

The Positive Impacts of Religious Dads

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In 1994, researchers Reed Larson and Maryse Richards decided to conduct a test. Using a technique called Experience Sampling Method (ESM), they asked 483 American adolescents and their parents to wear a wristwatch. Approximately 30 times per day the alarms on these watches would sound and all three participants (adolescent, mother and father) were asked to stop what they were doing and record in a journal where they were, whom they were with, what they were doing and how they were feeling. The journals were then analyzed to determine if there were any patterns in parent-adolescent relationships. The results were staggering.

According to Arnett (2010), the experiment by Larson and Richards revealed fathers only offered a “shadowy presence” in their adolescent’s life (p. 179). The majority of time that fathers spent with their adolescents was usually also spent in the presence of the mother. On average, fathers only spent 12 minutes alone, per day, with their teenager and 40% of that time was spent passively watching television. Conversation was generally minimal, but when it did take place, sports were the most common topic.

These startling statistics do not hold true for fathers that indicate that religion is important to them. Religious fathers, both married and divorced, are more involved and have higher quality relationships with their children. The reason for this is somewhat unclear. King (2003) suggests that possible reasons for these higher quality relationships stem from religious teachings that value the family unit, encourage the prioritization of the needs of others over the needs of self and propagate a profamily message via sermons, scripture and church publications (p.384). Churches and other religious institutions also sponsor activities that bring family members together and enable fathers and adolescents an opportunity to engage with one another. Religious fathers believe that sharing their faith with their children is important which prompts them to spend time with their children teaching them about faith and ethics (King, p.384, 2003). These religious men tend to surround themselves with like-minded men with similar beliefs which reinforces profamily teachings and family focused outings (King, p.384, 2003).

King (2003) references a study by Bartkowski and Xu (2000) that found a “father’s church attendance was positively related to parental supervision, father-child interaction, and affective parenting (giving praise and hugs)” (p. 383). All of these attributes can be linked to beneficial consequences for adolescents. At a time in an adolescents life when they are looking for positive role models, society as a whole is demanding that fathers take a more active role in the lives of their children. If fathers won’t step up to the plate, then adolescents will turn to

another male role model for mentorship and to trust. If your son or daughter is looking for a male to spend quality time with, don't you want it to be you?

References

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