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Fathers Tell Your Stories!

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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I must admit to having a fear that I believe I share with many fathers. I fear that I will some day be insignificant to my children. It's not as though they'll completely forget who I am; it's that what I stand for and what I believe in won't be a significant part of their lives.

Perhaps popular culture will take over...or perhaps they just won't care. The fear is there because it's so important to me that my children have a moral compass to live by, and that they have a value system that honors and respects others.

So what are fathers to do? We live in an increasingly complex society and the answers to our children's questions are neither easy nor simple. Many of these questions may be difficult to answer and may show your kids that ideas about what's right and wrong are not always very clear.

What fathers can do is to wish and hope that things turn out for your children—or you can have the courage to make passing on your values an absolute priority in your family. You can challenge yourself to pass on love, faith, courage, freedom—the eternal truths that will have meaning for your children for generations to come.

There will certainly be some bumps along the way and it won't always be a smooth ride. After all, there's an entire culture out there that's telling your kids that what they wear and what they buy is the most important thing in their life.

There's a way for fathers to succeed here. They can do it through the stories that they tell their kids and also through how they models for their kids.

You can start by taking a different and closer look at the daily events that happen in your life. Your life is filled with significant happenings that you can sometimes pass over if you're not paying attention or if you get too busy. These events can become stories that your children will cherish.

Why is it important to tell your stories to your children?

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One important reason is that it serves to connect your children to previous generations and to help them to feel a part of the larger whole of your family. Perhaps a more important reason is that telling your children your stories helps them to deal with the difficult challenges that they'll be facing in their life.

The truth is that your kids will go through some real struggles. As parents, it can be painful to watch—and it is seldom useful to try to come to the rescue. What can be helpful to your kids is to know that their father, and other significant people in their lives, have gone through similar struggles and have survived.

Stories are often about struggles and failures. Your children love to hear stories about these struggles

because they have them often in their own lives. They know failure and struggle extremely well; that's a lot of what being a kid is about.

The stories you tell them will ultimately be comforting. That you have had these struggles and have come back and recovered is encouragement to them; your kids will need a truckload of encouragement to navigate their way through life.

It is truly a gift to be able to communicate to your children what is in your heart through the use of stories. Stories can not only be used as a vehicle to pass along your values, but they are likely to inspire your children to repeat the same process with their children.

Here are five suggestions to help you come up with stories for your children:

1. Tell stories to your kids when they are the most attentive to them—when they are in bed, or settled down so they can sit still for awhile.
2. Make sure to include stories of you failing miserably. These are particularly useful to your kids. We've all got a few of these, don't we?
3. Have your parents tell your children some of their own stories if they are able—a great way to show the connection that exists between generations.
4. Use stories to answer your kids' questions about difficult issues. They need to know that you have faced these issues yourself, and that there are many choices available.
5. Realize that you don't need a history of storytelling in your family to get started, and you don't need to be a great storyteller. Give some thought to experiences you've had that might relate to some of the issues your kids are facing right now or in the near future.

There is a short window of opportunity in which to tell your children the stories of your life. Many fathers fail to tell their stories because of a lack of a story-telling tradition in their family of origin. This can be a wonderful opportunity to begin your own tradition with your own stories.

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It's also a great opportunity to contribute to the moral upbringing of your kids by telling them the stories of your life. The lessons within these stories can provide some of the moral anchor for your kids in a world that doesn't often provide many moral anchors.

Teaching your kids about life through telling your stories will be more effective than lecturing your kids any day of the week. Your kids will want to hear your stories, the lecturing they could probably do without.

May your stories live on eternally.

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>.

Fathers and Sons

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As a personal coach for men and the publisher of a newsletter, I'm sometimes blessed with personal stories from readers that touch my heart. This story sent in from a father helped me to remember why I'm doing what I do. I'd like to share it with you:

"As a father of two teens, I've enjoyed your insight on fatherhood. I was raised in a loving family environment, but just as you indicated, my father was the primary breadwinner and the "backbone" of the family, not an emotional type. As a child, I never saw him cry or appear weak, nor did he ever utter the words "I love you". It was just not in his vocabulary, though I never doubted his love for any of us.

It was not until his last hours on this earth, nearly 9 years ago, that I saw him cry for the first time. Suffering from the side effects of leukemia, I was visiting him in his hospital room.

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As I sat on the side of his bed feeding him ice chips and jello cubes by spoon, it occurred to me that we had reversed roles. He was no longer caring for my needs, but I was there to help him with a basic need.

We talked about things that we'd never discussed previously and as I was preparing to return home to my family for the night, I turned to him and said "I love you". He smiled and nodded his approval as I exited his room for the last time.

Unfortunately, he'd been experiencing internal bleeding, though he never complained or mentioned it to me, and he expired some three hours after I left.

I feel fortunate to have spent those last hours with him and that I could express my love to him, though I

felt out of character in doing it. I only wish that it had occurred years earlier.

As a father myself, I've broken the male mold. I freely express my love not only for my wife but for each of my children. Rarely does a day pass that I don't talk with my kids, always ending the conversation with an "I love you".

I'll be the first to admit that life is not always a bed of roses, and that developing strong family ties requires patience and perseverance. But I'm incredibly proud of the family relationships that we've developed and nurtured in our children."

Millions of today's fathers grew up with fathers who were unable to express their love directly. And yet so many of these fathers have been able to express their love to their own children.

They've done it because they know the pain of not receiving that love. They know how absolutely vital their expression of love and acceptance is for their kids. And they've moved past the discomfort of expressing their love for their kids so that they

may thrive.

This is an acknowledgement to the courage of all the fathers who have "broken the mold."

If our world is to change, it won't be without love from our fathers.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, coaches men to be better fathers and husbands. He is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers" <http://www.markbrandenburg.com/father.htm> 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>.



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