

Be a Vulnerable Father

A group of fathers talked in a casual setting a short time ago. It occurred to me that the topic of their children was a difficult one for these fathers to talk about.

This group of fathers could bring up child rearing in a more general way but stopped short of talking about specific family members or about how hard raising kids can be.

This group was much more comfortable talking about the business climate, athletics, or something from our nation's news. When the subject of family came up and it got a bit too intimate the subject was shifted to something more "masculine."

This hesitancy of fathers to talk about their children with other men is a common theme. It's an important theme because this same hesitancy may prevent you from having closer relationships with your kids. What's behind the hesitancy to talk about your kids with other men or fathers?

Men aren't crazy about being vulnerable. Men are strong and capable, not vulnerable.

Yet so much of being an effective father is to open up your heart and to be vulnerable.

Here are some things that will demand some vulnerability from fathers:

- To admit to other men that you're having a difficult time with one of your children.
- To ask for help from someone else around a parenting issue.
- To allow your kids to teach you new things.
- To say that you screwed up and to sincerely apologize.

- To admit that you feel lost at times as a father.

These are all things that take courage, and these are all things that will benefit you as a father and will benefit your kids as well. Most fathers that I know would say that their families are the most important thing in the world to them.

Why then is it still so rare for many fathers to talk about their families with other men?

Let's hope that fathers across the country will have the courage to begin the dialogue about their families and to have the willingness to be vulnerable. Let's hope that fathers will learn to get past the fear that they are weak or incapable if they are struggling in their family life.

If fathers can get past this fear of weakness they will learn that they can strengthen themselves and their families in significant ways.

Here are some action steps for increased effectiveness:

- Make it a point in a conversation with another father to bring up a problem you're having with a family member. Ask for advice or support from this person.
- Ask your wife or someone close to you if there are ways in which you could be more open, honest, or genuine with your children.
- When you do mess up, say you're sorry and mean it.
- Ask your child or children to teach you something that they know how to do and that you don't. Put yourself in the position of a beginner.
- Form a group of fathers to talk about your families and to get support for them.

- Share your feelings with your children in an age-appropriate manner. Let them know that you're available when they'd like to share their feelings.

As discussed in the previous chapter, your relationship with your own father will have a big impact on how effectively you father your own children. Men who feel that they have been fully accepted by their fathers tend to be more ready to allow themselves to be vulnerable with their kids and with others.

Those men who don't feel accepted by their fathers will often need to protect themselves from being more open. The pain of not being fully accepted by their father keeps these men from taking the risks that can provide great benefits to both them and their kids.

These men stay safe emotionally but never taste the deep passion and love that can come from being a vulnerable and connected father.

This more open and vulnerable way of being with your kids may start for you with a different kind of conversation with another father. It may start with an exploration of how you stay "safe" in your relationships with family members. Or it may start in your willingness to place yourself in the role of a beginner while you are taught by your children.

The only way that it will ever change, however, is through courageous action.

Be the kind of father who allows their kids to see what being "open" looks like.

Dropping the armor and being more vulnerable will be a lot less terrifying and a lot more effective than you think.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers"
<http://www.markbrandenburg.com/father.htm>

For more great tips and action steps for fathers,
sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, “Dads,
Don’t Fix Your Kids,” at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>.