

Celebrating Father Figures

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During June we celebrate Father's Day, and if there are fathers and grandfathers in your life, let them know how important they are to you. If you're a father, take some time to reflect on the profound role you play in the lives of your children. Most men will tell you that becoming a father was a life changing experience that helped them understand what it means to love, protect, and be responsible for a child.

Due to life circumstances, financial burdens, or emotional limitations, some children grow up without having their fathers in their lives. Most will experience a lifetime longing for that relationship, even if they never knew their dads. There are children who are fortunate enough to have good stepfathers, or men in their lives who care for them, like uncles, teachers, big brothers, mentors, or other father figures. These men can offer attention, love, and guidance, providing children with the support to grow up confident and hopeful.

If there are children you know who don't have a father in their lives, think about what kind of attention you can provide. Here are ideas that might resonate with you:

- Tell children what you like about them. Focus on their strengths, not on their challenges. Give specific encouragement, like "I noticed how you helped your little sister with her homework, she's really lucky to have you around."
- If you can't see the children in your life as often as you would like, stay connected through letters, email, phone calls or even texting. Communicate that you're thinking of them in simple ways.
- Listen!!! Make the time and space to hear what children are thinking and feeling. Take a walk, go for a drive, or have a lunch date. It's a gift for children to be heard and seen, and it doesn't take a lot of time to have meaningful connections.
- Have fun, but when possible also offer your help with homework, studying, and other challenging tasks.
- Participate in a local school as a mentor. Your one-on-one attention for a child could make the difference between passing or failing.

The time and attention father figures spend with children will influence them for a lifetime. Your loving words and actions can help children grow into caring and compassionate adults.

Research shows that knowledge that there is an adult who believes in them is a key ingredient to fostering resiliency in children. The adult does *not* need to be a biological parent.

And for women who are raising a child without a father figure, you can provide love and attention that children need... especially if you have a "village" for support and resources.

