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Dad, Give Your Kids the "N" Word

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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What's your main purpose as a father?

Isn't it to prepare your kids to be happy, healthy, successful people in their own lives?

What's the best way to do this?

One effective method of preparing them for their own lives is to give them a heavy dose of the word that not enough kids are getting today. That word is the "N" word, or the word no.

We all deal with a certain amount of frustration in our everyday adult lives. We are frustrated at our jobs, in our relationships, and by circumstances that we have no control over. Over time we learn to handle frustration better and to turn it into challenges and opportunities that we work through.

People who can handle frustration successfully tend to have happier and more successful lives. They learn to be resilient and to appreciate what they've accomplished and what they've received.

How about your kids?

Are your kids being frustrated enough? Are there high enough expectations being placed on them? Are you saying no enough and are you allowing them to have opportunities to be frustrated and to work through it?

There are a lot of kids today receiving boatloads of gifts and gadgets from their parents who aren't being given many responsibilities within their families.

If you're not allowing your kids to be exposed to responsibility and frustration, and if you're not liberally giving out the N word to them, you may be creating monsters within the confines of your home.

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Many parents have gone through hard times in their lives and naturally want to spare their children the same fate that they experienced. They have a very difficult time seeing their children struggling and allowing them to deal with it.

The result of this choice is that many children today get almost everything they want in terms of clothes, electronic gadgets, toys etc. The amount of stuff they receive and the new products that they want keep growing every year.

Try comparing what your children get in terms of their most wanted items to what you get in your life. Is it a close comparison?

It's clear that many parents are preparing their kids for a life that's out of touch with the real world. The

same kids who have so many material possessions often don't appreciate or take care of what they do have. Why should they? There will probably be more goodies coming soon.

Fathers who say no to their kids on a fairly regular basis take a big step towards ensuring that their kids are happy, responsible, and successful.

Here are some specific actions that dads can take:

- If you're married, consult with your wife about what your dose of the "N" word will be. Creating a unified front will strengthen your position and cause fewer conflicts.

- Never do things for your children that they can do for themselves. Allow them to be frustrated and to learn to be more resilient.

- Consider an allowance for your kids, even if they're quite young, so that they can develop a sense of responsibility with money and a sense of taking care of their things.

- Take stock of your children's possessions. Do they have way too many things? Are there some things that might be better suited for Goodwill?

- Foster an environment of appreciation for the things you have. Model this appreciation in how you care for the things you own and how you use them.

- Limit the number and price of the gifts your kids receive at holidays and parties. Donate or give away the gifts that they aren't very interested in. Talk to your relatives and friends if necessary about what you're trying to do.

It's difficult at times to see your kids' struggle with the many challenges of being young and inexperienced. Frustration is a constant companion of kids as they learn the many skills and demands of living their lives.

Fathers can make an extremely important choice for themselves and their children when these

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frustrating moments arise. They can see the opportunity for their kids to learn from these moments by having to work through these feelings.

Fathers who are really interested in the success of their kids are motivated by doing what works for their kids in the long run.

Fathers who are interested in having their kids "feel good" much of the time and who feel good themselves when they can "rescue" their kids from frustrating feelings are more interested in being the savior.

The message here comes in loud and clear for your kids: Your dad doesn't think you can handle this.

Remember that some day your kids will figure these things out for themselves.

When they do, they'll thank you for allowing them to struggle.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers" (http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e_book.htm#secrets. For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, "Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids," at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>

Hey Dad, How do You Handle Your Kids Mistakes?

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One of the most difficult parts of being a father is learning to accept your children's mistakes. It certainly can be easy to be loving, supportive, and helpful when your children are mistake-free, but most fathers who are paying attention don't find too many mistake-free periods of their children's lives.

Let's be clear about our kids and their mistakes. There aren't too many kids who get up in the morning, rub their hands together and say, I wonder how I can screw up today and really bother my dad! Kids don't enjoy or want to make mistakes, it's just one of the ways that they learn about the world.

Kids usually try to do their best; but they're doing their best considering the resources they have at the time. Sometimes they're tired, sometimes they're easily distracted, and sometimes they're strong-willed, but they generally do the best they can. It's quite easy for us to unfairly judge them according to their best efforts in the past.

When our kids make mistakes, we have choices to make. Fathers can either make choices that help to create kids who are defensive and who lie to them ...or they can make choices that help to create kids who can learn from their mistakes and improve upon them.

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Kids who fear punishment or the loss of love in response to their mistakes learn to hide their mistakes. These children live in two different places—one place where they have the love and support of their father (parents), and another where they feel that if their mistakes were discovered, they would be undeserving of that love. It's hard for these kids to fully accept their parents' love and support even when it is expressed. It's also difficult for these kids to set high standards for themselves, because they tend to be fearful of failing.

These are some ideas for fathers who are committed to helping create kids who can learn from their mistakes, and who are not afraid of making a few:

Absolutely accept the notion that your kids are doing their best, and that they'll learn faster about their mistakes if they are in an environment that accepts mistakes.

Understand that your difficulty with your kids' mistakes is in fact a reflection of your difficulty dealing with your own mistakes; be aware of this and deal with your own issues first.

Know the shaming messages that we can all give so easily to our kids—messages that can do a lot of damage to them and help them to feel unworthy. Here's a few of them:

- How could you have done that?
- You don't listen to me!
- You can do better than that!
- What's the matter with you?

Keep providing your kids with learning experiences, but at the same time structure their environment so they can't make too many mistakes (having expensive glassware around the house where children might break it is not their fault).

Provide a great model for your children by the way you react to making mistakes: do you get defensive and stretch the truth, or do you own the mistake and learn something from it? Create a culture that's based on learning from mistakes.

We only have one chance to show our kids the patience and discipline necessary to allow them to learn from the mistakes that we've all made. Your opportunity to improve just started now; give your kids the room that they need and deserve.

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