or do that to get to know and be a part of my child's life but “I must” be a parental **stakeholder**, **stable** father and **supporter** of all that my child is, does, and will do in this life.

We must stay close to our children in a way that lets them know that we are here, and wherever they need us to be for them—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, recreationally, socially and otherwise. We keep being there for them until even *they* know that they can count on us. Chapter 8: Closeness shows the four areas where getting close to your kids is important—and that includes getting to know them.

A Youth-enized Dad Understands What Is Influencing His Child

You become youth-enized when you understand many of the influences and pressures that our young people are faced with day in and day out from school to the streets.



Young people are greatly influenced by so many people and so many things such as:

- Divorce in their family that they still don't understand and is still continuing to affect them;
- Other forms of brokenness in their families;
- Misguided peers and peer pressure;

- Drugs (Some youth literally see drugs as how their parents coped with their problems or what they think they need to do or must do to cope with their own. See Chapter 5: Copying for the impact of parental examples);
- Entertainers such as rappers and the Hip Hop world (artists are often big role models for your children);
- Music and the arts themselves (lyrics and visuals such as music videos over time do have an impact on youth);
- Professional athletes (they also can be big role models for your children);
- Comedians; and
- Gangs and crime... all to name a few of the forces that greatly affect your children.

Taken together, the effect of all these influences can be powerful, leading to all kinds of risk factors such as no motivation for education or accomplishing much at all. As a Youth-enized Dad, you will come to understand the **where** are our young people mentally and **what** are we doing to get on their pages with them so that we can love them, help them and direct them in the positive venues of life.

Understanding their world has a lot to do with raising, mentoring and developing them. We cannot lose sight of developing and mentoring our young people. The community, the village and society in general are losing much of the needed focus.

- Some see it and some don't
- Some do it and some won't
- Some want to but just don't know how to engage our young people through Youth-e-nization. But you can be the dad that makes the difference and makes that mark of serious, solid and longlasting impression on your child.

A Youth-enized Dad Gets Involved

We cannot sit back idle any longer and give the streets, misguided friends and unfamili-a-nized community (meaning unlike the communities of the past that were more engaged with our children, even if they weren't their's by blood) all the blame for their destruction. It is time for us dads, working with our children's mothers, the rest of the family, the courts, the church, community agencies and government to appropriate the unified power that will bring about change. This is why in Delaware we have the Delaware Fatherhood & Family Coalition, a statewide coalition of parents, agencies, grassroots groups, churches and other faith-based organizations, and state government officials, all working together to support fathers' involvement in the lives of our children.



We cannot afford to ignore our youth. When we ignore them, both the family and community are affected: It's like sin and leaven, they spread. We must impact our community by providing it with strong and knowledgeable young people; youth that fathers and mothers, parents in general, teachers and coaches want to smile upon.

A Youth-enized Dad Believes In His Children

Finally, a Youth-nized Dad believes in his child's ability and potential. Ability now, potential for the future. We must not see our children, especially our teens, as just passive recipients of our love and care. We must see them as having the capacity to get involved and help make the world a better place. We must have high expectations of what our children can accomplish...not just in the future, but even right now.



When you see your daughter always telling her friends what to do, that should tell you that she is already exercising her **leadership and managerial skills**. When you see your son fight hard every time to win video games on the computer or smart phone over all of his friends, then you know that he believes in having or maintaining his **competitive edge**. As a parent, you get to see that first but you also get to be the first to do something with it. You, dad, have the right and the responsibility to understand their thoughts and behaviors and nurture them in a good direction.

There are many examples that can show us the power demonstrated through youth. Young adults and teenagers have been living examples for years in this country. Look at a young Abraham Lincoln, a young Thurgood Marshall, a (relatively) young Bill Gates, a young Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a young Jesse Owens, a young Daniel Webster, a young Babe Ruth, a young Jesse Jackson, a young Andrew Young, and even a young President Barack Obama. A careful look at their lives will reveal that at some point “a lightbulb went on” and they began to see their own potential for doing something great with their lives.

Consider them living proof and testimonies of what can be done in your child's life with the right fathering, mothering, educating and other supports. Instead of pushing our youth aside or making statements about our young people as the youth of tomorrow, do the following:

1. Teach and educate them today.
2. Train and develop them today.

3. Win them to your side today.
4. Expose them to things that they never thought possible today
5. Give them leadership and love today.
6. Help them to be responsible and accountable for the little things now (it pays off later)
7. Remind them that they are fearfully and wonderfully made.
8. Tell them that they are the youth of today not tomorrow.

Our youth need to know that they are somebody—*today!*

As the father/dad you have been given an opportunity that no other person on this earth has via birth and blood – the first-hand ability, capability to nurture what you know or think you see about his or her strengths. Over time, as illustrated below, you will see your efforts pay off.

KEY ACTION STEPS

Assess Yourself – How Youth-enized Do Your Kids See You?

Take a hard look at yourself and see how youth-enized you are. Here's some quick indicators (but talking about this with your children is the best way to discover how they see you).

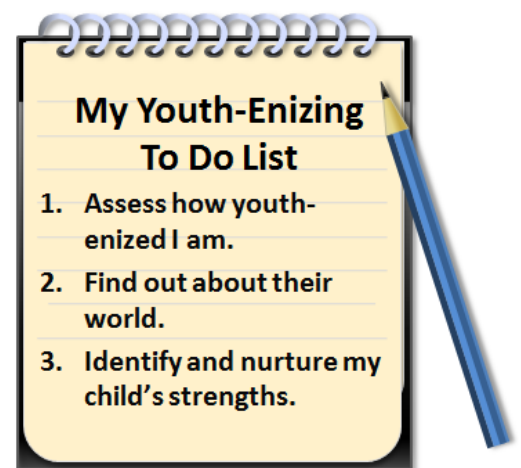
Find Out What Is Going On in Their World

Make it a point to discover what is going on in your child's world and what he/she feels about:

1. Toys
2. Games
3. Cell phones (smart phones)
4. Mp3 players
5. Computers (desktops or laptops)
6. Ipads
7. Sports or sport support (cheerleaders, helpers, student managers)
8. Websites (parentally & non-parentally controlled)
9. Making money quick, fast and in a hurry
10. Drugs
11. Youthful relationships with future implications
12. Friendships
13. Hurts & disappointments
14. Frustrations & worry
15. Gangs, criminal thoughts & activities
16. New and modern day kinds of peer pressures

Nurture Your Child's Strengths

When you begin to see (or think you see) strengths that your child has, become invaluable to them with the following steps:



1. Don't take it lightly
2. Continue to watch and listen on a regular basis
3. Study as much as you can about what looks like may be or might be possibilities for your child
4. Discuss with your spouse or child's mother what you've seen and heard. Co-parent instead of no parenting or half parenting.
5. Partner together to bring out the best in your child
6. Consider placing your child in a school or a program that can help him or her to develop the possibilities
7. Don't be afraid to make a shift or change as he or she grows older into their teenage years
8. Be prepared for a conversation at some point that might support or make adjustments to what you saw and heard. This may come to you directly out of the mouth of your child.
9. Understand early that your children are all different even though they may have come from the same mom and dad. This means they will develop differently too.

Start now, not tomorrow! Daddy your boys and your girls need you.



This chapter discusses some of the dynamics of youth today. But to further understand how to work with youth, go to our Project Manhood website and click on the youth section:

www.ProjectManhood.com/OurYouth

It's a great section for anyone who works with youth, especially boys. You'll also find links to other great websites focused on young people.

Chapter Left Blank

To order this book:

www.projectmanhood.com

SECTION II:

Understanding Yourself as a Father

Understanding what makes fathers different from mothers, and how men can make a unique and vital contribution to the lives of kids.

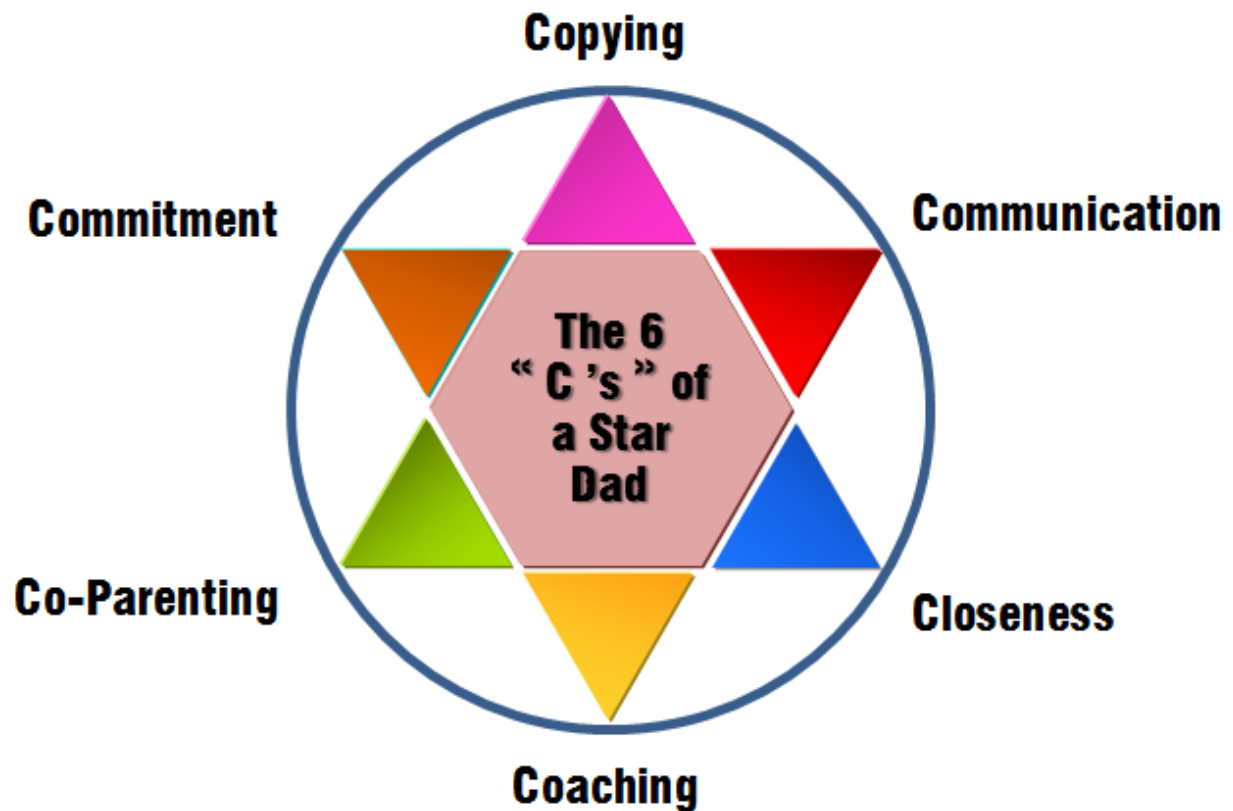


Chapters Left Blank

To order this book:
www.projectmanhood.com

SECTION III:

The 6 “C’s” of Being a Star Dad



Chapters Left Blank

To order this book:

www.projectmanhood.com



OVERVIEW: WHY TALKING TO YOUR KIDS MATTERS

Yes, talking to your kids matters but how you do it, when you do it, the reasons for doing it and the results of it should matter too.

Would you believe that a lot of fathers either don't talk or like to hear themselves talk but no one in the family is really listening? Our goal in this book is to teach you and give you the kind of skills that are tried and proven and that really work when it comes to talking to your kids and then to have the satisfaction of knowing that they are truly listening.

We really believe in "Daddy Communication" or what we also call "Daddy Talk". When dads communicate effectively then the whole family gets what is needed and does what benefits the whole family. When dad is not in the communication picture then it is lopsided for sure and creates a whole new set of problems.

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR KIDS

Barriers to Your Children Wanting to Listen to You

From our work with youth, we have found that all kinds of things can create barriers to a child's desire or ability to hear what you have to say. Once your child is older or an adult you will know how well they wanted to hear you talk by what they say now that they are older. Don't be shocked if you hear some of the thoughts and feelings we've heard from youth like, "Dad every time you asked me to come in the room because you wanted to talk to me I:

- Was scared.
- Was afraid.
- Was nervous.
- Was ready to laugh at you again.
- Didn't want to hear you because all you did was repeat yourself over and over again.
- Was sleepy and your voice made me tiresome.
- Knew you would just make me angry.
- Respected you enough to fake listening.
- Cried because you hurt me so much with what you continued to say to me about me."

Quite a list, huh? Something to think about.

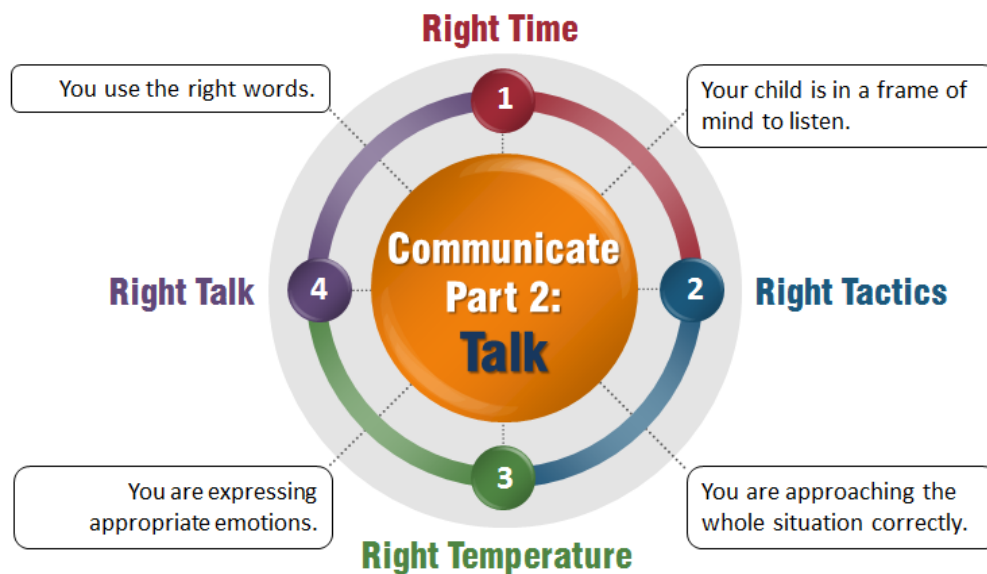
What to Avoid

In the light of the list above, avoid:

1. Making your child angry without good cause;
2. Having an attitude when you are trying to get your child's attention;
3. Trying to talk to your child right after he or she has had a bad game or after a loss of a sport's game
4. Being insensitive to anything or everything that they may be going through at the moment that you want to talk;
5. Missing the signs from your child that say: *Not now, please wait, I'm hurting, I'm going through something emotional and I thought you could tell by now;*
6. Not seeing when they are taking mental breaks;
7. Talking right in the middle of a homework assignment;
8. Yelling and screaming at the top of your lungs – especially if everyone is already listening to you;
9. Wanting to talk when they are already engaged in a conversation that to them is important; (of course to you at that time it is not); and
10. Talking just to hear yourself talk.

THE COMPONENTS OF GOOD DADDY TALK

If you really want to talk to your child effectively, think in terms of getting four things right:



1

Right Time

You BOTH have to be in the right frame of mind and there have to be no crippling distractions.

The Right Time: What a Difference a Day Can Make

As a father believe it or not your children already want to hear from you because you are already important to them. Don't monster your way into being able to talk because as the Dad you already have a platform to communicate!

However, to us dads an opportunity to talk is an opportunity to talk no matter when or where it is or how it is set up. But it is not enough to start a conversation with your child but to engage your child in such a way that the child wants to listen to what is being said by his or her father.

Darrell's Story

I remember for each of my four children (that all played basketball) that as their father I used to continually mess up because I always wanted to talk right after a horrible basketball game. I wanted to tell them what went wrong, what they could have done better and then encourage them at the same time.

It didn't take long before each one of them with their faces, attitude and respectfully walking away and then telling or saying to me, "Dad, do we have to talk about this right now". "Do we have to talk about this right after the game." "Can't this wait until tomorrow or some other time".

And even though I did not want to wait, I quickly learned that there was a time for dad to talk and their was a time for dad to leave it along until.

And if your child is not in the right frame of mind, he or she won't really hear you no matter how well you express what you have to say. Or if he or she is in the middle of homework or watching a game (or if you are) or something else that may distract from the conversation, it is not a good time. **Note:** Sometimes it IS a good idea to talk to a child (especially boys) while engaged in an activity with them like playing a game or watching a game. The setting helps relax the atmosphere and puts the child into the right frame of mind. You just have to know your child.

The Right Tactics: Knowing What You Need to Accomplish

Consider this situation. Your child is not keeping his room anywhere near clean enough on a regular basis. The question is, why?



Does your child lack either **will** or **skill** to do what you want him to do? If he/she lacks the will (the motivation), then you have to **help him or her get motivated** using any one of a number of tactics. If he/she lacks the skill (for example, doesn't have good time management skills and ends up taking up too much time doing other things) then you have to **teach the necessary skills**. Of course if he or she is motivated and has the skills to pull it off, then sit back and enjoy your kid getting the job done!

Going into tactics in detail is beyond the scope of this book, because now we are discussing child-rearing strategies and dealing with problem behaviors. But we just want to point out that part of what you have to decide when you are planning to talk with your child about something is what is going on (the cause) and what will help make it right (your strategy, approach or what we are calling your Tactics).

Of course, you may not be dealing with a *problem*. You may just want to get close to your child (a goal), or decide on where to go for his birthday (an activity decision), or some other non-complicated situation. Then your Tactics will be simple to decide on. **But you will still need SOME kind of strategy for approaching the situation**, whatever it is.

3

Right Temperature

You have to express the appropriate emotions for the situation.

The Right Temperature: Making Your Tone Match Your Tactics

This 3rd component is a simple one to grasp, but a harder one to implement. It means watch the emotions you communicate when you are talking with your children and making sure they are what should really be communicated in this situation.

You can't be trying to get your child to want to talk with you (a Tactic) but then give off a lot of anger ("What the heck is wrong with you, kid??? Talk to me!"). The tone doesn't match the chosen Tactic. If you want to communicate love and concern (a Tactic), then don't sound disinterested. You get the point. As we said, this concept is easy to grasp.

4

Right Talk

The very words you use are critical.

The Right Talk: Picking Your Words Carefully

The final component of good Daddy Talk is using words that will get the job done. What job? The job you decided on in selecting your Tactics. Remember always what your objective is and your strategy (tactics) for getting there. Here are a few key principles for using the right words:

The Right Talk is Clear

Dads talk to your children but know what you are going to say. Spend time with yourself and some times even rehearsing it before you say it or talk it or communicate it. It could save you some embarrassment and unhealthy reactions to your miscommunication for sure.

The Right Talk is Concise

Usually we men don't have trouble with this one. We tend to cut to the chase, so you will probably have this one covered.

But conciseness isn't just about the number of words. It is also about focusing on the core issues and leaving other stuff for later. Don't bring up everything in one conversation. Remember your Tactics (your approach or strategy) and don't use words that can get you off your chosen Tactic.

Bad Example:

Let's say you have decided to bring up your child not picking up after himself and keeping his room clean. You've decided as your Tactic that you are going to focus on his time management skills so that he doesn't run out of time and decide he can't clean up. Then you say something like this:

“Javier, I’ve told you time and time again to clean up your room before you go to bed. (So far not too bad, just a little edgy with that “time and time again” phrase, but it could work to let him know you are getting quite fed up.) You can’t fool around and act stupid all the time and then tell me you don’t have time to clean up. (Uh oh, that “stupid” word is going down the wrong path. It brings in intelligence rather than time management skills.) You’re so lazy and irresponsible. That’s why you are failing school, (uh, what is school doing in here?) and LOOK AT ME when I’m talking to you or I’ll beat you to the ground. Don’t you dare disrespect me!”

By the end of this communication, what is the son focused on? His time management skills? Don’t think so! He has correctly determined that your primary upset is on him not looking at you, which has nothing to do with time management. You are way off track. This is NOT concise talk! Too many issues being addressed at once. And with the wrong Temperature also.

The Right Talk is Concrete

All too often, people talking to one another use generalities like:

- *“You always...”*
- *“You never...”*
- *“You aren’t...(and then comes a character trait like “respectful,” “responsible,” or “wise”).*

Rather than use those kinds of general terms, point to concrete situations and concrete behaviors.

- *“Whenever Jason comes around, you forget our rules about doing homework first and you start playing with him. As I’ve said many times, you need to either send him back home or tell him you have to finish your homework first and then you can play.”*
- *“When you talk to me using curse words or street talk, you are disrespecting me as your father and I cannot allow that. You will have to change your language or you will be in trouble.”*
- *“I like it when you pick up after yourself without me having to remind you. It makes me feel you know what being a responsible person is. You just have to remember to do that everytime you drop something or every night before you go to bed, okay?”*

Notice in the examples above, there is a **situation** mentioned and a **behavior** described. When you do those two things (behavior and situation) THEN you can draw some general conclusions if need be.

15 CRUCIAL COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS AND HOW TO TALK ABOUT THEM WITH YOUR KIDS

In our experience with fathers, we have noticed 15 situations that usually require a father's sensitive and competent response. In our full guidebook, *What to Say When*, we give you all the details of what's going on in each of these 15 situations, the tactics to use, and even exact words you can say. But the situations you will almost certainly face and need to have good communication skills are:

1. When You Know You Have Not Been There For Your Children
2. When You and Your Baby's Momma Don't Get Along
3. When You Want to Spend More Time With Your Child But Can't
4. When Your Children Are Asking to See You and Their Mother Gives You a Hard Time
5. When You Live in a Different State than Your Children (You are still never too far away!)
6. When Your Child Refuses to Respect You
7. When Your Child Doesn't Want to Talk to You
8. When Your Child Needs Help With Multiple Things
9. When You Have to Deal with Your Child's Step-Father, Mother's Husband or Mother's Boyfriend
10. When You Don't Have a Job but Everyone Wants Money from You
11. When You Know Your Children Are Using Drugs
12. When You Know That Your Child Has Anger Issues
13. When Your Children Don't Want To Deal with Their Reality
14. When Your Child Has to Deal With Death in the Family
15. When Your Child Needs Discipline

QUESTIONS TO ASK FATHERS

Finally, let us ask you a few questions on behalf of your children:

1. Do you want to talk so that your children will listen or do you just want to be heard because you think that what you are saying is so important?
2. When is the last time that you talked to your child and your child gave you their undivided attention without you saying or doing anything extra?
3. If what you have to say is as important as you think it is?
4. Have you ever really looked at everyone's face when you talk? Do they honestly look interested?
5. Has any of your children ever said, dad, dad, dad don't stop please I want to hear some more?
6. Have you ever been told that you were appreciated for all that you just said?
7. Does your wife or child's mother tell you how much your talking to the child does so much for the child?
8. Do you think before you speak or do you just let it out?

9. Have you put together a plan? What are you going to say to your child about whatever you intend to talk about?
10. Do you have a support group of fathers and you dialogue about what you say to your child and how it turned out? The results or the learning experiences from it.
11. Did your father talk to you a lot?
12. What did it feel like every time your father talked to you?
13. Who taught you how to talk to your child?
14. What makes you want to talk to your child? Like what is your motivation?
15. Is talking to your child going to make things better for you or for your child or both?
16. Have you eve asked your child, what they get from the conversations that you have with him or her?
17. Do you know how to switch gears from the little child that you use to talk to to the teenage child? The young adult child? The adult child?
18. Do you think that you have earned the right to talk to your child or that you should do it *just because* you are the dad?

KEY ACTION STEPS

Make a Daily Action List

It helps to keep a few key things in mind to remind you of what you have to do with your kids. Here's some suggestions:

1. I will listen first to other fathers and the stories about their children so that I can have a history to go by.
2. I will only talk when I have something to say important, helpful and healthy for my family, my spouse or my child and me included.
3. I will commit to talking in ways that will encourage, build up and help my child and not live in the world of negativism.
4. I will not be afraid to ask my wife and my child do they enjoy hearing me talk or do they just tolerate me.
5. I will began to practice Daddy Communication techniques and skills from this day forward.

Note: If necessary, you may need to include some items to **avoid** (if there are habits you need to break).

Ask Your Children for Suggestions

Feel free to ask your children (especially older children) what would help improve the communication between you. They may not tell you at first, but eventually they will throw something out to see how you react and if you follow through. So...tell them you'll think about it, thank them for sharing, and then follow through!



Get Mom Involved

In this society it is super true that “Two Heads Are Better Than One” because children need both parents as you will learn in our chapter on Co-Parenting. If you want to be a super or star dad then, let mom give what she has to give and you give what you have to give and sit back and watch what both are able to bring to the table together. You do that by talking things over first with your child’s mother and agreeing on the Tactics. She may even have some advice about the Talk (the words to use) or the Timing, especially if you don’t live with your child.



Because this is such a big topic—too much to fully cover in this book—we have created a separate, detailed guide to help you talk to your kids when dealing with 15 of the most common situations fathers and children face. It’s called:

“What to Say When: A Father’s Guide to Powerful Communication with Your Children”

You can download it from the Project Manhood website if you don’t already have it:

www.ProjectManhood.com

Chapters Left Blank

To order this book:
www.projectmanhood.com