



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: Just Dad

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My dad, Wally, always had a wonderfully warm smile. Like most good dads he was kind and patient, but had strong emotions. He was a hard worker, never afraid to learn new skills. He was a humble guy, with a refreshing sense of kindness, elegance and a touch of brashness. He welcomed challenges, and accepted his kids as an integral part of his life. He loved to sing, was not great at fixing things with his hands, but did most of the work to build an upstairs out of an attic for us to enjoy. Dad patiently taught me to drive, ate hot peppers without a tear, went to church weekly and prayed the Lord's Prayer with us on the way to school in the car. He was a good guy, and he planted many seeds in us. He taught us faith and compassion and a thirst for learning new things. He encouraged our confidence and belief in ourselves and in the goodness of others. I'm sure he felt blessed to have his kids, even when we caused him grief. There was never any doubt that he loved us. He was just Dad.

Recently a dad I know died of a heart attack after a round of golf. He was way too young, although his children are adults with kids of their own. His son said, "My dad is never going to be able to tell me he's proud of me. So I am going to tell my kids I am proud of them right now!" And he did.

There's always a lot of talk about dads in America, that they are too focused on success, or don't express their feelings, or too self-centered, etcetera, etcetera. Most dads are trying to find their way and to do a good job of parenting just like moms are.

They too are planting the seeds that will become the harvest of the next generation. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and others doing research on the importance of a loving father in a kid's life, tell us that our prisons are full of people who did not feel the love, acceptance, or even the presence of a dad. Kids are more likely to stay in school and graduate, have higher self esteem, test with a higher IQ score, and even have a more fully developed sense of humor if they have a caring dad in their lives.

No expertise is required!! Just show up. A dad who is able to "be there" emotionally for a child, who conveys his love and acceptance and really shares his life *becomes* the expert needed and trains on the job.

One dad in my family said, "Keep them involved. Let them know you love them and are proud of them." He is a great dad who learns everything about fixing things from a book, but has never read a parenting book. However, he is a listener and not afraid to grow. He has great character and is not afraid to express his feelings.

So dads who hang out at the kid's school, in the backyard, at bedtime, and over dinner are just what every family needs. Thanks, Dads, for just showing up and being there. Your kids know they are worth it!

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