

# Father Times

## Generative Fathering – A Fresh Perspective

Issue 1

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

### Taking Time for Fathering

Welcome to *Father Times* — the newsletter on taking time out for fathering. What does that mean? Well, it means taking time to play with your children. It means taking time to think about your parenting. It means taking time to consider your children's strengths and needs. It means taking time to listen to a son or daughter talk about his or her day at school. It means that fathering takes time.

This newsletter will focus attention on specific topics important in fathering young children, topics from playing together to building social skills to guiding children. It will include points to ponder, activity and play ideas,

parenting tips, books to read with children, and other ideas and information. We hope you enjoy reading it and applying the ideas in the most important moments you spend each day — father time.

#### Once Upon a Time . . .

### All in a Dad's Work

Jack stopped at his neighbor's house on Monday with his two boys to borrow an extra sled. The trio was headed to the big snowy hills outside of town. By the time Jack had the sled packed into the van, he also had two more smiling passengers for the trip. Both of the neighbor boys were delighted. They were going to get to do some rough and tumble play with a dad! (*Relational and Recreation Work*)

On Tuesday, Jack and Laura discovered that Elizabeth, the baby, was starting to get around a little too well for their current living space. They got down on the floor and noticed several potential hazards. Jack covered



outlets, removed a floor plant, looked for poisons under the sink, and together they rearranged furniture to cover cords. Elizabeth's growth was prompting a need to make adjustments that would keep her safe. (*Development Work*)

Wednesday, Joe came home from kindergarten with a very down-turned lip and sad eyes to match. He was quiet at dinner and even quieter afterwards. He offered little explanation when asked what might be the matter. Jack listened closely for cues all evening and then selected a special book about fighting

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with friends for bedtime. Joe began to tear up when Jack finished the story. He looked up and spilled the whole sad tale of name calling during recess that had ended with another boy saying, "You're not my friend and you can't come to my party!" Joe and Jack had a great discussion about a similar situation Jack had encountered and how he handled it way back when. Joe hugged his dad hard, asked to hear the book one more time, and slept peacefully. (*Relational Work*)

Thursday was a dreaded day for Jack. He really disliked reviewing his insurance policies and doing long-term financial planning. And worse than that, he had his yearly physical exam scheduled for the same day! To add to this, of course, he had to take time away from work. Jack's paid work is one way that

he feels he can take care of his family even when, occasionally, he feels he is not able to be the dad he wants to be. Jack keeps his appointments because he needs to be in good health to keep up with his growing children. He also listens to the insurance salesperson, knowing that if something should go wrong, his family would be cared for financially. (*Stewardship Work*)

Caleb had been pretty patient all week, but now it was Friday and he wanted his dad's attention. When Joe, their older son, was 4 years old, Jack had taken him to a planetarium. Joe loved it there and asked to return often. Jack and Joe spent hours looking at the stars together on warm summer evenings. Joe was getting to know a lot about Jack's hobby, which was quickly turning into a shared hobby. Jack had wondered if Caleb would enjoy stargazing too, but then decided that each child should get to develop his or her own interests. Caleb was much more athletic than Joe. Jack thought he might like to work at discovering a favorite sport with Caleb. "How about a game of catch, Caleb? Find your glove and I'll dig the ball out of the garage." The sturdy-framed four-year old responded by hitting the ground running for his shoes, his ball glove, and every precious minute his dad had to give him. (*Mentoring Work*)

Jack remembered back to a time before children when he and Laura slept in on Saturday mornings, ate a late breakfast out on the town, shopped together, came home for a quiet dinner, invited friends over to watch a game on television, had dessert or played mini-golf. It was a relaxing way to spend a day each week. Jack snapped out of his little daydream only to realize that it was now Saturday morning, three children later, and here they came to pile on the bed and give their folks a rousing good-morning wrestle, the new Saturday morning tradition. Ritual has it that Jack makes pancakes while everyone gets dressed and ready for the day before the cakes come off the griddle.

Then, the big work of the day. Everyone pitched in with the projects so that all could have some fun. Elizabeth helped the least. As a baby she is regularly thanked just for rolling or moving out of the way! The boys, at ages 6 and 4, are much more capable of real work — appropriately chosen for them. When the chores are finished the call goes out — "the work is done, it's time for fun!" Recreation can take many forms in this house full of young children. It's usually free and always "kid selected" from a few parent-okayed options. Saturdays are a time for re-creating the bonds of

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family and recreating with family members. They are times that will be remembered in years to come. (*Recreation Work*)

It's Sunday and a trip to Grandpa and Grandma's home is scheduled. Packed in the car, the family finds itself sharing stories, playing games, and planning how they will treat one another at their grandparents' house. Jack tells a story about being a young boy and learning an important lesson in forgiving his siblings. Laura talks about sharing. These are not planned speeches, just opportunities to share values and beliefs with children who are interested and listening. Talking about their faith and living out their values are important ways that Jack and Laura intend to teach their children how to live in peace with others. (*Spiritual Work*)

The week is over and in Jack's mind it holds no special significance. In truth, fathers all over the world do this type of work every day and don't even realize how important it is. They often don't understand what a difference it makes in the lives of their children. Yet, as they commit themselves to a continuing and caring pattern of involvement with their children, they find there is always time for the most important work of all — a father's work.

## Generative Fathering – What Is It?

It is TIME to take a fresh look at being a dad. There is plenty of bad press about fathering these days. The newspapers are often filled with accounts of “deadbeat” dads or lazy husbands or violent fathers. Media images often portray dads as bumbling but lovable Homer Simpson types, or as distant fathers who haven't done a very good job of connecting with their children for one reason or another.

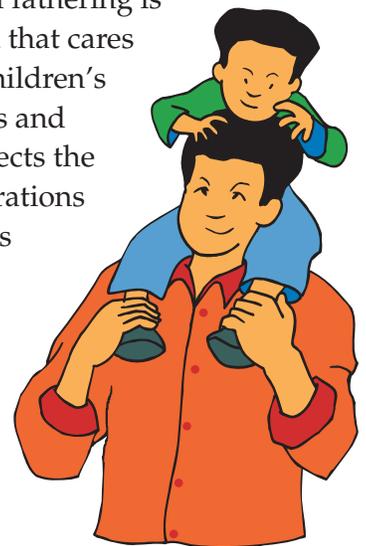
We think these images miss the boat on the majority of men in family life. Where are the images of fathers dropping kids off at school? Of fathers listening to a disappointed child's concerns? Of fathers cheering on a child at a sports event? Most fathers care deeply about their children, and most of them express it on a regular basis. A father's involvement is particularly important when his children are young. This creates a more positive foundation for a child's growth and development and helps fathers and children develop bonds that are meaningful throughout life.

This newsletter looks at fathering beyond a “deficit perspective” — in other words, it looks at the important

strengths that fathers bring to fathering. It recognizes that fathers are doing the work of being fathers. When fathers work in meaningful and caring ways in the lives of their children we call it “generative” fathering, or fathering that generates positive relationships and well-adjusted children. This type of fathering is what we wish to encourage.

A father's most important work is the work of fathering. Work is something that fathers universally share. Whether it is going off to work to earn money for family needs or working at home to be a connected father and family member, the term work is an appropriate word to describe fathering.

Good fathering is work that cares for children's needs and connects the generations across time.



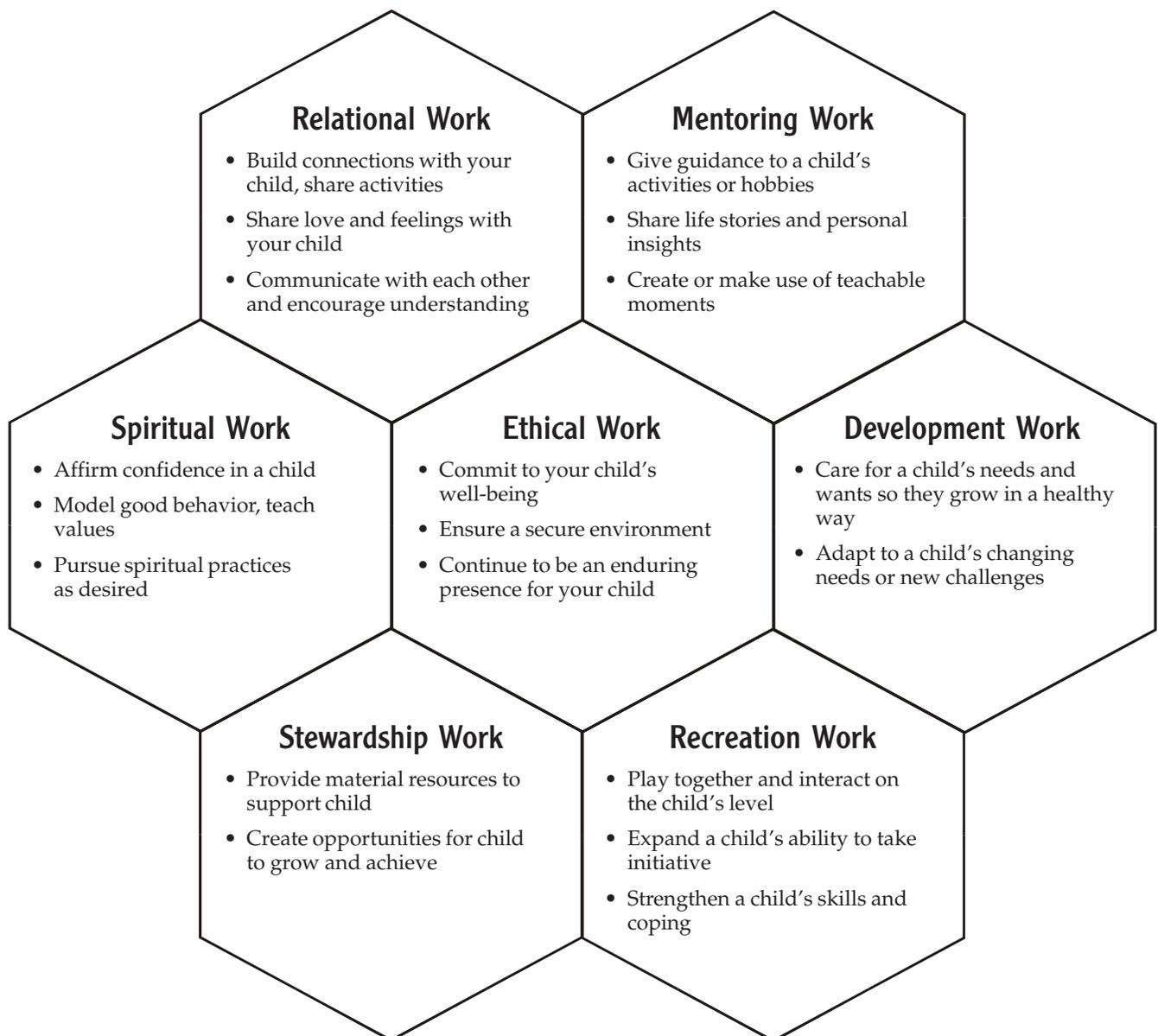
# Generative Fathering – Seven Domains of a Father’s Work

The idea behind generative fathering is that it is grounded in meeting children’s needs. It also encourages respect for men’s lives and their abilities to fulfill those needs. The framework of generative fathering outlines *how fathers provide for the needs of their children and the next generation*. Seven important domains of a

father’s work are portrayed in the figure below. Generative fathering is centered in a father’s willingness to be a committed and continuing presence in his child’s life.

Fathering is a journey. It is learning to care for another person and responding to his or her changing needs over

time. It involves building and maintaining a strong, loving connection and quality communication with a child. It means providing material resources and individual opportunities for well-being and growth. It is all of this and more, but most of all, it’s time, commitment, and caring from a father to a child.



## Activities For Fathers and Children – Spend Some Time!

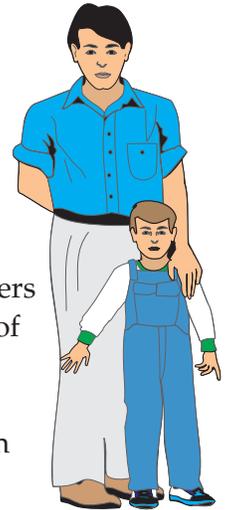
This section is filled with activities you as a father can do with young children. If you are having fun, so will your children. Have fun as you spend time together!

- ❑ **Make your infant a time capsule** to give her at graduation, her 21st birthday or maybe her wedding day! Be her historian by starting now to save a national and local newspaper, or movie and TV listings. Write down how you decided on her name. Tape record hot songs, commercials, and of course, her cries and coos now and special events as she grows.
- ❑ On average, a baby needs about 7,000 diaper changes. **Say “I love you” and some other special messages each time you change him or her.** The baby will feel better top to bottom. Be sure to wash baby’s hands with soap and water as well as your own after each diapering to prevent sickness.
- ❑ **Take your child for a tree walk.** Using a large, flat crayon and paper, do bark rubbings. Talk about the importance of leaving the bark on the tree! Gather different leaves and rub the side of a crayon over them on a piece of paper to see the outlines. Collect the different

outlines and begin a collection.

- ❑ **Blow up a beach ball** for your toddler to practice catching. Under-inflate a little for an easier catch.
- ❑ **Read Eric Carle’s book *Pancakes, Pancakes!* and then cook some together.** Drop two drops of batter in the pan for eyes and a long smile for a mouth. Let the batter cook for a few seconds before adding more batter over the top to make a pancake. When you flip the cake over, the face will appear a little darker than the rest of the pancake.
- ❑ **Make a “feely” sock** by placing familiar items in a tube sock. Invite your child to put his or her hand in the sock and guess what the item is. Give hints to build vocabulary.
- ❑ **Recycle with your children!** If you don’t usually recycle, start today. Being environmentally friendly is good work, too. Talk about how and why people recycle as you are doing it.
- ❑ **Look up instructions on making a bird feeder.** A simple feeder can be made by stringing o-shaped cereal on a piece of yarn. Put a small piece of tape around one end of the yarn to make

stringing easier. More complex feeders can be made of wood, a milk carton, a pop bottle, or even half of a coconut filled with suet, seeds and crumbs. Place the feeder outside and see if you get some feathery visitors.



- ❑ **Put a piece of sticky tape, sticky side out around your arm like a bracelet.** Do the same for your toddler. Go outside for a nature walk. Put stones, shells, plants, leaves, sticks, etc., on the tape to make a nature bracelet.
- ❑ **Make a job jar for your children.** List the jobs that need to be done each week on small pieces of paper. Each person draws a job from the jar and does it. Then he or she places the slip of paper in the “well done” jar for completed jobs that week. Young workers need a lot of guidance in this area. Team up with your child for many weeks before expecting him or her to know what to do and how to do it well. This time can be fun and productive — it’s a matter of “daditude” to lead by example.

## Fathering Facts . . .

### Benefits for Kids

One researcher calls it the best of times and the worst of times for dads. Those fathers who are able to be involved with their children are doing so in many productive ways. Many fathers are present from the birth of their children on through life, supporting them physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, financially, in every way they can. On the opposite end of the scale, some fathers will never know their children. Yet there is a growing body of research that points to wonderful outcomes from fathers' positive involvement in their children's lives. Children benefit from having their fathers involved in their lives in healthy, appropriate ways. The greatest benefits appear in two-parent families when children are able to actively engage with their fathers. Here are some of the benefits researchers have found when fathers are positively involved. Children:

- Show evidence of greater self esteem



- Have greater physical, psychological, and social well-being
- Tend to have a more secure gender identity
- Take greater initiative and show positive self-control
- Develop more empathy and compassion and have more successful relationships
- Perform better on academic tests and show higher educational achievement
- Are less likely to be expelled or suspended, repeat a grade, drop out of school, or not graduate than students who do not have fathers to work with them
- Tend to do better in school, go on to college, and become economically self-sufficient

(Source: *Father Facts*, 3rd ed.  
2001. Gaithersburg, MD:  
The National Fatherhood Initiative.)

## Story Time . . .

### Books for Dads and Kids

*Look at Me* by Stephen Shott

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*  
by Eric Carle

*Grandfather Twilight* by  
Barbara Helen Berger

*The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe  
Strawberry and the Big Hungry  
Bear* by Don and Audrey Woods

*Curious George* books by  
H.A. Rey

*Where the Sidewalk Ends* by  
Shel Silverstein

*Aesop's Fables* (retold) by  
Fulvio Testa

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## Fathering, Couple Relationships, and Kids

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Think about when a child is born. It is not only the moment of birth for a new child. It is also the moment of birth for a parent as a father or mother. A new relationship is born.

Fathering does not simply involve a relationship with a child. It also involves a relationship with the child's mother. Whether you are single, married, divorced, widowed, or remarried, you have a connection to the mother of your children. Both of you are parents to a child who is part of your lives.

Young children are affected by the quality of the relationship between a father and a mother. Men and women should strive to develop healthy, cooperative relationships regarding their children. Parents who strive to be successful co-parents who work together provide several benefits to children. First, a healthy co-parenting relationship gives children a more stable and secure home environment. Second, a healthy

co-parenting relationship shows children a positive example of how relationships can and should work. Finally, a healthy co-parenting relationship encourages growth for children in an environment of minimal conflict. Fathers and mothers who support each other and put aside their differences go far toward improving the well-being of their children's lives.

### T H E B R I D G E - B U I L D E R

An old man going a lone highway,  
Came at the evening, cold and  
gray,  
To a chasm vast and wide and  
steep,  
With waters rolling cold and deep.  
The old man crossed in the twilight  
dim,  
The sullen stream had no fears  
for him;  
But he turned when safe on the  
other side,  
And built a bridge to span the  
tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim  
near,  
"You are wasting your strength  
with building here.  
Your journey will end with the  
ending day,  
You never again will pass this  
way.  
You've crossed the chasm,  
deep and wide,  
Why build you this bridge at  
eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head.  
"Good friend, in the path I have  
come," he said,  
"There follows after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this  
way.  
The chasm that was nought to me  
To that fair-haired youth may a  
pitfall be;  
He, too, must cross at the twilight  
dim —  
Good friend, I am building this  
bridge for him."

*by Will Allen Dromgoole*

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## **Fathering Resources**

### **Websites for Fathering Information**

#### **Fatherwork**

<http://fatherwork.byu.edu>

#### **National Association for the Education of Young Children**

<http://www.naeyc.org>

#### **The National Fatherhood Initiative**

<http://www.fatherhood.org>

#### **Wonderwise Parent**

<http://www.ksu.edu/wwwparent/wondhome.htm>

#### **National Center for Fathering**

<http://www.fathers.com>

#### **ParentsPlace**

<http://www.parentsplace.com>

#### **Fathering Bibliography**

<http://hdwsu.edu/publications/fathering/famenu.html>

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