

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



Father time is valuable time

On Father's Day it's worth reflecting on how good fathering matters. It matters to mothers. It matters to men. And importantly it matters to children.



"He's a bit of a rascal!"

This is how Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge described his new born son in a recent televised interview.

Watching the interview it's apparent that Prince William is totally smitten by his son. He is a changed man. As any dad knows, there's no turning back.

Early indications are that the Duke of Cambridge is going to be a modern, hands-on dad who wants to be an active participant in the life of his son. It was he who carried the baby from the hospital to greet the media pack, and it was he who put the baby capsule in the back seat of the car before heading home. *"I'm a hands-on dad"* was the message beamed around the world. Good on him.

Building up frequent father points

Prince William is typical of many modern dads. Gone are the days when the only relationship many men had with their children was through their wives. Men, increasingly, recognise that their effectiveness is dependent on first-hand interactions with their kids. That means their presence is needed far more than any presents they may provide for their kids.

For some dads first-hand interactions with children are easier said than done. Family separation, work circumstances and busy lifestyles are all factors affecting their capacity to become involved in their children's lives.

In these circumstances it's important that men maintain an emotional attachment to their kids; do their best to know what's going on in their children's lives; and respond appropriately to the developmental imperatives of their children.

The impact of fathering on children

Good fathering matters.

It matters to mothers as a supportive father makes a mother's life easier.

It matters to girls. Good fathering has been linked to higher confidence levels in girls, particularly during the tricky adolescent years. The notion of a father who is present, available and attentive affords a sense of security to a girl, which is necessary for healthy development.

Dads are also the first introduction to the world of men for girls so it's important that fathers treat their daughters with gentleness and respect, but also encourage them to be assertive. In a sense, fathers teach their daughters how



they should expect to be treated by males as they get older.

Good fathering matters to boys. They learn their first lessons of manhood from their dads. Early primary-aged boys usually want to spend a great deal of time with their dads. Steve Biddulph, author of *Raising Boys*, describes this phenomenon as 'father-hunger' and suggests that dads need to be around their sons in the primary school years so they can 'download the software' of how to be male.

The father-son relationship during adolescence can be problematic. While teen boys seem to be hard-wired to challenge their fathers, most desperately want their dads to be proud of them. Teen boys need a dad who can be firm when needed as they don't always make great decisions. They need a dad who remembers the awkwardness and insecurity of being a teenage boy themselves. And they relate best to dads who don't take themselves too seriously. The judicious use of humour, particularly with boys, is a great fathering strategy.

Fathering matters to men

And, of course, involved fathering matters to men. Most

health scales state a healthy relationship with their children is a predictor of good health and longevity for men, as well as of life satisfaction levels. I suspect there is something relaxing and de-stressing for a man to get into a child's space and time. There is a big kid in most men just busting to get out.

Parental well-being would be the last thing on Prince William's mind as he attends to his young son's needs. It is through these early forays into parenting that Prince William, like countless other men, will find his feet as a dad, and also discover his place in the life of his son.

Five fathering tips (whether you live with the children's mother or not):

1. Go on dates with your daughters.
2. Have adventures with your sons.
3. Support your partner's parenting.
4. Change as your child changes.
5. Discipline with firmness and compassion.