

Active Fathers Plant Life-Changing Seeds

On average, fathers spend 6.5 hours per week caring for their children. That's good news for kids because researchers and parenting experts say any time a father spends with his children is time well spent.

"Children feel most safe and secure when they have the love and acceptance of both parents," says Michelle LaRowe, author of the book *A Mom's Ultimate Book of Lists: 100+ Lists to Save You Time, Money and Sanity*. "And children who have active and involved fathers tend to do better socially and academically and have less behavioral issues than those who don't."

Donnelle Johnson, 44, can attest to that.

Her father, Donald Painter, worked long hours, and his work took him away from the family's rural Oklahoma home for days at a time. But, Johnson says, that didn't keep her father from being a dad who spent quality time with his children.

"He would find ways to involve us in his life," says Johnson who attends Parker Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church in suburban Denver. "Sometimes he would even take us on his business trips."

Painter also instilled in his children a love for the great outdoors by annually taking them to Colorado. The vacations were cherished times, Johnson says, but the little things her father did at home to share his faith with his children had the greatest impact.

"If the church doors were open, we were there," she says. "Growing up, we always read the Bible and prayed together, too."

Aaron Cole, pastor of Life Church, an AG congregation in Germantown, Wisconsin, says one of the best ways for a father to pass his morals, values and faith on to his children is through actions.

“As a father, a man can’t have the God experiences for his children, but he can—through his life—lead them to theirs,” says Cole, 38. “That’s the role of a father: to enable and encourage his children to experience God for themselves.”

That’s a sentiment shared by Ted Cunningham, co-author of *As Long As We Both Shall Live*. He says fathers should be “intentional about the messages they are writing on their child’s heart.”

Johnson says the spiritual life lessons her father passed on to her siblings and to her were intentional and had staying power. Today, Johnson leads worship at the church she attends, and her siblings are both involved in ministry where they worship.

The role fathers play in their children’s lives is absolutely critical not only spiritually, but also emotionally, socially and academically, according to parenting experts.

As is the case with many fathers, 37-year-old John Kudrick leads a busy life. He balances his work as a book editor with family activities, helping care for his three children and church activities. Being intentional when it comes to spending time with his kids, he says, is paramount.

“I do my best to carve out some chunks of quality time each day with each of my kids,” says Kudrick, who lives in Level Green, Pennsylvania. “But I also look for ways to have daily highlights with them, whether it’s wrestling for a few minutes, playing a board game, drawing pictures or reading books with them.”

Recently, Kudrick took his youngest daughter for a walk at a

local park then to a diner for bagels and hot chocolate.

"My wife and I alternate weeks, so, with three kids, that means that every six weeks each of our kids will have gone out and done something one-on-one with Mommy and Daddy for some quality time," he says. "And the great thing is that it doesn't have to blow the budget."

Quality time and experiences with one's children, LaRowe says, don't have to be expensive.

"Too often parents get focused on entertaining, rather than engaging their children," LaRowe says. "It doesn't really matter what you do, just take an interest in what your child enjoys doing and spend time doing it together."

According to Suzanne M. Bianchi, John P. Robinson and Melissa A. Milkie, authors of the *Changing Rhythms of the American Family*, today's mothers and fathers are busier than parents of past decades yet they manage to spend as much or more time with their children as their predecessors did.

That's beneficial, even if the time comes in short bursts of attentiveness or quick words of encouragement. For example, research suggests that children whose fathers regularly ask how their day went and what they learned at school actually do better in school.

Time with their fathers also teaches boys how to interact with other men and how to properly treat women. For girls, time with their fathers can help set expectations on how they should be treated by males. Maybe even more important is that time spent with their fathers lets children know they are loved and cherished.

When children don't get the attention they crave from their fathers, LaRowe warns, they usually find other ways to get that attention.

“It’s important for fathers to realize that when they don’t spend quality time with their children, it often translates to the child feeling rejected,” she says. “Children may feel like they’re not important enough, not good enough or that they’re just not lovable enough to be around. When that happens, a child’s self-esteem and sense of self-worth can be shattered.”

LaRowe says that can cause boys to rebel against authority while girls might go looking for love in all the wrong places.

A couple of years ago, Johnson and her father hired a guide, a mule train and some horses for a two-week hunting expedition into the Rockies. Each morning they met at their campfire, read Scripture, discussed their faith and prayed before setting out to hunt.

Johnson says she learned something on that trip about her father that she had never considered. “My dad has never stopped being a dad,” she says.

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