

Fathers Can Excel, Even in Tough Situations

A while back, I was talking about *Championship Fathering* on a radio program. I told my stories about the importance of loving, coaching and modeling for your kids; encouraging other kids; and enlisting more dads to join the team.

After the program, a dad wrote to me and said, “How can someone be a ‘Championship Father’ when the system and the mother won’t let him?”

For a growing number of dads today, this dad’s question is the only one that matters, because they don’t have access to their kids; they don’t have opportunities to be the dads they want to be.

I don’t fully understand how dads feel when they’re shut out from the lives of their children, but I do hurt for them.

In today’s culture, it’s easy to lump all non-custodial dads together. We talk about custody battles and child support, and we forget that these are individual dads who love their children and are fighting for the chance to be involved fathers. That’s real, and it’s a tragic consequence of the divorce culture that we live in. The impact on children is even more tragic.

These dads already know there are no easy solutions, but they don’t give up calling attention to their challenges and the injustice they feel.

If you can relate to this situation, I hope you’ll keep reading, because I want to offer three pieces of encouragement that can apply to whatever fathering challenges you may be facing.

First, focus on your long-term commitment to your child. That will help to see you through daily ups and downs, or even major roadblocks to your fathering.

One dad we know was separated from his three school-aged kids by a very bitter divorce. Barred from direct contact with his kids, and faced with parental alienation, he remained steadfast in his attempts to connect with his children. His oldest daughter eventually sought contact and moved in with him when she was able to do so independently. Just a few months ago, after seven years of separation, his son expressed a desire to connect and re-establish a relationship.

No one wants to go through something like that, but some dads do, and an unwavering, steadfast commitment will be a huge factor in making the best of it.

Second, find ways to keep practicing the fundamentals of *Championship Fathering*. I do believe in the validity of the research behind loving, coaching and modeling, and I know they can make a difference for you. Every dad needs to soak these in, practice them, and make them part of his skill set. These fundamentals can be creatively applied to just about any situation.

Years ago, one dad worked on a submarine for 90 days at a time, and he had to cut off all communication. That was a huge fathering challenge. So ahead of time, he wrote postcards to his children for every day of his trip, then had a friend drop them in the mail every day. So his kids had messages just about every day from their dad, and they felt special that he thought enough to do that. He adjusted his fathering for his situation, and found ways to be effective despite his challenges.

So what about the dad who doesn't have access to his children because of divorce and his custody agreement? That dad will have to live out loving, coaching and modeling in different

ways from other dads.

For example, if loving the child's mother isn't part of the equation, that dad can at least work on respecting her, cooperating with her and giving his children access to other people who are modeling healthy relationships. Maybe the best coaching you do is through email and texts.

If you aren't able to be an *everyday* role model for your kids, keep doing what's right in your work and other areas of your life, and do all you can to stay positive with your kids. Trust that your high character and poise will make a difference in the long run, and that through the months and years your children will notice and appreciate how you carried yourself despite horrible circumstances.

Those are just a few examples. You may face a challenge of different a kind, and you can find ways to make the principles work. That goes for active duty dads, stepdads, dads who travel a lot, dads in prison, and so on. Loving an infant is much different from loving a 12-year-old. Coaching a daughter will likely require a different approach than involvement and insight with a son.

If you want more specific tips for applying loving, coaching and modeling, you'll find some on our website.

Finally, I encourage you to get together with other dads in your situation.

You may be a divorced dad, a single dad, an adoptive dad, stepdad or traveling dad. You may be very busy. I know there are dads out there, like me, who struggle in this area at times, trying to find a balance. Find a dad who's a step or two further along, and ask him, "What's working for you?" "What have you learned?" "What's the best way you show consistency for your children?"

Dad, no matter what, don't let frustration get the best of

you. Other dads in your situation have found ways to stay connected with their kids. You can do it too.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Write a letter to your child and share about a significant memory from your life and an important lesson you learned from it.
- Whatever situation you're in, communicate unconditional love and blessing to your child—through letters, emails or texts, or verbally. Say, “I love you for who you are, no matter what happens or how often we get to catch up with each other.” Tell him often that he's special to you.
- When you are with your kids, make as many deposits into their “emotional bank accounts” as you can, since time apart gradually drains that account. Read more on this.
- Are you denied access to your children? It may be that you could see them more by getting involved at their school. (Check out our WATCH . program for one great way to do this.)
- Does your child use social networking websites and apps? Join in and learn about those, and use them as a way to connect, especially when you're apart.
- If you're in a challenging fathering situation, try to maintain healthy routines with your kids—but also allow some flexibility. Be very understanding when they don't handle the challenges in the same way you do.

Help other dads by sharing. What adjustments have you made or creative solutions have you used to connect with your kids despite a challenging situation? Please join the discussion below or on 's Facebook page.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers to make the Championship Fathering Commitment. NCF believes that every

child needs a dad they can count on, and uses its resources to inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father figures their children need. Subscribe to his weekly email tip by clicking [here](#).

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