

Social Issues

Why Children Need Both a Mom and a Dad

By Focus on the Family

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Mothers and Fathers Parent Differently

God established marriage to connect a husband and wife and any children they have. So what happens when marriage breaks down, as in today's culture? In particular, how does it's demise affect children? More than 30 years of social science studies tell us children do best with a married mother and father, so we know that the loss of either is detrimental to a child's

development.

Different is good.

Much of the value mothers and fathers bring to their children is due to the fact that females and males are different. The cooperative relationship of male and female in marriage blends their differences to provide a child with good things that same-sex caregivers cannot.

Balance is key.

Fathers tend to encourage children to take chances and push limits, while mothers tend to be protective and more cautious. Each approach is essential for a child's healthy development. When either parenting style is extreme it can have an unhealthy effect on children, but together the different approaches of a mother and father are balanced to nurture the child, expand his experiences and give him confidence.

Opposite-sex parents contribute uniquely to child development.

Dr. David Popenoe says,

"We should disavow the notion that 'mommies can make good daddies,' just as we should disavow the popular notion of radical feminists that 'daddies can make good mommies.' ...The two sexes are different to the core, and each is necessary — culturally and biologically — for the optimal development of a human being."¹

Children Need Fathers

Drawing from his own experience of growing up fatherless, President Obama has explained the importance of fathers and acknowledged the effects in his own life of growing up without one. Here is his statement from Father's Day 2009:

"In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence — both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference."

And in a Father's Day speech in 2008, then-U.S. Senator, Obama said:

"We know the statistics — that children who grow up without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty and commit crime; nine times more likely to drop out of

schools and 20 times more likely to end up in prison. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, or run away from home or become teenage parents themselves. And the foundations of our community are weaker because of it."

Fathers should not be optional.

The father, as the male parent, brings unique contributions to the job of parenting that a mother cannot. Even *Psychology Today* understands this, saying, "Fatherhood turns out to be a complex and unique phenomenon with huge consequences for the emotional and intellectual growth of children." ²

Fathers prepare their sons for life.

Boys who grow up with dads have their masculinity affirmed and learn from their fathers how to channel their strength in positive ways. Fathers help children understand proper male sexuality, hygiene and behavior in age appropriate ways. Fathers help connect their children, (especially boys) to job markets as they enter adulthood. This is because fathers, more than mothers, are likely to have the kinds of diverse community connections needed to help young adults get their first jobs. They are also more likely to have the motivation to make sure their children make these connections.

Fathers protect their daughters from predatory males.

Girls with involved, married fathers are more likely to have healthier relationships with boys in adolescence and men in adulthood because they learn from their fathers how proper men act toward women. They have a healthy familiarity with the world of men, and know which behaviors are inappropriate. This knowledge builds emotional security, and helps to safeguard them from the exploitation of predatory males.

Fathers keep children out of jail.

Studies have shown that the presence of a father strongly correlates to children avoiding incarceration. The absence of the father as an authority figure can contribute to a child's disregarding laws and rules. "70% of juveniles in state reform institutions grew up in single or no-parent situations."³

Ideas have consequences.

Anthropology tells us no human society, ancient or modern, primitive or civilized, has ever sustained itself with a buffet-like family model of "just pick what suits you." We cannot escape that male and female differences matter. Our humanity is diminished by those who say that we

are only generic persons randomly equipped with either sperm or eggs. Deconstruction of the biological family structure will not be without profound and painful consequences.

Many of the above facts and statements are summarized from "Why Children Need Father-Love and Mother-Love," "Are Same-Sex Families Good for Children?" and "The Human Case Against Same-Sex Marriage" by Glenn T. Stanton, the director of Family Formation Studies at Focus on the Family.

For more than 35 years, Focus on the Family has worked to support and encourage marriages and families. During that same time period, a great deal of social research has been conducted, which documents the truth that children do best when raised by their married mother and father. The next article in this series gives more information about that research.

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1. David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable of the Good of Children and Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 197.
 2. "Shuttle Diplomacy," *Psychology Today*, July/August 1993, p. 15.
 3. Beck, Allen, *Survey of Youth in Custody* 1987.