

Study: Commitment to Christianity Loses Importance in American Families

Most Americans believe good mothers and fathers must be loving, supportive and protecting, but few see the necessity of parents having a commitment to Christianity or religion, according to a recent survey.

LifeWay Research conducted a survey in March to gauge opinions of the expected roles of parents at a time when Americans typically begin giving thoughts toward Mother's Day and Father's Day.

According to the survey, "Loving" is the No. 1 characteristic deemed mandatory for mothers (85 percent) and fathers (79 percent). After "loving," four of the next five characteristics are shared, including "supporting," "protecting," "encouraging," and "involved."

"The consistency of what Americans expect of fathers and mothers is a sharp contrast to many of the popular storylines in films and books," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research, pointing out the characteristic "fun" garnered consideration from just 57 and 54 percent for mothers and fathers, respectively.

"While a little more than half of Americans say mothers and fathers must be 'fun,' more people expect parents to be loving, supporting, encouraging, and understanding," he said.

What Americans don't necessarily see as mandatory traits of good mothers and fathers are religious convictions, including being a committed Christian.

Mothers (35 percent) and fathers (31 percent) being

“Religious” garnered a slightly higher return than being a “Committed Christian” (26 percent for both mothers and fathers) on the survey of mandatory traits.

“Clearly Americans who are not Christians themselves would not be expected to value a Christian commitment among parents today,” McConnell noted. “However, 3 out of 4 Americans indicate their religious preference is Christian, Catholic or Protestant. This means only a third of these people appear to value parents modeling a commitment to Jesus Christ to their children.

“For many who indicate a Christian type religion, this preference simply reflects something they were born with rather than something they feel they must nurture in the next generation,” McConnell explained.

According to the survey, Americans who self-identify as born-again, evangelical, fundamental Christians are less likely to select “Involved” (60 percent vs. 68 percent) and “Generous” (44 percent vs. 51 percent) and more likely to select “Religious” (56 percent vs. 26 percent) as mandatory traits to be a good mother.

“Being a good father or mother is subjective. Yet in America today the expectations are both high and consistent,” McConnell said.

The LifeWay Research survey also reveals areas where expectations for mothers and fathers differ. More Americans expect mothers to be tender and loving while the expectation for fathers more often is to be protecting, involved, consistent, and providing.

While the average number of characteristics is the same for mothers and fathers, the survey also reveals women expect both mothers and fathers to have more of the characteristics.

LifeWay Research provided the following 16 characteristics to

determine which ones Americans consider mandatory to be a good mother/father:

Loving, Supporting, Protecting, Encouraging, Understanding, Involved, Trusting, Teaching, Tender, Providing, Consistent, Fun, Admitting Mistakes, Generous, Religious, Committed Christian.

“With such widespread expectations of parents today, the question rests less on what is expected than on how parents can live up to these expectations,” McConnell said. “Clearly, parents today need some support and encouragement of their own to consistently provide love and support to their children.”