

THE HEART OF FATHERING

One evening while teaching a Fathering course at the Youth Center of the High Plains, I ask the young men to write an essay about their dads. The essay included five components of what I call “Heart” fathering, using the letters H-E-A-R-T. They are emotions or expressions that I believe are key for a dad to address for the sake of his children. I believe they are the framework for being a great father.

Let's look at these....

Humor – The father and child who can laugh together are well on their way to building a strong relationship. Draw a clean line about what isn't funny: humor that excludes, insults, frightens or tears down.

Enjoyment – It can overlap with humor but it is a deeper sense of contentment and gladness just for being with your child in outings, a hobby, or a water balloon fight.

Anguish – We must realize that many dads are facing overwhelming challenges: lack of access to their children, a child with special needs or difficulties because of a child's poor decision. Don't be surprised – it comes with a connected, loving relationship.

Reflection – Develop the habit of monitoring yourself as a dad – regularly asking yourself questions about how you're doing as a dad. This practice can lead to important insights into mistakes and making adjustments; you become aware of your children's unique and ever-changing needs.

Tenderness (& Tenacity) – An area many dads need to improve. I think of it as giving “a gentle but firm answer” no matter what your children do. Heartful fathering is also tenacious: unswervingly committed even in the face of great difficulty.

Back to the kids locked up – I see Great kids who look forward to being great dads because they understand “heart” is about being a Great Man.