

Seven Tips for A Modern Dad

By John Badalament

1. Create a vision for fatherhood. Just like a company has a mission, dads need a vision for fatherhood, a *Dad's Vision Statement*. Twenty years from now, what do you hope your child says – and doesn't say – about your relationship? By asking this question, you can be more deliberate in how you choose to spend your time, what skills you need to learn, and what behaviors you want to model.

2. Be the bridge between your own father and your children. Modern dads must sort through their family legacy, particularly the relationship with own dad, to determine the gifts they want to pass on to their own children, as well as the liabilities they must watch out for. To move toward a new vision of fatherhood, you have to be aware of the legacy you carry.

3. Establish a ritual dad time.

One great way to make sure you're spending quality time with your child regularly is to create a *Ritual Dad Time*. This in no way should replace daily family rituals like sharing meals, walking to school, doing shared activities, reading together, etc. Rather, this is a *special*, once per month, one-on-one time with dad. Think of it as the father-child equivalent of a couple's "date-night."

4. Know your children. By *knowing* your children – becoming an expert about their lives – you send them a clear message that they are important and in the process deepen your bond. Beyond your focus and attention, *knowing* requires being a skilled listener and resisting the urge to be a "fix it" listener.

5. Be known by your children. *Being known* involves sharing more about who you are as a man – not just as "dad" – with your children. Tell stories about yourself when you were your child's age. Think of the pressures you faced, what you did for fun, challenges you overcame, who you had a crush on, etc. Letting your children know more about what you think and feel on a regular basis is essential to building a healthy connection.

6. Take care of yourself. Live the life you want your children to lead. Go for regular checkups, and listen to your doctors. One reason men die five years earlier than women is because we don't go to the doctor as often as we should. A study out of the Johns Hopkins Children's Center recently found that a majority of boys 15-19 years old believed that going to the doctor was a sign of weakness. Dads need to model differently.

7. Don't go it alone. It's critical that you make time to talk with other parents. One of the most important and available resources to dads is...other dads! Get together informally with a couple of other dads on a monthly basis and talk about fathering. What's been going well? What parenting challenges are you currently facing? Keep it simple. Or, seek out a parenting group in the community or start a dad's group at your child's school.

About John

John Badalament, Ed.M., is an author, filmmaker, international speaker and leader in the fatherhood field. His forthcoming book, *The Modern Dads Handbook: Four Practices To Stay Connected with Your Kids In A Rapidly Changing World* (New World Library) will be released for Father's Day, 2009. *All Men Are Sons: Exploring the Legacy of Fatherhood*, his acclaimed documentary film, aired on PBS stations across America. His most recent film project is entitled, *Gender Traps: How Marriage Problems Start In Kindergarten*.

John's work has been featured on *NPR* and in *Men's Health Magazine*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Rocky Mountain News* and *The National PTA Magazine*. In 2008, he was recognized in the *New York Times* by the Family Violence Prevention Fund's Founding Fathers campaign to end violence against women and children. A graduate of Harvard's Graduate School of Education, John consults with schools, parent groups, mental health professionals, corrections facilities and religious groups.

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