

## Youth Violence - What Fathers Can Do

The brutal murder of a 16-year-old boy in Chicago several weeks ago has brought youth violence to the headlines once again. Many leaders agree that this latest example is one more wake-up call for our nation to take action to combat some alarming trends, but in all of the talk, there are few viable solutions recommended.

One student at the Chicago high school said, "It's up to us to make a change. All of these adults are doing what they need to do to help us."

It's admirable for this student and others like her to recognize that each young person is responsible for his or her actions, but long-term solutions will only be found in addressing some of the root causes of violence, and one major cause is the trend toward greater absence of fathers from their children's lives. Research is conclusive about the link between fatherlessness and higher occurrences of crime and violence in youth.

Fathers who are not only present, but engaged in their children's lives, help shape their children's character. Boys especially need a man there to reel in their aggressive tendencies -- to confront them about disrespect and inappropriate behavior, hold them accountable to a higher standard, and be a model for responsibility and healthy conflict resolution. That's an important part of our role as fathers.

But here is another thought of being engaged in your children's lives. My case might be a good example. I was a dad at home, successful Vice-President of a large hospital and by all appearances a pretty good guy. I live in a two story home in Paramount, go to church and have my share of friends. Gosh, if you looked at me or talked with me a while, I bet I could impress you. Hum? My kid wound up in jail, a gang leader, guilty of a weapons charge, burglary of a habitation and a well-known "punk" in a world I did not appreciate right here in Amarillo, Texas. It is a long and brutal story of a "disfigured and dysfunctional dad and family." I am absolutely not proud of that time in my life or with my marriage or being a good "father figure." I guess my report card might say, "D" and that was with a curve! My point is this: I was a dad at home BUT not really. I was what you called an "absent dad" emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and a lot physically. I was there but not connected. When I was there I was short-tempered, erratic, moody and not a very lovable guy. Sound familiar to any of you guys reading this? My oldest son found unconditional love elsewhere.

In today's world, with so many unfathered children already, we must take it a step further and be father figures to other kids who don't have a fatherly presence in their lives. Those kids need our encouragement, our modeling, and our accountability as well. If we don't reach out to them, we leave them vulnerable. "Encouraging Another Child" is a critical element if we have

any chance of salvaging a generation of fatherless kids. The ultimate objective is to change the culture for today's children and the children of coming generations.

There are many ways to reach out: by coaching or sponsoring youth events; by showing interest in them and their pursuits; by including them in your family's activities; by going out of your way to speak words of support and confidence. There are also more organized ways to get involved, whether it's volunteering through a mentoring organization, serving a day at your child's school through a national program called WATCH D.O.G.S. or even starting or joining a violence prevention effort like the MAD DADS (Men Against Destruction, Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorder) organization, which has chapters across the country.

Will you start spreading your positive fathering to other kids who need you? One great first step is to make your own personal decision that you may be an inactive dad in the lives of your own children like me.

- Don't underestimate the power of your involvement in your children's lives. Stay faithful in taking them to school, helping them with homework, showing interest in their pursuits, and demonstrating your affection every day.
- Build friendly relationships with your kids' classmates. Earn the right to step in with a word of advice or gentle correction.
- Encourage a child without a dad by attending his sports event, music performance, etc. Or try making it a fun outing for your whole family.
- What advice did you receive from your dad or another father figure? Without giving a lecture, speak similar words to a fatherless child you know.

Talk with administrators at your child's school about security and offer to help organize fathers to help in those efforts, possibly by starting a WATCH D.O.G.S through the National Center for Fathering. See the web site: [Fathers.com](http://Fathers.com)

Yes, we have a major problem in our community as well as the ones we hear on T.V. or read in the headlines. We do have violence in Amarillo and the Texas Panhandle. We have a generation of kids without fathers and with single moms "doing everything they can to be some kind of parent." We have some MAD and ANGRY kids. Guys, I will just be blunt and honest: Don't walk away from your family, your kids or yourself when things in your family seem like they are "past the point of no return." You may be really surprised about the mercy and grace of our Father and how all things are *Possible*. OH, don't look for a "silver bullet" to make it well fast and life just moves on-you might be even more disappointed. It takes time, effort, forgiveness and grace (lots of it). *It is worth it*. I know that to be true if I know nothing else about life.

In all things with your kids and wife: Listen, Listen and Love, Love.

*Contributions of this article can be found at [fathers.com](http://fathers.com).*