

# Kids Say This Is the Best Way to Be a Better Dad

As is often the case, the most profound truths are pretty simple.

Every year we conduct essay contests in different areas of the country, where thousands of children write about “What my father means to me.” We always get priceless stories and comments, expressed as only kids can. The entire experience is truly heartwarming.

But today I want to pass on a challenge from these essays. Reading them, our staff couldn’t help noticing a common theme.

Typically, the kids describe some of the fun things they do with their dad, or how he demonstrates his love and dedication. Then, toward the end, they’ll add something like this: “If there’s one thing I wish was different with my dad, it would be that we spend more time together.” Or they’ll say, “I wish I could do more things with him.”

Now, these kids love their dads. And maybe we can say some of this is based on unrealistic hopes, like a child saying, “I wish I could live at Disneyland,” or, “I’d like to have ice cream for dinner every day.” Sometimes kids say those things.

But, if we’re honest, dads, most of us would have to admit that we could give our kids more of our time. I know I could.

We play a huge role in their lives, and the more time we spend with them, the more they benefit from our loving, coaching and modeling—using teachable moments, affirming their character, building a strong relationship, passing on our values and our faith ... all the great things that fathers do.

Clark Smith, one of our bloggers and a good friend of the

Center, provided this word picture: "Fathering is a pasture fenced with time. The size of the fence determines the size of the relationship. Increase your parenting time even a little and the relationship grows greatly. Nip a foot or two out of the fence and watch the pasture shrink."

That's another way of saying that time is a basic need for any good relationship. The amount of great activities and conversations and memories you share is directly related to how much time you spend together. Time with your children may or may not have immediate rewards for you, but you're building a legacy that will likely last for generations, minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour.

Please don't let this be a guilt trip. But couldn't we all pledge to be more aware of the time we're devoting to our children and make that a higher priority?

Build time with your kids into your schedule so it doesn't get squeezed out when other things come along. Plan those daddy-daughter dates and outings with your son. Get into routines that naturally bring you together over and over. They need your undivided attention.

Also, be intentional about one-on-one time with your kids. Schedule regular time alone with each one. Treat him to frozen yogurt, practice volleyball with her, or just go for a walk. Mix in a daddy-daughter date or an overnight trip every now and then. Carve out blocks of time regularly, and then make sure you're focused on your child and nothing else.

Dad, make sure that if your child ever writes something about you, his or her essay doesn't include the words, "I wish my dad could have spent more time with me."

What creative (or routine) ways do you use to make sure you're getting time with your children? Please help other dads by sharing your ideas either below.

## Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Do your children ever ask, “Daddy, can we ...?” Or, “Dad, do you want to ...?” Savor those opportunities, and make the most of them.
- Make the most of mealtimes, bedtimes, doing dishes, raking leaves or those minutes riding in the car with your kids. Have some stories, jokes or other interesting things to contribute to the time together.
- Invest some time to *watch* your child during a practice or rehearsal. (Your presence really does make a difference.) Afterward, ask questions about some things you noticed.
- If you can’t be with your child every day, send short texts or emails with words of encouragement or updates on what’s happening, or what you’re looking forward to doing with him soon.
- Sit with your child and let her talk about her day, without any interruptions, for five or ten minutes. Just listen. Then be ready to share if she asks about your day.

**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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