



Married parents exert most positive influence on their children's lives

BY JOHN ROSEMOND

About 40 years ago, as divorce was becoming commonplace, America began waking up to the importance of fatherhood. Up until then, the literature on child rearing was almost exclusively mother-oriented. Fathers didn't count for much. After all, Freud had pretty much ignored them, hadn't he?

That changed with the 1974 publication of psychologist Fitzhugh Dodson's *How To Father*. (Factoid: Dodson is credited with being the first to turn the noun *parent* into a verb with *How To Parent*, his 1970 best seller.) Since then, it has become increasingly apparent that whether present or only sometimes present or not present at all, fathers exert great influence on their children's lives, for better or worse.

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By now, nearly everyone knows that kids in father-absent homes are at risk for all manner of difficulties, but the scope of the problem is worth reviewing: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children, one in three, live in father-absent households. Children in such homes are five times more likely to be living in poverty. The infant mortality rate for children born to unwed mothers is nearly twice that of children born to married moms. Just having a father's name on the birth certificate, even if he's not living in the home, is associated with a lower risk of dying in the first year of life. Compared with kids who live with their dads, kids in father-absent homes are more likely to be injured in home accidents. Their mothers are more likely to be depressed. They're at higher risk for asthma. They're much more likely to eventually abuse drugs and/or alcohol, become obese and smoke. Their moms are more likely to smoke too, even during their pregnancies. They're more likely to be abused physically and/or sexually. They don't do as well in school, and they're much more likely to drop out. As teens, they're more likely to become delinquent. By the time they are young adults, they're more likely to be in jail. As adults, they don't earn as much.

Girls who grow up in father-absent homes are more likely, as teenagers, to become pregnant. In that case, they're likely to be single mothers who raise their children in father-absent homes, perpetuating and compounding the original problem. And the wheel keeps on turnin'.

Name the problem, and it's almost a certainty that kids from father-absent homes are significantly more at risk for it. Even though the above litany was meant to be mind-boggling, consider that I had to be selective. Newspapers don't give me enough space to do more than scratch the surface.

But here's something that's not often talked about: Children of unmarried, cohabiting parents are at higher risk for most of these same problems as well. That means the real problem isn't so much the absence of a father in the life of a child; it's the absence of a husband. More specifically, it's the absence of a marriage.

That makes sense. After all, nothing contributes more to a child's sense of well-being than knowing his parents are in a vibrant, committed relationship with one another. Under those circumstances, he doesn't even need a lot of attention. More important is the fact that his parents give a lot of attention to each other.

In light of this, I propose that we start calling the father problem what it really is: the marriage-absent home. For a child to grow up with a father is good, but for a child to grow up with a father who is first and foremost a husband is even better.



John Rosemond (www.rosemond.com), one of America's busiest and most popular speakers in the parenting field, is on a mission to help parents claim loving leadership of their families. He is known for his sound advice, humor and relaxed, engaging style. He is syndicated in approximately 225 newspapers nationwide and has written 14 best-selling parenting books, including his newest, *Parent Babble: How Parents Can Recover From 50 Years of Bad Expert Advice*. ■



American
Red Cross

Red Cross seeks new volunteers

(Submitted by the American Red Cross)

The American Red Cross is looking for volunteers who will help work on blood drives in their local area. Volunteer opportunities include registering blood donors as they arrive and serving refreshments to those who have given blood.

Blood drives are held at various locations throughout the Spring Lake, Grand Haven, and Fruitport area with varying dates and times. A brief training is provided.

Like the emergency room of a hospital, the American Red Cross must be prepared to respond to patient emergencies with blood products 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Through the everyday support

and generosity of blood donors, blood drive sponsors and community volunteers, the Red Cross can be prepared to do this day-in and day-out, no matter when or where blood products are needed.

"We are so thankful to our loyal blood donors, blood drive sponsors and volunteers for everything they do each and every day," said Tim Lipan, executive director of the American Red Cross. "It is because of them that we are able to provide blood for people in their time of need."

If you have four hours to give, like people, and want to make a difference, please call (231) 720-4227 and ask for Jennifer or email: Jennifer.bokach@redcross.org. ■

Grand Valley State University announces area graduates

(Submitted by Grand Valley State University)

Almost 4,000 students earned degrees from Grand Valley State University during the last academic year. Students who graduated at the conclusion of the 2011-2012 academic year from this area include: Fruitport residents Aiste Baltuonyte, Hillary A. Berry, Lindsay N. Boone, Frank E. Durante, Andrew R. Fountain, Karen J. Gee, Brandon S. Harris, Michael R. Hilliard, Katie M. Langlois and Rachel L. Robinson.

Nunica was also well represented by graduates Brandy J. Buys, Andrea I. Childress, Dawn L. Medendorp, Adam M. Rant, Rachel L. Rant, Misty R. VanBrocklin and Ryan D. VanKlompenberg. ■