

How to Be a Good Dad Through Life's Ups and Downs

I have a good friend who's an assistant coach for an NFL team. Or, I should say, he *was* an assistant coach. He was let go a few weeks ago when the head coach for that team was fired.

He's a sharp young man, and I know he'll be fine. He told me, "It's not fun, but change is part of life. ... I've been blessed more than I deserve."

It might seem difficult for everyday dads to identify with an NFL coach, but believe me, those guys go through real-life issues and face fathering challenges just like the rest of us.

Like my friend said, change is part of life for all of us, and in the coming year, your family will experience some large or small changes. Some of them are related to your career or an important relationship, but many of them happen simply because change is inevitable with kids. It's part of being a parent.

There are first steps and the last day in diapers. Every year brings a first day of school with new teachers and a last day of school with an endless summer of opportunities ahead. Driver's licenses, dating privileges, graduations, choosing a college, enlisting in the military, engagements, weddings and babies are all life-altering transitions. I know a dad who recently adopted three children from overseas. For him and his wife, it has turned their world upside down.

So how do you stay on top of the ongoing changes of family life and carry yourself in a way that will leave a positive legacy for your children?

You probably can't stay ahead of the changes completely, but my first thought is that, as dads, transitions really should not take us by surprise. As our kids grow and change, we need

to be thinking ahead about what's coming down the road and prepare as best we can. Our kids need stability even in turbulent times, and a father has the privilege to give that to his greatest team, his family.

Being prepared can include talking with others, like other dads who've walked the path ahead of you. Get their best insights. Proactively plan with your children's mother, and benefit from her experiences and perspective.

With your children, the best way to prepare them is to help them develop habits and skills that will serve them well when the changes do come. At the top of that list is communication.

Specifically, work to become a more sensitive listener. How are your children handling the changes, what are their concerns, and what do they need from you? Ask open-ended questions, and then listen and watch.

Also, explain why change is necessary sometimes, and you can even admit that change is sometimes beyond your control.

And then, of course, give them lots of affirmation through words and actions. Make sure they know—without a doubt—that though some things may change, your love for them and acceptance of them will not change.

The stresses of life can push family members apart, but with our sensitive leadership, uncertainties and challenges can draw our families closer and make them stronger.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- During difficult transitions, help your children focus on something positive. Maybe plan a fun activity to help restore joy and a sense of continuity to the family.
- Invest energy in helping someone else—a great way to take your family's focus off of a current struggle or difficult adjustment.

- Another positive, proactive step would be to volunteer as a WatchDOG at your kids' school or a school in your neighborhood.
- Allow each family member to talk through whatever they're feeling through times of change.
- Meet regularly with other dads in a small group. Through the ups and downs of life, they'll keep you steady through encouragement, support, and accountability.

What other tips have you found valuable as a dad for life's transitions? Help other guys by posting your thoughts below.

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: ["Yes! I want tips on how to be a great dad who lives out loving, coaching and modeling for my children."](#)

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