

FROM THE DEAN OF BOYS' EDUCATION

GOOD FATHERING MATTERS

Jason Cheers | Dean of Boys' Education

A recent article published by parenting educator Michael Gross in his 'Insights' newsletter titled Father Time is Valuable Time provides an important reminder that 'good fathering matters' to boys.

Boys learn their first lessons of manhood from their fathers. Early primary-aged boys usually want to spend a great deal of time with their dads. Steve Biddulph, author of *Raising Boys*, describes this phenomenon as 'father-hunger' and suggests that dads need to be around their sons in the primary school years as much as they can so they can 'download the software' of how to be male.

During adolescence, the father-son relationship can become problematic. While teenage boys seem to be hard-wired to challenge their fathers, most desperately want their dads to be proud of them. Teenage boys need a father who can be firm when needed as boys don't always make great decisions. They need a father who remembers the awkwardness and insecurity of being a teenage boy himself. And they relate best to dads who don't take themselves too seriously. The judicious use of humour, particularly with boys, is a great fathering strategy.

The critical role of fathers and male adult role models is also acknowledged in a boy's literacy development. Of key importance is the role modelling that is shown towards reading at home. This needs to be more than just magazines and newspapers. If boys don't see the male adults in their lives reading and discussing the books they are reading, they're not receiving key messages about the importance reading has to the lives of boys and men.

However, for some fathers, first-hand interactions with their children are easier said than done. Family separation, work circumstances and busy lifestyles are all factors affecting their capacity to be as involved as they would like to be. In these circumstances it's important that dads maintain an emotional attachment; do their best to know what's going on in their lives; and respond appropriately to their developmental imperatives.

Michael's article concludes with four tips for fathers which I think offer great advice:

1. Have adventures with your son.
2. Support your partner's parenting.
3. Change as your son changes.
4. Discipline with firmness and compassion.



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