

What to Do When Fatherhood Doesn't Feel Like a Joy

As you know, fatherhood is a joy!

... and sometimes, not so much.

The longer I am a dad, the more I'm humbled about the role. I talk to more and more men who are having difficulties with their kids, and they really aren't much different from me. They try to do the right thing, they're highly devoted to their families, and yet for some reason their kids make a wrong turn.

I've also seen dads who seem to have everything under control: no problems, life is grand, and dad handles minor issues with a method he learned from a seminar or a great book he read. Often these guys have young children, and they're excited about their kids, as they should be.

I celebrate with those dads, but there's a part of me that's torn. On one hand I want to say, "Keep at it, Dad, and you can expect fatherhood to get better and better." On the other hand, I want to say, "Yeah, just you wait, buddy."

For all dads, I encourage you to use every resource you can find: seminars, books, blogs and online tools. And there are a lot of great dads out there; maybe you're one of them.

At the same time, there are no perfect fathers. You might think that, since I've spent my working days for more than 20 years thinking and writing about what it takes to be a good father—and now being a co-author of a book on fathering—I'd have all the answers and be able to put them into practice flawlessly.

Not true at all. There's a big difference between knowing what

to do and actually doing it. I'm a pretty good dad, but I still have a lot of growing to do, and I know quite a few guys who appear to be more engaged in their kids' lives than I am. It's still a challenge for me to actually carry out what I know I should be doing with my kids. Probably like you, some nights I go home and struggle to find the motivation to get up off the couch and interact with them.

But really, good fathering isn't about knowing all the answers or doing everything right; it's doing better today than we did yesterday. We have to realize that, no matter how prepared or on-top-of-things we think we are, we're all imperfect people trying to do a hard job. We all have our own unique fathering journey. We're all learning and growing—and that includes you and me.

So where's the balance?

If things seem to be going swimmingly in your stage of fathering, celebrate. Soak it all in. Fatherhood should be a great source of joy. Still, keep your feet on the ground, because things can change quickly.

And when you come across a dad who's struggling, resist the impulse to judge or assume he dropped the ball in some way. Fathering is complex—life is complex—and things happen for a variety of odd reasons.

If you're a dad who's in a more difficult stage of the journey, maybe with teenagers, I urge you not to get cynical about fatherhood. Find ways to be glad with those dads who have it going well. Maybe feed off some of their excitement and renew those feelings in your fathering.

In the end, it's really not about being perfect (because none of us is), but about being there when we can and persevering through whatever adversities come our way.

Keep up the good work, dads.

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