

THE CRY FOR RESPONSIBLE FATHERING

Recently Public Agenda released a survey of 1607 parents, *A Lot Easier Said Than Done: Parents Talk About Raising Children In Today's America*. The survey was fielded during a time when violence aimed at children was widely reported. Its findings echo many deep-seated concerns of dads. A Texas father voiced his frustration that, “no matter how hard I try to protect my two little girls, it’s a no-win situation.”

The findings from this survey can be summarized by highlighting themes that grew out of the interviews. Following each of the themes are questions we fathers must wrestle with:

1. **Protecting our children from the outside world.** How are we helping our children process the messages and dangers posed by the outside? Have we taught our children to be discerning in situations where they could be susceptible to sexual abuse and kidnapping?
2. **Television: A Worrisome Old Friend.** How do we use the TV in our home? Do we filter and monitor the more disturbing aspects of the media?
3. **Trying to Create a Responsible Adult.** What values are we trying to instill in our children? What have been our most effective methods for imparting these ideals?
4. **The Complex Equation of Parenting.** How do we express love and limits to our children? How would our styles of parenting be cast—authoritarian, softly, overwhelmed or a buddy dad?
5. **Dating, Driving and Decisions: The Teen Years.** How are we shaping our children’s independence? When and why is critical to intervene.
6. **The Views of Low-Income Parents and Single Parents.** What challenges do single, custodial fathers face? How does one’s family income affect the children’s opportunities?

To Think About...

The cry for responsible fathering in our culture is growing every day. Too often, when evening news anchors summarize the day’s events, the anguish of kids with no dads is involved. Recently in Milwaukee, seven boys, ages 10 to 16, beat a man to death. Not surprisingly, it was noted, “Five of their fathers are dead. One is in Prison ... and one of the boys, age 14, is a father himself.”

In other reports, we hear of fathers who are there but are dangerous and irresponsible. The sniper shootings in Washington, D.C., are a reminder that, for good or evil, children will imitate our actions. It’s unnerving to think that a 42-year-old father of four, John Muhammad, coerced a 17-year-old father—hungry teen to participate in killing without remorse.

There's no question we need a personal and cultural renewal of responsible fatherhood. Only then will our children be secure and their fears calmed. Who will lead this renewal? The feds? The media? Community—based organizations? Moms? Is it a combination of all the above? I believe one thing is certain: It will never get of the ground without responsible men—dad by dad—heeding the call.

Action Points for Committed Fathers...

- 1. Stop by and pay an unannounced visit to your child's school. If you can't see him or her, make sure you leave a note.**
- 2. Reflect on qualities that your father or father figure modeled for you as a child, and ponder how you're passing them on to your kids.**
- 3. Check your wife's stress level. Is it time to go out on a date?**
- 4. Tell another dad about three joys you receive from being a dad.**