

Being The Father Your Child Needs You To Be

Fathers are important to their children throughout the life cycle. In a recent study of fathers and sons, the 17- and 18-year-old men who were surveyed described how at age 13 to 14 an age well documented as a critical stage of identity development, their fathers suddenly took center stage in their lives. In an effort to forge this new relationship, these young men began to observe their fathers closely, watching their routines, their habits, how they related to women, how they handled success and failure, and so forth.



They also paid close attention to how their fathers treated their relationships, asking the questions "Does he care about me? Does he like who I am?" Although the young men in the study said they rarely initiated such conversations, almost all of them indicated a strong desire to talk with their fathers about feelings and real-life issues.

They wanted **fathers who can know and be known**. All children need a father figure who **knows** their interests, what they are doing in school, who their friends are, what scares them, etc. They also need a father who can **be known**.

Being known means sharing your story. It means having the courage to show your flaws, fears, and joys. This is not to say one should overburden a child with inappropriate revelations; rather, it's about giving your child the gift of knowing who you are and what you feel. **Being known** requires vulnerability. As adults, we need to remember that vulnerability is what breeds intimacy in all of our relationships. Your **being known** by your children helps them develop a healthy sense of self and feel safe.

As an educational consultant to schools and director of a public television documentary about fatherhood, **All Men Are Sons**, I speak to young people (and parents) throughout the country about their relationships with their fathers. At the end of each presentation, I ask the students to write down two things they've always wanted to ask their fathers but never have. Consistently, the top two responses have been "What was your [the father's] relationship like with your father?" and "What was your childhood like?" Though they may not ask, children want and need their fathers' stories.

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National PTA – Our Children, March 2004