

MORE ABOUT FATHER FIGURES

I'd like to talk again for a moment about father figures, it's something we talk about a lot in the Fathering Project. Father figures can be very powerful in a child's life. Think back to your own life. Was there a male, an adult male who spoke into your life, made you feel special, maybe a grandfather, a school teacher, a sports coach and uncle? Men, you are a father figure whether you like it or not.

The children that come into your house, your friend's children, you are a father figure to them. So dads or males in general, be aware of the power of father figures to change the lives of kids and take opportunities. I think about a child who his parents had split up and he wasn't doing well and a guy took him out with his own kids to get wood on a camping trip. And he created an opportunity for this other child to go and he said, "Come and help us get some wood." And he said, "Mate, I know things have been tough at home, but I reckon you're a great kid, I've seen how you've done this and this and this. You're a winner."

The power of a father figure to change the future of a child's life is enormous, so think about it.

MORE ABOUT FIFO

I thought I'd have a little word to fly in, fly out dads. There are four tips. Firstly, tell your kids about the work you're doing, whatever it is. Explain to them how other people will benefit, not just them, in terms of paying the mortgage and food on the table, but other people out there. You're getting iron ore out of the ground to build bridges and schools for kids in China so they can go to school. Secondly, really work hard to stay in touch with your kids. Skyping them with bedtime stories, and make sure you know what's happening in their lives.

If they've got an exam or an assembly, or a performance, or a running race, know about it in advance and ask about it. Next, when you come home, remember they've learned to do without you. So don't try and rule the roost, chill out. If there's a few trucks on the floor, just let it go. This is one of the biggest points of tension, and unfortunately kids then don't want dad to come home or they have mixed feelings about it. And finally, when you come home, make a bit of an extra effort. Go down to the school with them.

It's interesting how teachers say that sometimes fly in, fly out dads are seen more often at the school than dads who work in the city. If you'd like more information about how to be a good dad, go to our website, thefatheringproject.org.

SCREEN TIME.

By screen time I mean the time kids spend each day using devices with screens like TVs, video console, smart phones, tablets, et cetera. It's not all bad, there's lots of good things. For example, interactive problem solving and screen time involved with homework, and positive socialization. The problem is when it gets excessive. Because of course kids lose social skills. They lose the ability to have conversations, to have eye contact. They can lose the ability to pay attention at school. They lose the ability to read other people's body language.

So what can you do about it? The first is, try to involve the whole of the family in activities, especially outdoor activities. Walking in the park, getting a dog to take for a walk, playing soccer in the backyard, a family bike ride, going to the zoo, lead by example. Because in the end three dimensions and smells and sight and sound and people will always be more attractive. But you can't just push them out the door and expect it to happen. And you want that to be fun. So let the children pick.

You can track everyone's progress. If you find the kids aren't exercising, you can put things in the calendar and you can actually make it a little bit competitive. And remember, start small. Don't expect them to run a marathon. Five minutes of running together or walking together may be a good way to start it, and schedule it. A few other key points, have dinner together without any TV time. And set limits around the amount of screen time. And what's recommended is maximum two hours a day.

MORE ABOUT THE BUS PRINCIPLE

When people ask us what kids need from their dads, we always say three things with initials, BUS, be there for them, unconditional love, and S stands for special. Help them realize how special they are. Each kid is special and unique. But You've got to actually help them realize that. And we have an analogy which is that, the Sydney Opera House and the Taj Mahal are both very special buildings, but they don't have to out special each other.

Kids are like that, they are very special and unique. Can I just encourage you to look at the kids and ask yourself what's special about them? Not so much their talents, but something about them. The way they care for people, their smile, their ideas, their creativity. And one of the important things along that line, is to make them realize what a special future they have. One of the things that makes teenagers depressed is that they don't think their future is special. They think they're coming out of a photocopier, or an assembly line, but they have a unique and special role in life.

They may never be the prime minister or open the bowling for Australia, but they have a special and unique future. So help them to realize that.

THE VALUE OF GETTING YOUR KIDS INVOLVED IN JUNIOR TEAM SPORTS

I'd like to talk to you and encourage you about getting your kids involved in junior sport; it gets them away from screen time. But there are four big advantages. The first is, they learn fitness. They have to train and this desire for fitness or the desire to not be unfit again can be a lifelong benefit. Secondly, it can create great memories. Sport is great unscripted drama, and working as a player in a team, and winning or doing well in a game can provide great memories. Certainly that's the case for me.

Thirdly, they make friends in a particular way, not through social media. Three-dimensional friends and sports are a great vehicle for this and some, only a few, but some will become lifelong friends. I recently attended the wedding of the daughter of a friend of mine, a close friend I made playing football who had passed away. And I was sort of, in a sense, me and another mate were representing him and it was deeply moving to be there representing a friend who I'd known for over 40 years.

And finally, your kids might get lucky and get a good mentor. Football, soccer, netball, coaches can be, some of them, wonderful parent figures for children. And your kid might be lucky enough to score one of them, and that will also have a profound effect on them, whether you're doing a good job as a parent or not. If you'd like more information, ideas or tips on this subject, just Google The Fathering Project.