

To Lead (or Not)

A good leader is someone who does two things—

1. They lead
2. They listen

Your children will naturally look to you for guidance. You now have a responsibility to lead them through life. You get to lead them through the pitfalls and dangers and bring them into adulthood as amazing people who will make a difference in the world. Many fathers try to push away this responsibility — they withdraw and have little involvement or even just quit and drop out of their child's life.

To Lead (or Not)

The first area of being a leader is leading. The good news is that this area of leading often comes naturally to many dads, even though it isn't always easy to do right. As the father, you are able to lead your family by putting in place:

- Expectations that will help your children achieve
- Challenges that will help them grow
- Boundaries that will keep them safe.

The real trick is to do all of this in a way that is healthy for everyone.

Leading in Expectations

It is very important to set the right expectations for your children so that they are motivated to learn and grow. Studies have shown that appropriate expectations will help your child be the most successful in all areas of their lives.

1. Make expectations age-appropriate.
2. Set expectations that give your children a personal goal to reach—one that fits their skills and temperament.
3. NEVER let expectations get in the way of your love and acceptance of your child.

Leading in Challenges

As a father, you can also lead your children by challenging them to do even more than what they think they can. Where expectations are that base limit that you expect, challenges are those things that go beyond.

1. Your child should never feel like they are less loved or less valuable if they don't reach these stretch goals. If your challenges are making them feel that way, even if unintentional, it is time to back off.
2. Remember, these are CHALLENGES—a chance for them to go even further; so there should never be any consequences or demeaning talk if they aren't able to do them. *Instead, use challenges as an opportunity to encourage, teach, and push your child into learning and doing something new.*

Leading in Boundaries

Personal boundaries are one of the most important areas in which you can lead. Boundaries are the often-unspoken rules where one person's responsibilities and rights end and another's begin.

In your family, you can lead by setting boundaries for your children. For example, some important boundaries are:

- Your children should not sit on the laps of any non-family members. That is a personal space boundary that should not be crossed.
- Siblings should not parent other siblings. The personal responsibility of a child does not, and should not, include being a parent.
- No one, except very close friends or very trusted professionals, are allowed to watch your children.

Leading Through Listening, Seeking, Responding and Being Proactive

A good leader leads AND listens. The listening part of leading allows you to respond to your child's true needs. It is a vital part to being a good leader.

For your children, you will want to be better than just a good boss; you want to be connected and close. One of the best ways to do this is to seek out each child and talk to them. Ask them questions about things they enjoy and respond to their responses.

Responding to your child is more than just listening; it involves giving them what they need in the moment. If they are:

- Unsure, you can give them reassurance and stability.
- Sad, you can give them comfort.
- Angry, you can hear their anger and give them a safe place to express it.

This is seeing the emotional state of your child and providing what they need.

There are also very basic needs that your child has in order to thrive. These are not things they should have to tell you or show anxiety about before you start providing them. You need to be proactive in these areas so that you are actively meeting your child's needs. The two biggest basic needs where you can lead are the areas of:

- Safety and security
- Love and belongingness

The safety and security side has to do with a safe and stable environment where your child can exist without fear. The second area in which you should be proactive is in love and belongingness. That is, your child should feel unconditionally accepted and loved in your home.

Being proactive in these areas will give you the foundation to be a great leader!

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