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FATHER PRESENCE MATTERS:
A CASE FOR FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

FATHER PRESENCE MATTERS: A CASE FOR FAMILY

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Children from single parent homes experience disadvantages that often continue into adulthood. This qualitative dissertation project examines the pain and lived experiences of a family where father absence continued through three generations. Literature regarding father absence is reviewed, and the negative outcomes associated with fatherlessness are explored. This project combines a 12-week curriculum training, a 12-day Twelve-Step component, and a 12-month mentorship in a faith-based response to fatherlessness. The objective of this project is to reconnect fathers in a meaningful way with their children, ease pain and facilitate healing of all involved parties.

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CHAPTER I

“Fathers are essential to the wholesome growth of both girls and boys and provide the needed skills that complement a mother’s contribution.”¹

– Walter G. Vaux

“Addressing the problem of absent fathers must be a national priority because it impacts the well-being of America’s children, families and communities.”²

- Indiana Senator Evan Bayh

Children are rarely raised in homes where both the father and mother are emotionally, spiritually and physically involved. The number of children being raised in single parent homes continues to rise.³ Research by the National Fatherhood Initiative indicates that 27% of children in the United States live in single parent homes, which translates into nearly 20 million children living with only one parent.⁴


There are approximately twenty-four million children in the United States living in fatherless homes. Father absence has become a national trend, adversely affecting the lives of children in virtually every race and ethnic group. The Morehouse Conference concluded, “The problem of father absence crosses racial, ethnic, and class lines . . . this growing form of child neglect has been tolerated in communities throughout the country, among rich, poor, and middle class alike, and in nearly every ethnic group.” This trend has left devastation among the rich and the poor in communities across America. It has become culturally common, acceptable and even expected that millions of children will grow up without their fathers. Krohn & Bogan define absent fathers as “those who do not interact with their children on a regular basis and consequently do not play a significant role in their development.” Father absence can be the result of divorce, death or abandonment. Research confirms that the majority of children in the United States will spend a portion of their lives in a single parent home. According to the Minnesota

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6 Morehouse Research Institute and Institute for American Values, _A Statement from The Morehouse Conference on African American Father_, (Atlanta, GA, 1999), 6. The Morehouse Conference of 1998 was a collaborative effort of The Morehouse Research Institute and The Institute for American Values. It brought together scholars, activists and advocates for father involvement, such as David Blankenhorn, Founder and President of the Institute for American Values, Ron Mincy, Columbia University School of Social Work, William Julius Wilson, Harvard sociologist, Dr. Bernard Franklin, Vice President of the National Fathering Center, Pulitzer Prize winning columnist William Raspberry and others to discuss the trends of fatherlessness and offer political, economic, social, and spiritual recommendations.

7 Ibid.

8 Franklin B. Krohn and Zoë Bogan, “The Effects Absent Fathers have on Female Development and College Attendance,” _College Student Journal_ (2001), 598.

Family Institute, “One hundred and eighty communities exist in the United States where ninety percent of all families are without fathers. Seventy percent of white and ninety-four percent of black children will live with only one parent by the time they are eighteen.”\(^{10}\) Customarily it is the father that is absent from the family equation\(^{11}\) (Appendix A).

Absentee fathering often traverses multiple generations. The pain of abandonment often repeats itself cyclically; from one generation to the next, the destructive consequences continue to thrive. In one case, an unwed eighteen-year-old single mother, who was a victim of father absence herself was abandoned and left with the sole responsibility of raising her two children.\(^{12}\) She was a freshman in college at the time of the birth of her twins. The father of the twins was disconnected and uninvolved during their growing up years and continues to be estranged. The mother later married and gave birth to another daughter, leaving the three children with neither father present in their lives. As a child, the female twin often asked her mother, “Where is my daddy?” The mother always responded as the reason for his absence, “It is not because he doesn’t love you, but life has prevented him from being here.” She didn’t have an answer to explain why she was left with the sole responsibility of child rearing. She did not have an answer that could erase the pain of knowing that her children had a father somewhere, who did not love them enough to be present in their lives. The father was never around to toss a football with his son. In the same manner, he was not there to model a dating standard for

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\(^{10}\) The Minnesota Family Council/Minnesota Family Institute, *Volunteers See End to Father-absence Cycle, Mentor Youth in Fatherless Homes*, 1.


\(^{12}\) Personal Communication, this case presents a three generational view of fatherlessness in the writer’s family.
his daughter. Life usually does not prevent fathers from being absent from their children, instead, “The principal cause of fatherlessness is paternal choice.”¹³ A commitment to be involved is a decision that each father makes, regardless of the situation.

The first-generation mother raised three children, who are all college graduates and productive members of society. She was very involved in their lives, emotionally accessible and supportive. She instilled in each of them a personal belief that they could accomplish and be anything in life. The strength, love and involvement of this mother could not shield her children from the inner aching that their fathers’ absence left behind. Although her expression of love continues to be profound, as adults, they still ask “Why?” Their question is simply, “Why didn’t my father love me enough to be involved?”

In this case, the cycle of disconnected fathers continued for three generations. The pain of father absence repeated itself in the third generation, through the children of the daughter born after the twins. Her two children, a boy and a girl, are four years apart in their ages and have two different fathers. The boy is the oldest and his father is present in his life, but is emotionally distant. The girl’s father disclaimed her at birth and continues to be physically and financially absent. The six-year-old daughter told her mom recently, “I want a new daddy . . . who comes to see me, does things with me and takes me places.” Like many, this six-year old has a father that is completely disconnected. On another occasion, she asked, “Mom, has my daddy ever come to see me?” Hearing this type of question from a child is heart wrenching. She, like so many children in the world, yearns for a father who is present.

¹³ Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 22.
Children benefit from having fathers who are not only present, but are also emotionally engaging, affirming and accepting. The most important factor that contributes to positive or negative outcomes for children is the quality of the father-child relationship, rather than just his physical presence. This quality of relationship “has to do with warmth, supportiveness, comforting, caring, nurturance, affection, or simply love.”

McLanahan & Sandefur after years of research, which included analyzing four large national databases and controlling for a wide variety of factors, including urban location, race, income, residential instability, parent’s education, child’s cognitive ability, child support payment, and other variables provided evidence that father absence is a leading cause of negative and harmful outcomes for children. These researchers concluded,

The evidence is quite clear: Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents race or educational background, regardless of whether the parents are married, when the child is born, and regardless of whether the resident parent remarries.

This is a case study about the life of the writer. She is referred throughout the manuscript as the second-generation female twin or as the writer. Her interest in father absence started early in childhood as she sought to understand the question, “How can a

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16 Rohner, The Importance of Father Love, 383.

17 McLanahan, Growing up, 1.

18 Ibid.
father not be involved in his child’s life?” Growing up without a father was enormously painful for her. Through her own pain, she longed to understand the process of father-child reconciliation.

The inner pain of children with uninvolved fathers often drives them down destructive paths in pursuit of male attention, approval and acceptance.19 Dr. Wade F. Horn, a clinical child psychologist and president of the National Fatherhood Initiative says, “Research has consistently shown that children do best when reared with a combination of emotional warmth and behavioral control; they depend for their well-being on a combination of mothers’ nurturance and fathers’ discipline.”20 The ideal family pattern for children is one where both parents are happily married, loving and actively involved with their children.21 Biological fathers can contribute emotional and social guidance that is distinct from that of a mother, mentor or surrogate father figure.22 The biological father’s contribution to his child is unique and irreplaceable.23

The writer’s father reentered her life briefly in her teenage years. He was met with anger, which is a common emotional response in parent-child scenarios that involve rejection. Her father resurfaced briefly, and as he exited her life for a second painful time, she was left with accumulated feelings of rejection.


22 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 48; Beth M. Erickson, Longing for Dad: Father Loss and its Impact (Health Communications, Inc. Deerfield, FL, 1998), 32.

23 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 2; Erikson, Longing for Dad, 32.
At the age of nineteen, she married a man twice her age. She sought the approval and acceptance of a father figure. Ironically, her husband was present physically, but emotionally unavailable. Girls who are constantly faced with rejection often turn their emotions inward. In addition, the desire to be accepted drives them to excel academically. Central to this drive is the pursuit of approval, which has its root in the perception that “If I do it well, I will be accepted.”

She longed for her father’s involvement, even into adulthood, but every time that she reached out to him, she was rejected. It is difficult for a person to reach out into the distance for an estranged father with the hope of pulling him close. The writer found herself in an Abrahamic place of hoping against hope for reconciliation (Romans 4:17). Abraham believed God for a promised son, even after it became impossible to produce a child in his natural body. Many people have found themselves in an endless wait as they have “against hope believed in hope,” that they would be reconnected with their father (Romans 4:17).

The writer’s interest in a dissertation project on father absence emerged from seeing her 6-year-old niece, the third-generation female, in excruciating pain over the absence of her father. The writer’s childhood pain repeated itself in the life of her niece as the cycle of father absence continued into a third-generation. Her niece has had crying episodes, where she repeated over and over, “I want my daddy.” This is the heart cry of millions of children, “I want my daddy.” This project is a forward step in understanding the pain that father absence leaves behind, with hope that this insight will cause fathers to

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24 All scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.
want to return home to their children. This return will require the dedication of both the father and child to the healing process.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been an explosion in research on the benefits of having engaged and involved fathers, as well as the deleterious consequences of father absence.\(^25\) Although the negative outcomes for fatherless children are pervasive and impact all ethnicities,\(^26\) the focus of this qualitative research is on understanding the lived experiences of a particular family that has suffered through the pain of three generations of father absence. The literature regarding father absence is reviewed, and the negative outcomes associated with fatherless children are explored. The father absence literature categorically concludes that the father’s role is essential in child development.\(^27\) This research demonstrates that children from single parent homes experience disadvantages when compared to their peers. In addition, the pain and emotional longing for the absentee father often persists into adulthood.

The writer in this dissertation project aims to develop a program from a Christian perspective that can be implemented in churches or faith-based groups to address the issue of father absence. The ultimate goal of this project is to reconnect fathers in a


meaningful way with their children, easing pain and facilitating healing of all involved parties. This project provides a practical resource for the church to gain forward momentum in assisting to eradicate the pain left behind by absentee fathers.

The primary step in the process of reconciliation for fathers is that they must come to understand that their presence matters. Only at this critical phase can a father began the journey of reconnecting with his child. The child will need to come to a place where he is able to forgive his father for his absence.

STATEMENT OF SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research will be limited in the following ways: The writer does not seek to identify a certain ethnicity as being more prone to father absence. The writer agrees with the literature; the negative outcomes for fatherless children are pervasive in every race and therefore not limited to any particular ethnicity.28

The writer appeals to the Scripture for its definition of marriage and for the understanding of God’s intent for family formation and fatherhood. This research is anchored on the biblical definition of marriage being a union between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Hebrews 13:4). The writer rejects all opinions of alternate lifestyles as being an acceptable family equation. The writer further rejects opinions that undermine and devalue marriage as God’s intent for childbearing and child rearing.

The writer defines father presence as his physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual involvement. This research advocates father involvement, but assumes that

28 Morehouse Research, A Statement from the Morehouse, 6.
fathers can parent when there is physical distance between he and the child. The writer acknowledges that father involvement may appear different in different cultures.

The writer acknowledges that some children raised in single-mother homes will not be poorly adjusted. Some single mothers are successful in raising their children without the support of the child’s father. The writer agrees with Douglas W. Nelson, Executive Director of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who advocates father involvement but warns; “Nothing one says about the importance of fathers should diminish our awareness of health, resilience, and achievement of the millions of children successfully being raised by single parents across the country.”

The writer does not contend that all children will suffer from the negative outcomes that are common among children from fatherless homes. In the same manner, the experience of the family from this case study is not a reflection of all people from fatherless homes.

DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

Interviews will be conducted from family participants in a three generational case study, including the mother of the first-generation, and her three adult children. The third-generation participants are too young to write responses to the survey questions, so verbal interviews will be administered and information gathered from life observations. In addition, an individual interview was conducted with a male who through the motivation of the Antwone Fischer movie reconnected with an adult son after being estranged for over twenty years.

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The following interview questions focused this study:

1. If you could tell your story, father or child, what would you want known?
2. What has been the impact of father absence in your life?
3. In your opinion, does father presence matter?
4. What subject would you place in a father absence curriculum to help heal the pain and aid in the process of mending broken father-child relationships?
5. Has father absence affected your self-concept?
6. Have you ever felt responsible for your father’s absence?
7. Have intimate, interpersonal and spiritual relationships been influenced by your father’s absence?
8. Have you ever tried to contact your father? (If so, describe the experience).
9. In your opinion is it ever too late for reconciliation in broken father-child relationships?
10. How can you move forward in your life if you were unable to reconnect with your father?

The member checking technique will be employed, where the person interviewed will be given the opportunity to check the collected data for accuracy and palatability.

A successful program addressing father absence will require more than strategies that promote responsible fatherhood and policies that encourage financial contribution. Every functioning level of society has a contributing role to play in reversing the trend of father absence and remediating the damage, starting with the church, which has a powerful platform to encourage responsible and meaningful fathering.
The church must move forward in its central role in reconnecting fathers with their children, through promoting a biblical view of fatherhood, and providing platforms to heal broken parental bonds. This dissertation project is one such effort. The project has three components that follow a 12-12-12 track: that is a 12-week training component, a 12-day Twelve-Step Program, and a 12-month mentorship. The combination of these three components: training, 12-Steps and a mentorship is a unique effort in confronting the crisis of father absence. The training curriculum evolved from the common themes from a review of the father absence literature. The curriculum also considers the expressed needs of the case participants. This training phase is a 12-week, faith-based approach to addressing the issue of father absence. It deals with the subjects of family pain and grief, and teaches fathers and children to communicate effectively. Divorce, strengthening marriages, and the liberating power of forgiving the absent parent are discussed.

After completing the 12-week curriculum, the child advances to the Twelve-Step Program which requires 12 days of group meetings over a period of three months. These meetings will be held once a week with 8-10 children from fatherless homes in each group, each of whom has been paired by a program coordinator. The 12-Steps will be presented and discussed in sequential order, one per session. The groups will meet, journey through the 12-Steps, discuss issues that surround father absence, and tell their personal stories. The participants will have active involvement in individual and group exercises that are designed to stimulate self-reflection, which is essential in working out any recovery and healing program. After completing the Twelve-Step Program, the child will be presented with a letter of invitation to advance to the mentorship.
The mentorship begins with a mandatory orientation as scheduled by the program coordinator. There is an extensive matching and selection process for both the mentor and mentee. There is also a tailored orientation for the parent/guardian, mentor and mentee. This component of the program provides male role models, who will give friendship, support and encouragement to a fatherless child.

ADVERSE EFFECTS OF FATHERLESSNESS

“Society is reaping the consequences of what happens when too many fathers are absent from the home and the men who could make a difference choose to do nothing about the children who are left behind.”

- Alyssee Michelle Elhage

Father presence involves physical, emotional and functional connectedness.31 David Blankenhorn, founder and president of the Institute for American Values, wrote regarding the current trend of fatherlessness:

Tonight, about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep in homes in which fathers do not live. Before they reach the age of eighteen, more than half of our nation’s children are likely to spend at least a significant portion of their childhoods living apart from their fathers. Never before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers. Never before have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems . . . if this trend continues; fatherlessness is likely to change the shape of our society.32

30 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 3.


32 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 1.
The presence of an involved father significantly increases the chances that the child will experience positive outcomes, such as increased cognitive competence, improved academic achievement, and a stronger sense of self-worth. Correspondingly, fatherless children more often suffer negative outcomes, such as developmental and behavioral problems. Children who lack father figures are more prone to experience diminished levels of cognitive competence, exhibit poor school performance, and display low self-esteem. In addition, these children are more inclined to promiscuous sexual activity, and are at a greater risk for emotional problems, substance abuse, violence and other delinquent behaviors (Appendix C). Fathers influence their children’s moral development, academic achievement, and competence in social interactions and emotional and mental health. Children are more secure in their identities, when the father is present and actively interacts with them. Horn says, “Fatherlessness is our most urgent social problem.” He contends that the first step in reversing the adverse

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33 National Center on Fathers and Families, Father Presence Matters, 3-4.


35 National Center on Fathers and Families, Father Presence Matters, 3-4.


effects of fatherlessness, while improving the well-being of children lies in “reconnecting them to their fathers.”

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**Diminished Levels of Cognitive Competence**

Cognitive development is the process where a child perceives and interprets presented information. Researchers contend that paternal involvement positively influences children’s cognitive development and social competence. One of the most important paternal investments as asserted by Blankenhorn is “a father’s distinctive capacity to contribute to the identity, character, and competence of his children.” Children from fatherless homes often have diminished cognitive development, which makes it difficult for them to excel. Father absence often impedes the child’s learning process.

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40 Ibid.


Poor School Performance

Children from single parent homes tend to have poorer school performance than children who live with both parents. In a study of over 25,000 children, McLanahan & Sandefur found that many children from single parent homes had lower grade point averages, decreased aspirations for college, poorer attendance records and higher drop out rates when compared to those who lived with both parents. Children with involved fathers traditionally have increased cognitive competence, empathy and internal locus of control. Children with absent fathers are less likely to remain in school and therefore enter the workforce with less earnings. Researchers report a similar trend for college attendance; children from two parent homes are more likely to attend college than children from single parent homes. Studies by Morrison & Cherlin, Lang & Zagorsky & Aughinbaugh, et al. demonstrate a decrease in the quality of academic performance of

44 Ibid.
45 McLanahan, Growing up, 38.
children from father-absent households when compared to father-present households. Other studies corroborated the issue of diminished school performance in children from father-absent homes. Lessing, Zagorin, & Nelson documented a trend that children from father-absent homes have lower IQs and verbal and performance scores than their counterparts from father-present households. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that “Children do better in school when their fathers are involved whether or not their fathers live with them or whether their mothers are also involved.”

Low Self-esteem

Self-esteem is developed in childhood and is greatly impacted by the parent-child relationship. Children with involved and loving fathers are more likely to have a healthy self-esteem. Parents instill in their children the belief that they are valuable and important; children depend on this love and affirmation. A child being raised by both


52 Erickson, *Longing for Dad*, 226.

53 Ibid.
parents in an active, loving and involved environment is the best scenario to provide children with a secure emotional haven.54

Promiscuous Sexual Activity

Teenagers from single parent families tend to engage in sexual activity before children who live with both parents.55 Other researchers conclude more specifically that children from single parent families are twice as likely to enter into early sexual activity.56

Emotional Problems

Children from father absent homes are more likely to experience emotional disorders and depression compared to children from father-present households.57 According to research by the National Fatherhood Initiative, emotional problems are two or three times more common with children who live apart from their biological father than their peers who live with their married, biological or adoptive parents.58

54 Erickson, Longing for Dad, 226-229.


57 National Center on Fathers and Families, Father Presence Matters, 2.

58 Horn, Father Facts, 15.
**Substance Abuse**

Substance abuse and violence are more prevalent with children from father-absent homes. Children, who live apart from their fathers, are more prone to use illegal substances and commit crimes. A survey conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services on child health concluded that fatherless children are at a much greater risk for drug and alcohol abuse.

**Violent Behaviors**

Children growing up in father absent families commonly experience behavioral and psychological problems in childhood and adverse effects throughout the life span. They are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems. A study comparing poverty and violent predictors found that the proportion of its single parent homes, rather than its level of poverty, could predict the rate of a community’s violent crimes. Children from father absent homes are often more predisposed to aggressive behavior, violence and drug use than children from two-

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parent homes.\textsuperscript{64} The active presence of a father decreases the chances that adolescents will use drugs or commit crimes.\textsuperscript{65}

**FATHERS ARE MORE THAN FINANCIAL PROVIDERS**

“We must remember that the noncustodial parent is still a parent, and not just a source of child support.”\textsuperscript{66} – California Senator Raymond N. Haynes

The familial roles of men have changed substantially over the past forty years.\textsuperscript{67} The family structure has been affected by changes in the division of labor and constant adjustments in child support patterns. These changes have contributed to the retreat of many men from their families.\textsuperscript{68} Lamb says, “There is every reason to believe that children raised in single parent families will be at risk.”\textsuperscript{69} The failure of non-custodial fathers to have consistent interactions with their children, as well as provide emotional, financial and spiritual support, leads to multidimensional deprivation.\textsuperscript{70}


\textsuperscript{65} Antecol, *Does Single Parenthood*, 2-3.


\textsuperscript{69} Lamb, *The Devaluation of the Father*, 28-29.

The family structure that includes both biological parents raising their children together has changed over the last several decades.\textsuperscript{71} Out-of-wedlock childbearing and rising divorce rates have contributed to the epidemic of fatherlessness.\textsuperscript{72} According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one-half of all marriages end in divorce and 60\% of all second marriages end in divorce.\textsuperscript{73} When compared to other countries America has the highest rate of children born outside of marriage and the greatest number of union dissolutions.\textsuperscript{74} The increasing rates of divorce and separation have contributed to the trend of fatherless homes.\textsuperscript{75} However, out-of-wedlock births drive the trend of fatherlessness, as Blankenhorn substantiates, “Unwed parenthood has thus become, by far, the nation’s fastest-growing family structure trend and the primary engine of the current growth of father absence in our society.”\textsuperscript{76} The result is that millions of children are deprived of the physical presence, emotional, spiritual and material support of their fathers.\textsuperscript{77} The statistics continue to increase of children born outside of marriage in the United States.\textsuperscript{78}

Fathers who do not provide financial support, regardless of the reason, are considered “deadbeats.” Deadbeat is a slang term, which the \textit{American Heritage}
Dictionary defines as “one who does not pay one’s debt.” Deadbeat dads are those who have abandoned their financial responsibilities to their children. The term deadbeat is contemptuous, denigrating and unfairly places all dads who have not paid child support under the same umbrella. According to Bill Harrington, “Deadbeat dad implies with absolute certainty that a separated father who has “allegedly” not paid child support is de facto a bad father and not worthy of understanding or support for what is often his own economic hardship. Whereas, a father who is with his family and who provides the same level of financial support is still valued and respected.” The Census Bureau reports that only 10% of all noncustodial fathers fit the “deadbeat dad” category. Furthermore, the reports shows that 90% of fathers with joint custody paid the support due and 44.5% of fathers with no visitation rights still financially support their children. The GAO Report indicates that of the fathers not paying child support, 66% are not doing so because they lack the financial resources to pay. Some men have neglected to pay child support because of a lack of access to a job. Should these men be cast aside for their temporary inability to pay child support? A definition for deadbeat dads may include men who are not physically available to their children, who are not emotionally and spiritually involved, and do not contribute financially. Horn maintains that a deadbeat dad is not just a person that is delinquent on his child support payments, but is one who is emotionally


81 Census Bureau Report, Series P-23, No. 173.

82 GAO Report: GAO/HRD-92-39 FS.
and/or physically detached from their children as well. An example of the appropriate role of fathers was illustrated by a posting found on the side of a New Jersey city bus, which showed a boy holding a baseball bat and a glove, and the caption read, “It takes more than a paycheck.” A father’s contribution to his children is to be a role model, accessible, and involved. Steir & Tienda, in a provocative thesis that explored the question, ‘Are men marginal to the family?’ concluded that, “Father absence is more than an economic problem. Because fathers are key agents of socialization, their presence is critical for healthy child development.” In America, it appears that the father’s significance in the family structure is equivalent to a child support check. Blankenhorn contends that America has lowered its standard; instead of advocating father involvement it propels a deadbeat dad strategy that does not work. He says, “Our current deadbeat dad strategy fails even to acknowledge our society’s spreading crisis of family fragmentation and declining child well-being.” The core issue in the deadbeat dad model is a focus on the absence of money rather than fatherlessness, “We do not ask this guy to be a father . . . We ask him to send a check. Instead of demanding what is owed, we demand money.”

85 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 2.
86 Steir, Are Men Marginal to the Family?, 23.
87 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 127.
88 Ibid., 127.
89 Ibid., 125, 127.
the irreplaceable contributions of fathers, stressed, “He gives his children a model of
manhood, approval and acceptance and enforces authority in the home. None of this can
be replaced by a child support check or an occasional weekend visit.”90 The financial
contribution of fathers is important, but it is not the only essential factor in a healthy
family structure.91 A major barrier to healthy family formation is “the lack of a male
image – that is the lack of a father. To pretend otherwise is simply to pretend that money
is important, but fathers are not.”92

Men should follow through with their familial obligations, which include
providing regular financial support to their non-custodial children, because father absence
robs the family of additional income and consequently reduces their standard of living.93
According to The National Center on Fathers and Families, “Children living in mother-
only families almost inevitably experience financial challenges as a result of father
absence.”94 However, financial disadvantage is not the only problem ensuing from father
absence.95 When society bases the father’s value to the family in financial terms only, a
lack of support is viewed as evidence that he is unimportant to the family equation.96 If a

90 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 2.
91 Steir, Are Men Marginal to the Family?; National Center on Fathers & Families, Father
Presence Matters, 2-3.
92 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 127.
93 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 53; Sara McLanahan, Father Absence and the Welfare of
Children (Network on the Family and the Economy), 2.
94 National Center on Fathers and Families, Father Presence Matters: A Review of the Literature,
95 National Center on Fathers and Families, Father Presence Matters, 2-3; Steir, Are Men
Marginal to the Family?, 23.
96 Ibid.
father’s contributions are seen as beneficial in the emotional, psychological, and spiritual realm, he is valuable to the family even through financial disruption.

FATHER ATTACHMENT

“Although father and mother usually play different roles in their child's life, ‘different’ does not mean more or less important.”97

– Dr. Richard A. Warshak

Fathers and mothers contribute distinctively to the development of their children’s identity, character and competence.98 The mother-child bonding that occurs in the early stages of child development is accepted by society as essential in healthy child development. However, historically the father-child bonding has not been viewed as equally significant.99 Michael Lamb in illustrating society’s devaluation of the father’s role says,

There is a peculiar tendency to infer sequentially that, because mothers are the primary caretakers, they are more important than fathers . . . This rapidly becomes translated into a belief that mothers are uniquely important. Fathers can hardly be expected to maintain a belief in their importance when they are continually being told of their irrelevance, other than as economic supporters of the family unit.100

98 Erickson, Longing for Dad, 226.
100 Lamb, The Devaluation of the Father, 28-29.
Lamb’s review of the research concludes that fathers can and do form attachments to infants, similar to the mother’s attachment.\textsuperscript{101} His research of seven to thirteen-month-old toddlers demonstrates that children form attachments to their fathers, similar to maternal bonds.\textsuperscript{102} Children in his study had similar reactions to separation from both mother and father. Children can become securely attached to their fathers, as Clinton & Sibcy maintain, “The father’s attachment influence is profound.”\textsuperscript{103} Fathers are significant in early child development and children can benefit from having a warm, affectionate, loving and involved father.\textsuperscript{104}

Society has undervalued the role of the father and his contributions to the development and overall well-being of his children.\textsuperscript{105} Lamb evaluated the father’s role, and expanded its definition beyond father as financial provider, and moral and sex role educator, to include father as nurturer.\textsuperscript{106} Lamb contends that the father’s role as nurturer begins at childbirth.\textsuperscript{107} The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice affirms the father’s role of nurturer; “Fathers’ role is more than that of economic provider of the past and now includes nurturing, care giving, and emotional support in


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 85.

\textsuperscript{104} Lamb, The Role of the Father: An Overview, 29, 33.

\textsuperscript{105} Lamb, The Devaluation of the Father, 28-29.

\textsuperscript{106} Lamb, The Role of the Father, 104-120; 332-342; The National Child Resource, A New Era of Family Centered Practice, 1.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 104-120; 332-342.
both obvious and subtle ways.” Fathers can establish the same bonding that occurs between mother and child and the “father-infant and mother-infant relationships are qualitatively differentiable.” The bonding between father and child is as essential as the mother-child bonding.

In affirming the idea that mothers cannot be fathers, Clinton & Sibcy quoted noted “fathering” expert William Pollack, “Fathers are not male mothers.” In promoting the position that parental roles are not interchangeable, Clinton & Sibcy say, “The way a dad develops a secure attachment to his kids is different than the way a mom does.” Fathers are more likely to engage their young children in more physical and stimulating play, whereas mothers often interact with them in a more care-giving manner. The mother and father separately contribute unique elements to their child’s well-being and collectively, “It’s a combination of the father’s tendency to challenge achievement combined with the mother’s typical nurturing that creates happy kids.” Father involvement and nurturance is positively associated with children’s intellectual, social and moral development.

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110 Ibid.


112 Ibid., 108.

113 Ibid.


Many people believe, as the God of the Bible has promised, that He will never leave them alone (Hebrews 13:5). When one of the most important people, a father, has rejected or abandoned a child, it is often difficult to believe that others can be accessible and reliable. In reality, God is ever-present in pain and provides the courage, strength and wisdom necessary to heal broken parental bonds. Through God’s empowerment, victims of father absence are able to grow spiritually, emotionally, and relationally from their experiences. It is this same endowment that enables fathers and children to reconnect in a meaningful and progressive manner. Clinton & Sibcy maintain that it is a divine principle that people grow and mature through pain; “anything that grows and matures does best when provided with the right mixture of two critical ingredients: support and challenge.” Ideally, victims of father absence will find new resources in God and meaning in their pain.

There is a general consensus that attachments are the emotional relationships developed between a child and his caregiver. In a broader perspective, “attachments” describe the relationship rules that manage the behaviors, responses and interactions as people give and receive love. Man has an inherent desire to belong to community and to experience meaningful relationships, such as with parents, a spouse, children, and God. A desire for intimacy, love, acceptance and affirmation is natural considering

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117 Ibid., 133.
118 Ibid., 6, 212.
119 Ibid., 12, 212.
120 Ibid., 3, 12, 157.
man’s innate relational element.\textsuperscript{121} God made man with the capacity for relationships and the need for community.\textsuperscript{122} A person’s worldview is shaped by his relationships with his parents and siblings and his interaction with the environment around his earliest childhood experiences.\textsuperscript{123} These early attachments impact a person’s relational skills as well as his ability to give and receive love.\textsuperscript{124} Furthermore, these developed attachments either help or impede the process of a person developing healthy relationships over the course of his lifetime. Since early childhood attachments shape a person’s worldview as adults and impact their relational skills, it is essential that children heal from the issues that surround absentee fathering.\textsuperscript{125}

Children must be able to rely on their parents to meet their emotional, physical and social needs. Clinton & Sibcy challenge parents to help their children form trusting and secure attachments by responding in a sensitive and responsive manner to their needs.\textsuperscript{126} The quality of a child’s attachment is influenced by the quality of care, a mother or father responding in a sensitive and responsive manner to the child’s needs.\textsuperscript{127} Securely attached children have empathy, independence, trust, a better ability to manage impulses and feelings and have greater resilience against stress and trauma.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{121} Clinton, \textit{Attachments}, 3-5, 207.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 16, 212.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 212.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 3, 12-13, 25.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 30, 52.
\textsuperscript{128} Clinton, \textit{Attachments}, 141-144.
A person’s life is off balance and out of order when God is not “the first link in the attachment chain.”129 It must be emphasized that it is never too late for a father to become involved in his child’s life. It doesn’t make a difference whether the child is five or thirty years of age. A meaningful relationship can be established, even when a father has missed all of the child’s developmental, teenage and early adult years. Families can move from absence towards healing and reconnecting. A properly ordered life is to have an intimate relationship with God as the first link and to be securely attached to both mother and father.130

Specific attitudes, behaviors and core beliefs are embedded in people’s attachment styles and guide their relational interactions as adults.131 People desire healthy and loving relationships where there is safety and fulfillment, but attachment challenges can leave a person disappointed and discouraged.

An infant’s relationship with his mother and father lays the foundation for subsequent relationships.132 People measure their self-worth and ability to be caring and empathetic by these templates.133 The attachment styles that develop in childhood continue throughout the life span.134 When a child is raised in an inconsistent, unreliable and uncaring environment, or in an environment where one parent is uninvolved, destructive patterns may develop and negativity may be internalized. Emotions are

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129 Clinton, Attachments, 151.

130 Clinton, Attachments, 12-13, 16, 151; Colin, Infant Attachment, 4.

131 Clinton, Attachments, 25, 47, 99.

132 Ibid., 25, 99.

133 Ibid., 16, 23, 25.

134 Ibid., 25, 47, 99.
subsequently walled off, and a damaged sense of self-worth may surface.\textsuperscript{135} This faulty relating is the result of attachment traumas and leads to distorted relationship principles in adulthood.\textsuperscript{136} However, “with redemption, knowledge and courage, we can reinforce the positive aspects and overcome the self-defeating tendencies of our attachment styles.”\textsuperscript{137}

As adults, secure people have a strong internal sense of value and a healthy sense of self. Therefore, they do not pursue the approval or praise of others.\textsuperscript{138} They are able to be genuine and honest in relationships and do not relate to others based on a distorted fear of being rejected.\textsuperscript{139} They are trusting of others, in tune with their emotions, take responsibility for their feelings, and are open to the feelings of others.\textsuperscript{140}

Attachments are not permanent; therefore, parents must remain connected to their children even in times of severe distress, such as divorce, the loss of a job or a financial setback. Inconsistency and a lack of emotional support during adversity diminish the child’s secure base and can lead to feelings of insecurity and overwhelming mistrust.\textsuperscript{141} However, people who have faulty attachment issues can overcome the damage from their

\textsuperscript{135} Clinton, \textit{Attachments}, 18-20.


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 128.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 128-129, 140.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 17-33.
past and “learn to embrace the secure attachment style that leads to rich, rewarding relationships.”

Although childhood experiences are significant in shaping an individual’s worldviews, injurious elements from childhood do not have to dictate the present. Injurious attachment styles learned in early childhood experiences can be changed, relational mistakes can be corrected, negative patterns of relating can be exchanged for nurturing ones, and parental bonds can be healed. A person can learn to create healthier relationships, provide a platform for old wounds to heal, and progress in their spiritual journey. This level of healing is the will of God for each victim experiencing the pain of father absence.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTIVITY: FATHER-CHILD BONDING

“The emotionally absent father can and should be included in the description and discussion of fatherlessness, because the devastating effect on children is similar.”

– Bill Harrington, Commissioner of the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare

According to a poll conducted by the National Fatherhood Initiative, the most important thing a father should provide for his children is “time.” When fathers spend quality time with their children they create strong emotional bonds. It should be

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142 Clinton, Attachments, 123.

143 Ibid., 73.


145 The National Fatherhood Initiative’s poll, which asked the question “What is the most important thing that a father should provide for his children?” posted its results on the front page of their website. Retrieved December 9, 2004 from http://www.fatherhood.org.
emphasized that advocacy for father involvement is not just an appeal for physical presence in the child’s life, but includes emotional connectivity. Responsible fathering includes positive emotional connection, consistency in the relationship, and physical accessibility.\textsuperscript{146} Fathers and mothers should be actively involved in the lives of their children, for it is the quality of these relationships that is the primary variable in predicting positive child development. The traditional family structure of a married father and mother, actively involved in the lives of their children, is the context in which responsible fathering thrives.

Biller & Kimpton in a view termed “the essential framework,” emphasize the importance of father presence, and maintain that healthy physical and emotional involvement of fathers contributes to positive outcomes for children.\textsuperscript{147} Sociologists contend that the absence of physical and emotional involvement of fathers negatively impacts child development and erodes the moral fiber of society, resulting in a wide range of social problems.\textsuperscript{148} Blankenhorn says, “Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence against women.”\textsuperscript{149}

Propelling research beyond the “essential framework” of family involvement, Lamb demonstrates that the lack of quality father involvement is the primary variable to the

\textsuperscript{146} Lamb, \textit{The Role of the Father: An Overview}, 33; Rohner, \textit{The Importance of Father Love}, 383.


\textsuperscript{149} Blankenhorn, \textit{Fatherless America}, 1.
negative outcomes in children.\textsuperscript{150} These research efforts examine children’s well-being as it relates to the nature and quality of the father-child relationship.

The issue of disengaged and uninvolved fathers is the destructive force that is propelling “America’s most urgent social problems.”\textsuperscript{151} Father absence adversely affects the lives of millions of children, and its profound impact on society is fueling such social ills as violence, crime, child poverty, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and teen suicide.\textsuperscript{152}

The emotional ties that are formed in relationships must be nurtured. Therefore the absence of father involvement hinders those ties and can lead to what seems like a gaping hole in their children’s soul.\textsuperscript{153} Dr. Beth Erickson refers to this gaping hole as “father hunger,” which she defines as the void that is left in a child’s life as a result of “a lack of contact with and knowledge of the father.”\textsuperscript{154} People incessantly attempt to fill the void created by father absence with other things.\textsuperscript{155} The pain from absentee fathers can result in self-medicating behavior or a revolving door of relationships. Self-medicating is the process where a person uses things such as eating, watching television, sex, alcohol or drugs to ease the pain from a trauma or loss. Erickson says of father hunger, “This natural


\textsuperscript{151} Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 1.

\textsuperscript{152} Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 1.; Wood, Effects of Fatherlessness on Children, 1; Hamrin, A Vision for Future Father’s Day, 1.

\textsuperscript{153} Erikson, Longing for Dad, 19.

\textsuperscript{154} Erikson, Longing for Dad, 19; Griffin, Fatherless Women, 21; Krohn, The Effects Absent Fathers, 605.

\textsuperscript{155} Erikson, Longing for Dad, 19-20.
longing, if left unfulfilled, too often dooms people to endless personal and professional dead ends in an effort to fill that hole."  

The feelings of rejection and abandonment surrounding a father’s absence may cause the child to develop soul wounds. These bruised emotions may produce emotional walls, which are roadblocks to healing and personal growth. Healing takes place by destroying protective barriers, reshaping faulty relational principles and learning to develop close connections with others.

FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

“Much of the development, strengths and depth of a woman’s character depend on her father’s stability." – Donna Griffin

A daughter’s relationship or lack of it with her father provides the blueprint for all other male relationships. Fathers play an important role in preparing their daughters for husbands. According to Horn, “Fathers give girls the experience of having a relationship with a man who shows that the definition of love is ‘I care more about you than myself.’” This role modeling is the contribution that all fathers must render, to be present, engaging and meaningfully involved in the lives of their children. The father-daughter relationship normally impacts the way the daughter sees herself and forms the

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template for what she expects in other male relationships.160 Her interactions with her father shape her philosophies concerning men and intimate relationships.161 The lack of an involved positive father negatively impacts girls’ self-confidence, esteem and femininity.162 The lack of a father causes girls to seek male approval and acceptance often in the wrong places.163 This pursuance of approval can be catastrophic for girls.

Girls are impacted by the absence of a caring father. It is evident that the father’s care is an integral part of a girl’s development of self-esteem. Those who grow up without fathers are more inclined to low self-esteem, promiscuity, unwed motherhood, low academic achievement and other reckless behaviors.164 The conclusion is that girls need their fathers’ expressions of love, acceptance and affirmation. Girls from father absent homes are more likely to have underdeveloped relational skills and are at a higher risk to begin families prematurely.165 Hetherington concurred that girls from father-absent homes tend to be more promiscuous and are at greater risk of teenage pregnancy.166 As Blankenhorn explains, “A father’s love and involvement build a daughter’s confidence in her own femininity and contribute to her sense that she is worth loving . . . consequently, women who have had good relationships with their fathers are


161 Ibid.

162 Ibid., 46.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid., 45-48.

165 Painter, *Daddies, Dedication, and Dollars*, 813-850; Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 46-47.

less likely to engage in an anxious quest for male approval or to seek male affection through promiscuous sexual behavior.”

Reversing the trend of fatherlessness deserves and demands attention across every platform: spiritual, social and political. These platforms are challenged to develop strategies and initiatives that will aid in lifting the burden and the negative effects of father absence from society. Efforts to restore children to a meaningful relationship with their fathers are a positive step toward recreating a culture of fatherhood. Blankenhorn summarizes the necessitate of this step, “Unless we reverse the trend of fatherlessness, no other set of accomplishments – economic growth, prison construction, welfare reform, better schools – will succeed in arresting the decline of child well-being and the spread of male violence.”

FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS

“Fatherhood is a social role that obligates men to their biological offspring.”

– David Blankenhorn

Lamb, in relating Biller’s argument for father-child involvement, quotes him as saying “the father is a superior role model.” The father-son relationship is a strong influence in the son’s social, psychological and emotional development. The academic

167 Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 46.
168 Ibid., 25.
170 Ibid., 13-30.
performance of boys is impaired by father absence.171 Fathers provide their sons with the template for fatherhood, and their lived-out example defines to their sons what it means to be a man.172 The health of this primary relationship is a predictor of the son’s future parenting style and communication and relating in other relationships.173 Boys benefit from their father’s involvement and are therefore more likely to become responsible fathers themselves.174

THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE TO ABSENTEE FATHERING

“Only when men stop abdicating their God-mandated role as leaders in their families and communities will we be able to survive and thrive as a nation once again.”175

- Rick Johnson

The church, by nature and essence, has the responsibility to strengthen families, promote the institution of marriage and help individuals pursue healing in every facet of their lives. The church’s voice on the issue of fatherlessness should be the most vibrant and resonating, because its advocacy of father involvement is sustained by God’s promise:


172 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 2.


174 Ibid., 8-9.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and
dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children,
and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a
curse (Malachi 4:5-6).

The Lord foresaw a time when father-child bonds would be weakened, but He
also promised a time when the trend would be reversed. God knew that this day would
come, where father-child bonds are considered peripheral, the rate of father absence is
staggering, and the negative consequences of fatherlessness are pervasive. The church is
the most appropriate vehicle to open the spiritual dimension that leads to the profound
level of healing and forgiveness that is required to reestablish broken father-child
relationships and alleviate the subsequent devastation of father absence. This level of
reconnection requires healing that must extend to fathers and their children, fathers and
mothers, and men and women.

A genuine Christian effort will focus on the spiritual dimension and the massive
healing and forgiveness required to bridge the disconnect between fathers and their
children and reestablish nurturing relationships. Compelling research concludes that
father absence adversely affects children and causes varied negative outcomes. In
addition to the vast evidence in the literature that father absence causes pain in children
and throughout the various stages of life are the real life stories of people, who even in
adulthood still suffer from the pain of father absence.

The church’s response to absentee and irresponsible fathering in America should
involve teaching men about the responsibility of fatherhood, and the outreach should start
early.176 The Fatherhood Project of the Families Work Institute maintains that preparation

176 Kathleen and Kathy Rich Sylvester, Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities: Six Steps
for parenthood should start in boyhood. This preparation should include programs “that teach boys to behave responsibly, set high expectations, offer hope for the future, and ensure that all boys are connected to adult role models.”177 One of the serious burdens of responsible fathering is that fathers provide the road map for their sons to become effective fathers.178 Good fathers can help their sons to understand the responsibilities and expectations of fathering.179 Positive male role models can be provided in the cases where children were unable to be connected to their fathers.180 Here, young boys can be connected to a “father” role model to teach them to behave responsibly and to set high expectations.181 These male role models may help young boys understand what constitutes a healthy marriage and also a vibrant, nurturing relationship between father and child.

Along with mentoring initiatives, the church can also use modeling paradigms, such as father-to-father groups to help educate men about roles, responsibilities and expectations as fathers. Faith-based initiatives designed to reconnect fathers with their families, such as Promise Keepers and the Million Man March have helped millions of men to become more supportive of their families. There are a number of secular initiatives that address the issues that surround fatherless homes, such as the National Center on Fathering, The National Fatherhood Initiative and the Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy. The National Fatherhood Initiative focuses on improving the

177 Sylvester, Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities, 6.
178 Arendell, Co-Parenting, 8-9.
179 Ibid.
180 Sylvester, Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities, 14.
181 Ibid., 13.
well-being of children by getting fathers to commit to their families. The National Center on Fathering focuses on producing research and education on fathering. The Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy encourages both mothers and fathers to physically, emotionally and financially support their children. In addition, the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is an effective mentoring program. The church could follow these models of successful programs.

The church has a crucial role in emphasizing the value of sexual purity among today’s youth. Promoting abstinence should include teaching young people that God’s design is for family formation to be formed within the context of marriage. Teaching unmarried youth to remain abstinent until marriage is the message that will make a profound difference. This message focuses on setting high standards rather than just teaching youth to “say no to sex.” In so doing, the church steps forward and emphasizes that sex is God's intent for marriage while challenging young people to remain sexually pure until marriage. In addition, the church’s efforts should include helping young boys and girls understand the importance of not becoming a father or mother outside of the structure of marriage. This involves teaching young boys and girls about the importance of practicing abstinence.

From their research on responsible fathering, the Social Policy Actions Network has compiled policy recommendations for legislators, governors and agency officials. According to their recommendations, an effective program to promote responsible fathering should include components that help men who are already fathers to develop their parenting and empathy skills.\(^{182}\) Life Coaches for Kids recognizes the spiritual

\(^{182}\) Sylvester, *Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities*, 5.
dimension involved in reconnecting fathers to their children. It operates on the premise that “mentoring single parent young people in life skills, character development and Christian faith” plays a significant role in reversing the trend of fatherlessness.\(^{183}\)

Churches can promote responsible fathering by presenting a biblical view of marriage and fatherhood, as well as disseminating literature that outlines the positive impact of father presence in the lives of their children.

Contemporary family scholars Silverstein & Auerbach, in their research, maintain that policy recommendations for responsible fathering should include diverse family structures rather than advocacy for the two-parent, heterosexual married family paradigm.\(^{184}\) Family structure has changed dramatically over the last few decades, and advocacy for two-parent family structure has declined in the process. However, the church’s advocacy must be for married parents raising their children in an expressive, nurturing and intimate environment; this is the ideal family structure.\(^{185}\) Studies have demonstrated that children who had warm relationships with effective mothers and fathers in the context of a happy marital relationship were better adjusted as adults.\(^{186}\) Positive child outcomes are most likely to evolve from a two-parent family structure. Families benefit when fathers partner with mothers and take on an active, supportive and responsible role. Obviously, the child benefits from the relational interaction, but the father, mother, grandparents and the community at large also reap massive benefits. In

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\(^{184}\) Louise B. Silverstein, “Deconstructing the Essential Father,” *American Psychologist* 54 no. 6 (1999), 397-407.

\(^{185}\) Erickson, *Longing for Dad*, 226-229.

summary, “It’s quite simple: Fathers matter. For children, two parents are better than one.”

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187 Sylvester, Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities, 9.
CHAPTER II
GENOGRAM AND SURVEY RESPONSES

“The potential for becoming free from the influence of one’s family system, however, is much greater in an approach that brings one towards the family than in an approach that takes one away. I think, therefore, in terms of differentiation of self within the system rather than independence of it.”

- Rabbi Edwin H. Friedman

A genogram is an informational tool that gives a picture of a family structure across three generations. It offers a visual display of intergenerational relationships and can offer insight on familial issues, such as reoccurring father absences, sickness and diseases, miscarriages, multiple births, broken relationships, out-of-wedlock births, divorces and others.

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
On the above genogram, the symbols that represent male, female, deceased, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and broken relationships are standard counseling codes.\textsuperscript{4} However, the following three codes to indicate levels of father involvement were developed for this project: “A” father absence, “A/E” emotional father absence and “a” represent father’s absence for a portion of the child’s life.

\textsuperscript{4} Galvin, Understanding, Interpreting, 3.
This case family’s genogram indicates several intergenerational issues, such as six divorces or broken relationships, three children with totally absent fathers, one emotionally absent father, multiple out-of-wedlock births and the father of the first-generation female was absent for a large portion of her life. The genogram indicates that the pattern of father absence began with the birth of her twins. The genogram gives insight into their family system and its generational patterns, which includes the repeated cycle of fatherlessness.

Genograms traditionally demonstrate that history tends to repeat itself.\textsuperscript{5} As summarized by one author, “For better or worse, history does tend to repeat itself in family systems. These patterns are by no means irreversible, but in order to seek change in these historical patterns, family members must first be aware of them.”\textsuperscript{6} The first step in changing bad habits or patterns in a family system is to become aware of the patterns.\textsuperscript{7} Therefore, the first step in reversing the trend of fatherlessness is identifying it as a problem. This first step is essential whether it involves a family system or society as a whole. Hence, “The process of change involves both awareness and intentionality.”\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{5} Galvin, \textit{Understanding, Interpreting}, 3.

\textsuperscript{6} From the Genograms for Personal Use Website, Posted Article, \textit{Background in Family System}, Retrieved March 5, 2006 from \url{http://www.genogram.freeservers.com}.

\textsuperscript{7} Galvin, \textit{Understanding, Interpreting}, 3.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
SURVEY RESPONSES

First-generation Female:

1. **If you could tell your story, father or child, what would you want known?** I would want known that it does not matter what your beginning is you can accomplish positive things in life.

2. **What has been the impact of father absence in your life?** I am insecure in personal relationships. I have a fear of being abandoned, so strong, that I make the effort to end relationships rather than risk being abandoned.

3. **In your opinion, does father presence matter?** Definitely, without a doubt. It is not just financial but their physical and emotional presence.

4. **What subject would you place in a father absence curriculum to help heal the pain and aid in the process of mending broken father-child relationships?** Courses on forgiveness with interactive work so that a person is not just expected to know how to forgive but is shown how to walk it out.

5. **Has father absence affected your self-concept?** Probably in a convoluted way. I think that I have used food to fill a void caused by father absence and therefore have had a weight problem all of my life, which has affected my self-concept.

6. **Have you ever felt responsible for your father’s absence?** No.

7. **Have intimate, interpersonal and spiritual relationships been influenced by your father’s absence?** I think spiritually I have not had the fullness of knowing God as my heavenly father because of not having a paradigm of an earthly father.
8. **Have you ever tried to contact your father? (If so, describe the experience).** I reunited with my father when I was about twenty years old. I had gone through about two years of turmoil because I wanted to have a relationship with him. My mother had always discouraged this and referred to my dad as “your no-good daddy.” My dad lived in the same town but was absent physically, financially and emotionally from us. My mother had good reason to be angry, but her anger caused me further pain. I think because of the person that I am, I was able to make a spiritual peace within myself and I decided that “I don’t care what my dad did or did not do for me; that is between him and his God as for me I am going to treat him like he lived in the same house with me all my life.” I did that; my mother was distressed about it and at times and was very verbal. My dad and I had a lasting and loving relationship for the second twenty years of my life, until he died. The plus from that was that my children loved their grandfather and never realized that we had been estranged.

9. **Is it ever too late for reconciliation in broken father-child relationships?** I feel that it is never too late to try for reconciliation. But I believe that it takes two people who are willing to work.

10. **How can you move forward in your life if you were unable to reconnect with your father?** I think a person can move forward by applying the principles of the serenity prayer; to accomplish acceptance will require work.
Second-generation Male:

1. **If you could tell your story, father or child, what would you want known?** My father was absent because he believed that I needed something material. The moral to my story is that active father involvement is priceless.

2. **What has been the impact of father absence in your life?** It has created a burning desire to be a part of my children’s lives.

3. **In your opinion, does father presence matter?** Yes! I have come to believe that a father’s presence is essential for both son and daughter. A son needs guidance from his father during his journey from boy to manhood. Furthermore, the son needs a point of reference as he transitions from man to being a father. A daughter often patterns her choice of a mate after her father. Daughters without a good reference model will often struggle to make choices concerning their mates.

4. **What subject would you place in a father absence curriculum to help heal the pain and aid in the process of mending broken father-child relationships?** Forgiveness! My mother never taught me to hate my father nor did she allow anyone else to teach me to hate him. Because of that, I was able to focus on the positives or the constants in my life. For example, I grew a deeper love and respect for my mother because she did not give up on me.

5. **Has father absence affected your self-concept?** No! My mother taught me to believe in myself.

6. **Have you ever felt responsible for your father’s absence?** No! I wondered why he was absent for a long time, and one day I was afforded an opportunity to ask him. He replied, “Because he had nothing to give me.”
7. Have intimate, interpersonal and spiritual relationships been influenced by your father’s absence? No!

8. Have you ever tried to contact your father? (If so, describe the experience).
   Yes! When I became a teenager my father moved back to town. I decided to go and see him. It was difficult for me at first because I was a shy child. I had to overcome a lot of fear, but I found out where he was working and went to see him. At first there was a lot of awkwardness, but I kept going to see him and it got easier.

9. In your opinion is it ever too late for reconciliation in broken father-child relationships? No!

10. How can a person move forward when he is unable to reconnect with his father? You must forgive him for not being there, then you can grow to appreciate the fact without him there would be no you. And you must remember that you are not your father.

Second-generation Female Twin:

1. If you could tell your story, father or child, what would you want known? My story is simply that my father’s absence caused me personal pain, some of which carried over into my adult life. In life, I tried to bury the pain through relationships.
   Whenever the pain surfaced it pushed me to achievement; which is not inherently bad. I became an overachiever. Achievement became faulty when I began to derive my self-worth from it. I sought approval and acceptance through
accomplishments and self-medicated through these same venues. I felt that if I was able to “do it well,” my own father might one day be proud enough to be present.

2. **What has been the impact of father absence in your life?** My father’s absence created some attachment and abandonment issues for me in life.

3. **In your opinion, does father presence matter?** Yes, father presence matters! I believe that a father offers a unique contribution to his child. My mother was strong, loving and nurturing, but I still longed to know my own father. I had a strong father role model in a neighbor, who was also my Explorer Scout Leader, and Spiritual Guardian. He had twin girls a year older than my brother and I and another son our age. The father treated my brother, sister and I like we were his own children. Yet, I longed for my own father. For a significant time in my life, I had a stepfather, but somehow, his love and support didn’t fill the void and pain that my father’s absence left behind.

4. **What subject would you place in a father absence curriculum to help heal the pain and aid in the process of mending broken father-child relationships?** I would certainly place a section on forgiveness in a father absence curriculum. Forgiveness is liberating and a better alternative than going through life bitter. I would also place a section that is geared towards bringing personal closure when reconciliation does not occur. I believe that the rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births necessitate a section on shared parenting. This suggestion also comes from watching my sister attempt to parent collaboratively with her son’s father and the difficulties that they have experienced.
6. **Has father absence affected your self-concept?** Yes, I believe my father’s absence affected my earlier life in the area of interpersonal relationships with men. I believe that the need for a father figure made me more vulnerable to marry at 18 years old a man twice my age. I had only known the man that I married around two months, so it had nothing to do with love or being led by the Lord.

**Have you ever felt responsible for your father’s absence?** I never felt personally responsible for my father’s absence. However, I was plagued through life with the question, “Why didn’t my father love me enough to be present?”

7. **Have intimate, interpersonal and spiritual relationships been influenced by your father’s absence?** I developed some abandonment issues from my father’s absence that manifested itself as “I expected people to eventually leave me.” I anticipated that people would walk out on me, because in the back of my mind lived the thought, “How can I trust anyone to stay and be involved in my life if my own father didn’t love me enough to be involved.”

8. **Have you ever tried to contact your father? (If so, describe the experience).** I tried to reach out to my father on a number of occasions, some of which are related in various sections of this manuscript.

9. **In your opinion is it ever too late for reconciliation in broken father-child relationships?** I believe that there can be a point that the necessary elements of reconciliation are missing and as long as they are, reconciliation will not occur. For example, in a relationship where a father resurfaced, unrepentant, unwilling to dialogue and wasn’t transparent enough to move forward. If his behavior was severe enough that he added new pain, the father and child would have a hard
time moving forward. In this type of situation, the person would have to
determine whether to accept the relationship as it was or bring personal closure
and move forward on his own. This is an example of the elements of
reconciliation being missing; making it is almost impossible to move forward in a
healthy manner.

10. **How can you move forward in your life if you were unable to reconnect with your father?** I believe when reconciliation is not forthcoming; the person must come to a place of bringing closure for himself.

Second-generation Female:

1. **If you could tell your story, father or child, what would you want known?** I have been through a great deal of pain in my life. When I was a little girl all my friends had dads that lived with them and I didn’t have that. I didn’t see my father until I was in high school. I was sixteen when I received a call from him and he was upset because I didn’t recognize who he was. He wanted to see me, so my mom and I went to my aunt’s house (his sister) for our meeting. I was so emotional that I couldn’t speak. I had been looking for that father’s love by being intimate with people I didn’t want a future with. This behavior led to me having two children out-of-wedlock.

2. **What has been the impact of father absence in your life?** I don’t know how to relate to men, or how to have a successful relationship with them. I constantly have problems with my self-esteem and not knowing my self-worth.
3. **In your opinion, does father presence matter?** That’s a loaded question because my son’s father was present for a while, but he and his family talked about me negatively around my son. As a result, my son does not respect or listen to anything that I have to say. I feel that when his father doesn’t come to pick him up, our son struggles with anger. On the other hand, my daughter’s father has never been there for her, but she is a straight “A” and “B” student. She misses him and asks about him constantly.

4. **What subject would you place in a father absence curriculum to help heal the pain and aid in the process of mending broken father-child relationships?** I have no idea.

5. **Has father absence affected your self-concept?** Yes, I look for that father’s love in men. I don’t know my self-worth.

6. **Have you ever felt responsible for your father’s absence?** NO! I know that it isn’t my fault.

7. **Have intimate, interpersonal, and spiritual relationships been influenced by your father’s absence?** Yes, I don’t know how to relate to men, how to talk to men, or how to have a successful relationship with them.

8. **Have you ever tried to contact your father?** (If so, describe the experience). After breaking up with my boyfriend in 2002, I was forced to do some self-reflecting. At that time I decided that I wanted to see my father. I arranged a meeting with him. The only thing that he could say is that he was sorry that he had messed up and that he missed out on getting to know me. I stepped up and told him that I forgive him for not being there for me. That all I wanted from him
was for him to be there for my children (his grandchildren). I gave him my phone number and I told him to call me at any time and that he could even call me collect. That was three years ago. I have not heard from him.

9. **Is it ever too late for reconciliation in broken father-child relationships?** No, I feel the ball is in his court. It’s up to him if we have a relationship.

10. **How can a person move forward when he is unable to reconnect with his father?** Forgive him and take it one day at a time.

Suggestions from the Literature:

The following family scholars and family/father initiatives have made topic suggestions in their literature towards reversing the trend of fatherlessness. These suggestions were considered in the development of this project’s curriculum.

*David Blankenhorn*<sup>9</sup>

*Founder and President of the Institute for American Values*

Decrease Divorce

Encourage the Involvement of Faith-based Efforts

Encourage Responsible Fathering

Establish Father Clubs

Fathers Matter Emphasis

Reconnect Marriage and Childbearing

Restore the Idea of Fatherhood

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<sup>9</sup> Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 222-234.
Council on Families in America:¹⁰

Decrease Divorce Rates
Encourage the Involvement of Faith-based Efforts
Fathers Matter Emphasis
Promote Education for Successful Marriages
Spend Time with Children
Strengthen Marriages

William J. Doherty, Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program in the Department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

Martha Farrell Erickson, Director of the University of Minnesota’s Children, Youth and Family Consortium:¹¹

Co-Parenting
Divorce – Critical Transitions
Employment Dimension
Encourage Responsible Fathering
Family of Origin Influence
Fathers Matter Emphasis
Mentoring – Fathers to Learn from other Fathers
Strengthen Marriages

¹⁰ Council on Families in America, Marriage in America, 14-19.

¹¹ Doherty, Responsible Fathering, 1.
Dr. Wade Horn\textsuperscript{12}

Founder and President of the National Fatherhood Initiative:

Community-based Initiatives
Decrease Divorce
Emphasize Positive Father Engagement
Encourage the Involvement of Faith-based Efforts
Encourage Responsible Fathering
Establish Father Clubs
Reconnect Marriage and Childbearing

The Marriage Movement and the Institute for American Values:\textsuperscript{13}

Encourage the Involvement of Faith-based Efforts
Mentoring/Role Models
Reconnect Marriage and Childbearing
Strengthen Marriages

The Morehouse Conference:\textsuperscript{14}

Build Strong Parenting Partnerships
Encourage the Involvement of Faith-based Efforts


\textsuperscript{14} Morehouse Research Institute, \textit{A Statement from The Morehouse Conference}. 
Fathers Matter Emphasis
Father-Mother Relationship
Strengthen Marriages

National Center for Fathers and Families (NCOFF)

Dr. Ken Canfield, Founder:15

Co-Parenting/Team Parenting
Employment Dimension
Family of Origin Influence
Fathers Matter Emphasis
Life/Role Transitions

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice/ a Service of the Child’s Bureau:16

Employment Dimension
Father-Mother Relationship
Life/Role Transitions
Mentoring – Father-to-Father Support
Co/Team Parenting

15 From the National Center for Fathers and Families (NCOFF)’s website: www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu.

The Social Policy Action Network:\textsuperscript{17}

Child Support

Employment Dimension

Enhance Parenting Skills

Father-Mother Relationship

Fathers Matter Emphasis

Strengthen Marriages

\textsuperscript{17} Sylvester, Restoring Fathers to Families & Communities.
Figure 2.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

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Each adult in the case family suggested that forgiveness be a subject included in a “father presence matters” curriculum. The first and second-generation female twins believed that accepting the things that one cannot change and learning to bring personal closure are also worthy subjects to be included. The second-generation female twin agrees with the literature that co-parenting should also be included in curriculum (see above chart). Children benefit from a parenting style that is child-centered and promotes the overall good of the child. Hence, co-parenting allows collaborative parenting, whether married, never married or divorced. The literature suggests that reversing the father absence trend should involve strengthening marriages, decreasing the divorce rate and building strong partnerships through collaborative parenting. In addition, the literature emphasizes that “father presence matters.” Fathers are not viewed as peripheral or marginal to the family. Instead, they have an important role in the lives of their children and are able to make a unique contribution to them. A curriculum that is focused from the literature, such as this project can help reverse the cultural attitude that a father’s contribution is superficial and his role discretionary. Dr. Ken Canfield concurs that, “Father’s leave an indelible mark on their children and society. We must encourage, equip and support dads as they become the true heroes of the coming generation.”18

The training curriculum is the first component of three in this project. After a child has spent 12-weeks in training, he will advance to the 12-Steps. This phase follows the traditional 12-Step group format. Groups provide an opportunity for children to meet, fellowship and befriend other children in like fatherly situations. These meetings will occur once a week, for 12-days over a three-month period. The 12-Step group format will

provide peer support while giving children an opportunity to “share their experiences, challenges, successes and failures,” as they journey through the healing process.\(^{19}\)

CHAPTER III

FATHER PRESENCE MATTERS CURRICULUM

“It is quite easy to shout slogans, to sign manifestos, but it is quite a different matter to build, manage, command, spend days and nights seeking the solution to problems.”

- Patrice Lumumba, Former Prime Minister to the Congo

Government, social and faith-based initiatives have emerged throughout America in an attempt to reverse the trend of fatherless homes and to erase the resultant negative outcomes for children. Many states have programs designed specifically to reconnect fathers with their children and build healthy family relationships. These efforts are helping to reverse the historical consensus that fathers are not as important as mothers. Initiatives have surfaced all over the country not only to discuss the issue of father absence, but to seek answers and vital solutions. Society has made forward steps, to dismantle the idea that fathers are peripheral to the basic care of their children.

1 Urban Leadership Institute, as quoted on the home page of the Dare to be King Series, Fatherhood, Retrieved November 8, 2005 from http://www.daretobeking.com/fatherhood, 1.

2 Sarah Looney, Supporting Responsible Fatherhood in Austin Texas: An Analysis of Current Programs and Opportunities (Graduate School of the University of Texas at Austin, 2004), Masters of Public Affairs Thesis, 7.

3 Ibid.
This curriculum focuses on establishing and building healthy marriages while emphasizing the unique contribution of mothers and fathers through a platform of equal partnership. It focuses on healing father and mother relationships and presents a biblical perspective on marriage and divorce. Furthermore, forgiveness is recognized as an important component in mending broken relationships. The grief that results from loss is recognized and approached through Kübler-Ross’s five stages of grief. This curriculum emphasizes positive communication and effective team parenting. It also presents a system of establishing a male role model network through its mentorship component.
CHRISTIAN PARENTING

“Train a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

- Proverbs 22:6

God created the family and highly esteemed it throughout the Scriptures. Thus, parenting is a wonderful privilege and children are a blessing from the Lord. According to the biblical view, children are regarded as the desired result of a marriage. The Bible says, “Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them . . .” (Psalms 127:3-5). Parents have the capacity through God to train their children in the faith, be supportive and provide an emotionally healthy family environment.

Children, like adults, have emotional needs that must be met in the context of family. An array of problems emerges when these God-given needs go unmet. According to family experts David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “a poverty of connectedness” is a phrase used to denote children’s emotional needs being unmet. Many children suffer from emotional deprivation, because parents do not spend adequate time with them, and consequently the child’s self-worth is damaged. The U.S.

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4 Finis J. Dake, Sr., King James Version Dake Annotated (Dake Bible Publishers: Lawrenceville, Georgia, 1963), 657.


7 Clinton, Ministry to Troubled, Lectures.
Department of Education statistics reveal that mothers on average spend less than thirty minutes a day talking with their children, and fathers less than fifteen minutes a day. The emotional chasm between divorced parents and their children has become more prominent according to Popenoe and Whitehead:

Four decades of persistently high levels of marital disruption and nonmarriage have taken a toll on children’s primary sources of emotional nurturance and security. Parent-child, and especially father-child ties, have become more fragile, inconsistent and distant. Children’s emotional lives have become more turbulent, insecure, and anxiety-filled as a result.9

It is important that parents, custodial and noncustodial, are not only present in the lives of their children, but also involved.

One component of parental involvement is to treat each child as an individual.10 Each child has his own temperament and therefore, he will have his own worldview, which will dictate his relating to the world around him.11 Individualized parental relation allows for each child’s individuality.12 Parenting scholars Craig Hart and Lloyd Newell maintain that the parent-child relationship should allow for the reinforcing of the child’s strengths and talents.13 In addition Hart and Newell suggest that parents avoid

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8 Clinton, Ministry to Troubled, Lectures.


11 Ibid.


unflattering comparisons between the children, because each child is unique and gifted in different ways.\textsuperscript{14}

According to James E. Faust, “Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another . . . It is a matter of prayerful discernment for the parents.”\textsuperscript{15} Individualizing parental relating is important also when assisting children to deal with the absence of their fathers. Children do not respond to father absence and loss the same way, even children in the same household. For instance, in this project’s case family the second-generation twins were impacted by their father’s absence differently. The female twin acted out in anger that resulted in violence as a child and teenager. She asked a lot of “why” questions concerning her father’s absence. On the other hand, the twin boy didn’t ask any questions and didn’t have any obvious outward manifestations concerning the father’s absence. They both had some childhood pain surrounding their father’s absence, but they processed that pain differently. Children in the same household may respond to grief differently, thus parents may need to individualize their responses based on the child’s need. The grieving process is discussed further in this curriculum, in the section entitled, \textit{Five Stages of Grief of Families in Pain}.

Although the child’s uniqueness must be honored there are some individual areas that apply to all children. Parents can teach children boundaries early; “developing boundaries in young children is that proverbial ounce of prevention.”\textsuperscript{16} Teaching children

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Hart, “Proclamation-based Principles,” 100-123.
\end{footnotes}
how to protect themselves, to take responsibility for their needs, to have a sense of control and choice, to delay gratification and to respect the limits of others is imperative in the process of developing boundaries. The parents must fortify the process by teaching their children to respect set boundaries. This is done through age appropriate discipline; discipline must fit the transgression.

Parents have a responsibility to train their children with love by establishing rules, discipline and appropriate punishment. Discipline is not the same thing as punishment, but involves teaching which behaviors are acceptable, as well as how to respect the rights of others. Clinical psychologists Drs. Henry Cloud and John S. Townsend define discipline as “the art of teaching children self-control by using consequences.”

One organization maintains that in a loving parent-child relationship, discipline should occur “in the context of a love and tender concern for a child’s long-term welfare.” There must first be a healthy relationship between the parent and child for discipline to be effective, for “rules without relationship do not work.” Published author and psychologist Dr. E. Pickhardt offers an alternate definition, “Discipline is a combination of parental instruction and parental correction that teach a child to live according to

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18 Ibid., 74.


20 Forever Families, *Disciplining with Love*, 1.


22 Ibid., 77.


family values – within family rules.” 25 Discipline must always be done in love, for the absence of love provokes and embitters the child. 26 The Scripture warns “And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Rules must be clearly defined and perhaps even written out. This helps parents to be consistent in their punishment and may eliminate confusion for both the parent and the child. Parents must consistently enforce established household rules and discipline, demonstrating “a clear connection between a misbehavior and a consequence.” 27 In order to avoid sending the child conflicting messages the same offense should always receive the same punishment. The child will know that if he does a specific wrong that the penalty is, without exception, the same.

In some households, because of inconsistencies in punishments, children have developed a willingness to gamble in hopes that this time the punishment will be the lesser of the choices that were imposed in the past. In the event that an issue arises for which there was no previous household rule, the child should not be punished, because “where there is no law, neither is there violation” (Romans 4:15). In these instances, the child should be corrected, a new rule concerning the particular offense should be established and the child should be made aware of the new standard. Parents cannot relax rules when children are behaving themselves; to do so would likely guarantee that the same delinquent behavior will resurface or something worse.

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26 Ibid.

27 Forever Families, Disciplining with Love, 1.
It is equally important for parents to allow children the freedom to choose and exercise their right to say no within appropriate boundaries, without resulting in the parents’ “withdrawal of affection.”28 It is a disciplinary style that involves the parents withholding their affection “to show disapproval and suspend their loving attention until the behavior changes.”29 Thus, the parental love and support is withheld from a child when parents disagree with the child. It is dangerous and developmentally crippling and is a boundary injury that sends the message to the child, “You’re loveable when you behave. You aren’t loveable when you don’t behave.”30 Parents must stay connected to their children even when they are upset with them, children need to know that they are still loved and valued, even when they misbehave.”31

An example of the withdrawal of affection is seen in this project’s case family with the father of the third-generation male. The father is a noncustodial dad, who is physically present but emotionally detached from his son. For example, the father frequently withdraws from his son without explanation, at times, by being inconsistent in picking him up. He may maintain a regular visitation schedule for three months and then stop for three months. When he stops, the son asks whether he did something wrong to make his father stop coming to pick him up. During these interrupted periods, the father breaks promises to the son and does not return his son’s phone calls. This withdrawal leaves the son in great pain, manifested by angry outburst, withdrawal from activities and poor academic performance. Furthermore, the son often cries and at times appears

28 Cloud, Boundaries, 50-60.
29 Forever Families, Disciplining with Love, 1.
30 Cloud, Boundaries, 75.
31 Forever Families, Disciplining with Love, 2; Cloud, Boundaries, 50-60.
depressed. On one specific occasion, the son waited for his dad by the door with his packed bag. At 6:00 p.m. the dad wasn’t there to pick him up and at 10:00 p.m. he still had not arrived. The son attempted to call his dad several times, on both the home and cell phone, but there was no answer and no call back. Several weeks passed and the son still attempted to call his father, but there was no response. In around the second month, the son said to his grandmother, “Gran, Gran why won’t my dad call me back . . . I know that he got my messages because he always checks his answering machine?” The son was able to discern that his father was intentionally not calling him back. A parent’s love should be unconditional and in representing God’s love it should “never fail.” Hence, when “parents pull away in hurt, disappointment, or passive rage,” they misrepresent the love of God and communicate to the child that he is loveable sometimes.

Exercise: Loving and Enjoying Yourself

How do you see yourself? __________________________________________________

What do you believe about yourself? ________________________________________

What are some positive qualities about you? _________________________________

Considering the above statement, complete the following statement: (This step can be repeated).

I am loveable because _____________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________.

32 Micah McKinley, Brewton, AL, personal observation by this thesis project writer, 22, December, 2004.

33 Cloud, Boundaries, 75.
Parenting teenagers is often the most challenging phase of the parenting experience. It is perhaps the most difficult and confusing stage in life, “adolescence is not a punishable offense.” The parent’s job during this growth process according to Pickhardt “is to create enough structure, restraint, and responsible demand to provide a safe and healthy passage through a complicated and risky period of growth.” This phase is usually marked by rebellion and is greatly influenced by society and peer pressures. Teenagers may make mistakes and behave irresponsibly. However, parents must stay connected with them. Teenagers still need parental help and encouragement. Parents should seek to communicate effectively with their teens, which include listening. It is imperative to establish clear rules, avoid overreacting and most of all, provide emotional support.

Exercise: Household Rules

Write down five to ten household rules that you are currently enforcing. Then have the children write or verbalize the household rules and compare notes.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
For single parenting cases, have the custodial parent follow the above exercise and write down ten household rules. Then have the non-custodial parent write down ten household rules, and have the parents compare notes. Identify which rules are different on the two lists. Determine which of the rules are different but should be the same and then create a new list that reflects the changes. Both parents should enforce the list of rules, which gives the child a sense of continuity in family life.

Exercise: Displays of Affection

Children benefit when parents have expressive, enthusiastic and contagious displays of affections. Here are some suggestions:

- Hugs and kisses
- Encouraging words
- A special note in their lunch box
- Bake their favorite cookies
- Tell your child, “I’m proud of you”
- Accept their unique personality
- Pray with and for them

Exercise: A Father’s Imprint

There are few bonds that are more influential than parental ones (a healthy relationship between father-child and mother-child). Parents have the ability to leave an “imprint” on their children. The Newly Revised and Updated Random House Webster’s College Dictionary defines imprinting as:

Rapid learning that occurs during a brief receptive period, typically in early life, and that establishes a long-lasting behavioral response to a specific individual,
object, or category of stimuli, as attachment to a parent or preference for a type of habitat.  

The long-lasting influence of an imprint can be positive or negative. Parental absence often leaves long-lasting negative effects on a child’s life.

This exercise is designed to provide thought-provoking questions to help a person determine whether his father has had a positive or negative impact on his life and the nature of that influence through the life span.

What is the earliest childhood father memory?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What emotions or feelings surround that experience?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Was this experience positive or negative?

What type of experience influenced you the most as it concerns your father?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How do these experiences affect the person’s self-concept?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

If a female, how do these experiences affect her relating to men?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

If a male, how do these experiences affect him as a man?
________________________________________________________________________

How do they affect him as a father?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Does father absence affect how the individual sees himself as a person?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

If not, has his absence ever affected the individual?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

If so, in what manner?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is the reason for the father’s absence?
☐ Death ☐ Divorce ☐ Abandonment

Has the person ever felt that his father’s absence was in some manner his fault?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, what have you done to resolve these feelings of guilt?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

The participant should close his eyes and think over his life, remembering the
men that have positively affected him along the course of his life. Maybe a school or
Sunday school teacher, a girl or boy scout leader, an uncle, pastor or community leader
has been influential in his life. The participant should write down males that have had
positive bearing on his life and indicate his age at the time of their influence. At which age range was the influence most evident:

☐ 1-5  ☐ 6-11  ☐ 12-17  ☐ 18-23

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF OF FAMILIES IN PAIN

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

In this pain-ridden world, people will face many different types of afflictions and grieve many losses. It is important that parents realize that father absence may be a type of loss, “Grief starts when someone or something we care about is lost to us.” This awareness can better help parents to assist their child through the grief process. Father absence has caused millions of children and adults pain that often continues throughout

39 Finis, KJV Dake, 192.

40 Mental Help.Net, Grief and Bereavement Issues. 1.
the life span. The loss of an active and involved father has become commonplace in almost every ethnic group. Grieving is the process by which a person copes with the loss and often-numbing emotions. Grieving is a healthy emotional response that allows a person to acknowledge his loss and move in steps towards letting go of the pain surrounding the loss. Growing up with a physically absent or an emotionally disengaged father may create a sense of loss. Unfortunately, children may suppress or bury this pain, leaving them to journey through adulthood with sometimes tremendous unresolved issues.

More than twenty years ago, University of Chicago psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, identified five stages of grief, which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.41 Grief is a normal emotion that occurs when there has been a loss.42 Kübler-Ross’s well-known stages of grief evolved from her extensive work with dying patients.43 These stages of grief can be virtually applied to any loss. As it concerns father absence, grief is the emotion that a person may experience when the father-child relationship is interrupted, never developed or in some cases has ended.44 People tend to grieve the loss of a relationship where there were attachments or strong connections. The hurt and sorrow that emerge from grief can be very painful.

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42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

The separation from anything of personal importance can trigger behaviors associated with the grieving process. Though they may grieve differently, both the father and child may mourn the loss of the relationship. Not every child or father will move through the stages of grief at the same rate or intensity. Some people grieve openly and others are more reserved with their feelings of distress. The grieving process may be shallow and brief or it may be deep and prolonged. Grieving is a growth process, where a person passes through or goes back and forth in the various stages. This progression is not necessarily ordered or clearly defined. Some individuals may reach the final stage, which is acceptance only to revert back to an earlier stage.

During the initial stage of denial it is common for a person to refuse to believe that the loss has actually occurred. As the person moves through the grieving process, he will come to a place that he is able to acknowledge the reality of the person or relationship that has been lost. In the second stage of grief, reality sets in and feelings of anger traditionally surface. Anxiety levels may be elevated at this stage as well as

46 Mental Help.Net, Grief and Bereavement Issues. 1.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Wikipedia, Kübler-Ross Model, 1.
51 Mental Help.Net, Grief and Bereavement Issues, 1.
52 Townsend, “Loss and Bereavement,” 5.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
manifestations of self blame and blame of others. In the third stage in the grief response, the individual attempts to bargain. The bargaining is towards “God for a second chance or more time.” This stage is evidenced by such statements as “If only I could . . .” or “If only I had . . .” The fourth stage, depression is a very painful place; here the “individual mourns that which will be or has been lost.” Acceptance is the fifth and final stage in the grieving process and is the place where the person accepts the loss. It is in this stage that recovery and reconciliation most often occur. At this juncture someone has regained interest in restoration of the broken relationship. The grieving process has ended when a person is able to look back and acknowledge both the pleasures and disappointments from the relationship. Often, the depth of grief is linked to the quality of the relationship. Furthermore, the more a person has invested in the relationship, the greater pain he may experience in the separation. God provides the resources required to deal effectively with grief from a loss.

God provides comfort through all sufferings, whether the loss is rejection, divorce, or father abandonment, and through Him one can receive power to walk triumphantly through pain. Judith and Jack Balswick say, “Pain can be a stimulus to

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Mental Help.Net, Grief and Bereavement Issues. 1.
personal and family growth.”“62 Pain is not exclusively negative, because it stimulates growth spiritually and emotionally, rendering a heart of wisdom. Solomon said, “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning” (Ecclesiastes 7:4). At some point, people are touched by tragedy and may experience unrelenting pain, for as the Scripture declares, “It is only a matter of time before it is our time to mourn” (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Personal pain is demonstrated throughout Scripture. Job, in reflecting upon his losses, said, “If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed in the scales: It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas” (Job 6:1-3). King David grieved deeply as he mourned the loss of his infant child, and later in life, he almost collapsed under the pain of the death of his son, Absalom. Although the Bible does not promise the absence of pain, it assures that one can find comfort in sufferings. The message of hope is that families are often strengthened through their pain and are brought closer to God. God provides comfort through life’s most difficult storms, including father absence, so that the one comforted can provide the same comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1).

Instead of resting in the comfort that God provides, people sometimes excessively busy themselves to fill the painful empty places in their hearts. Giving voice to pain may manifest in crying, moaning or weeping. The process of “letting go” is necessary, for unresolved anger opens the door to depression, bitterness and hostility. In a counseling environment, children, teenagers, and adults should be encouraged to express pent up emotions and feelings surrounding absentee fathers. This step of release can create new energy and positive space to allow new joy to shine.

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Grieving is a very important step in moving beyond the shackles of past pain. A person can grieve over any loss, which includes a childhood void of an involved father. When a person is allowed to grieve his losses, he can let go and move on triumphantly. Forgiving another person is not the same as condoning the offending behavior.

FORGIVENESS: THE PROCESS OF “LETTING GO”

“What is annulled in the act of forgiveness is not the crime itself but the distorting effect that this wrong has upon one’s relations with the wrongdoer and perhaps with others.”

- Joanna North

Familial conflict, separations, divorce and abandonment commonly leave children in deep pain. Noted for his writings on forgiveness, Lewis B. Smedes, theologian and ethicist explains that children often are caught in adult crossfire, and although innocent bystanders, they suffer great pain. He says, “Children are sometimes the most unlucky victims of the pain that washes over from grown-up conflicts.” There are two ways to respond to pain: to grow in the midst of it or to become bitter as a result of it. The likely alternative for people who choose not to forgive is bitterness. Bitterness occurs when a person abides in a prolonged state of unforgiveness. It is marked by feelings of resentment, disappointment and intense anger. Bitterness hurts the individual who


64 Lewis B. Smedes, The Art of Forgiving (Ballantine, 1996), 10.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Sper, How Can I Live with My Loss?, 3.
harbors it and incessantly robs in the physical, emotional and spiritual realms. As Rubin “Hurricane” Carter said, after being falsely imprisoned for twenty years, “If I have learned anything in my life, it is that bitterness consumes the vessel that contains it.”\textsuperscript{68} The Bible admonishes us to put away all “bitterness” and to readily and freely forgive one another “as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, AMP).

Unresolved anger usually grows into a “root of bitterness” (Ephesians 4:26). There is a pervasive misconception in Christian thought that anger is sinful.\textsuperscript{69} On the contrary, anger is a normal emotion; it is “the primary and in many ways the proper response to injury.”\textsuperscript{70} It is the response to anger that may be sinful, but not the emotion itself. The Bible states, “be ye angry, and sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). Many children experience anger as a result of the absence of their father, particularly in cases of abandonment and divorce. Anger is a normal emotion but becomes abnormal when it is expressed in a destructive manner, or when prolonged.\textsuperscript{71}

A forward step in healing broken father-child bonds is that both parties learn to express their anger in a constructive and godly manner. Just as it is important for the child to forgive, the father must go through a similar process. God has provided the blueprint for forgiveness; His protocol is simply to “forgive as I have forgiven you” (Colossians 3:13). God’s demonstration of forgiveness should drive each person to forgive the other, even those that have caused great pain. Forgiveness may be necessary

\textsuperscript{68} Norman Jewison, \textit{The Hurricane} (Motion Picture, 1999). The movie \textit{Hurricane} depicts the true-life story of the famous boxer, Rubin Carter, who was falsely imprisoned for twenty years. Rubin Carter is noted for not growing bitter while serving a 20-year sentence.

\textsuperscript{69} Gary Chapman, \textit{The Other Side of Love} (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 22.

\textsuperscript{70} Robert Enright, \textit{Forgiveness is a Choice} (American Psychiatric Association, 2001), 33.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
in instances of rejection, abandonment, violation, or betrayal. There is personal liberation in forgiving an offender.\textsuperscript{72} The act of forgiveness may not heal the relationship with the offender.\textsuperscript{73} In fact, it is important to note that the other person may not be impacted by the forgiver’s decision to forgive.\textsuperscript{74} Transformation and liberation happens in the heart of the person who makes the decision to forgive but the hurt and pain associated with an offense may not instantly vanish.\textsuperscript{75} The unilateral result of forgiveness is the effect that it has on the heart of the forgiver, regardless of the offender’s acceptance or response.\textsuperscript{76} Many times, people erroneously wait for their offender to move towards them and extend an apology (Matthew 5:24-25). The Bible illustrates that God made the first move towards mankind and forgave, “But God commendedth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Forgiveness is one of the most important keys to a healthy relationship. From a Christian perspective, forgiveness has to be an eventuality, regardless of the extent of the wrong. Family Therapist Dr. Paul W. Coleman affirms that the individual has to make a choice to forgive. He says, “Forgiveness starts as a decision, not a feeling. You do not have to feel forgiving for you to choose the path of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not overlook the harm that was caused. It does not minimize the pain or make excuses for the

\textsuperscript{72} Meninger, \textit{The Process of Forgiveness}, 31.

\textsuperscript{73} Smedes, \textit{The Art of Forgiving}, 32.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Tutu, \textit{No Future without Forgiveness}, 272.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
offender.”\textsuperscript{77} Forgiveness indicates that a choice has been made not to charge the injustice to the offender’s account.\textsuperscript{78} Illustrating that forgiveness is an action, John McArthur says, “Forgiveness requires us to set aside our selfishness, accept with grace the wrongs others have committed against us and not demand what we think is our due.”\textsuperscript{79} In the process, the intense emotions associated with the injustice fade at the wounded person’s choice to forgive. Forgiveness is simply the release of the resentment for an offense.\textsuperscript{80} Coleman says, “Forgiveness is not reconciliation . . . you can forgive without choosing to reconcile.”\textsuperscript{81}

A person in the process of forgiveness must acknowledge the offending act and the pain that the offense caused. Acknowledging that there is something to forgive is the first step in the journey of forgiveness. It is important that the child, teenager or adult identify the pain surrounding the missing father. For instance, a teenager may be angry that the father missed all of his or her growing up years or missed a particular event, such as graduation, or significant sporting event. Forgiving a father for the pain caused by his absence involves more than merely saying, “I forgive you.” It must be emphasized that a person’s decision to forgive an absentee father may not result in changes in the father. In the same manner, the decision to forgive does not mean that the offender will be open to

\textsuperscript{77} Paul W. Coleman, \textit{How to Say it for Couples: Communicating with Tenderness, Openness and Honesty} (Prentice Hall Books, 2002), 316.

\textsuperscript{78} Tutu, \textit{No Future without Forgiveness}, 272.


\textsuperscript{80} William Meninger, \textit{The Process of Forgiveness} (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997), 31.

\textsuperscript{81} Coleman, \textit{How to Say it}, 317.
reconciliation. Reconciliation may evolve, but it is not inevitable. Hence, the issue of forgiveness must be approached with the understanding that the forgiver may be the only person affected, changed or impacted.

Forgiveness is not synonymous with forgetting. The forgiver’s memory is not instantly erased; instead he may continuously be aware of the hurt caused by the absentee father. Forgetting is not the objective of forgiving an offender. William Meninger says, “Forgetfulness is possible only in the sense that the pain that once controlled and ruled over us does no longer.” Forgiveness is a volitional choice, as Tim LaHaye explains, “forgiveness is not a feeling first. It is a choice that goes beyond feelings; it is an activity of the will.” A decision to forgive is made, even when the emotions are not in a state of forgiveness.

Exercise: Define Forgiveness

People often think that they understand forgiveness, but may stumble at formulating a definition for it. Define forgiveness?

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85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.


89 Ibid.
**Exercise: Shredding, a Source of Release**

Writing a letter to the offender is a form of verbalizing the disappointment or anger, and this act allows one to enter the forgiving process. Here, the child, teenager or adult can write a letter to his father, not to be exchanged with him. This letter will be shredded later. During this writing exercise, varied emotions may surface, and crying may result. Write as the Lord brings to remembrance the disappointments, pain, anger and fears associated with father absence. When the letter is completed, lift it up to the Lord in prayer, petitioning His healing power. As prayers are offered to the Lord, call out the offender and the offense, such as “I forgive (my father) for (the offense).” Then take the letter and shred it, releasing the hurt, anger and disappointment in the process. This exercise can be liberating and is a structured way to deal constructively with anger.

Anger is a natural emotional response, but one should not remain in a prolonged state of it.\(^\text{90}\) It is possible to forgive a person who is not yet able to say, “I am sorry for the pain that I have caused you.”\(^\text{91}\) Smedes says, “The person who hurt us should not be the person who decides whether or not we should recover from the pain he brought us.”\(^\text{92}\)

One must forgive for his own sake, not the offender’s. Tutu explains it this way,

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\(^{90}\) Chapman, *The Other Side of Love*, 22.

\(^{91}\) Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 272.

\(^{92}\) Smedes, *The Art of Forgiving*, 93.
Does the victim depend on the culprit’s contrition and confession as the precondition for being able to forgive? There is no question that, of course, such a confession is a very great help to the one who wants to forgive, but it is not absolutely indispensable. If the victim can forgive only when the culprit confesses, then the victim is locked into the culprit’s whim and is locked into victimhood.93

A person cannot change the past; he can only move forward from a place of forgiveness.94 Smedes says, “Forgiving is the only way to heal the wounds of a past we cannot change and cannot forget.”95 In this decision to forgive, the person is released from the emotional prison of bitterness. The offender may not show any evidence of change, but the victim’s life can be enriched by his decision to forgive. Forgiveness may not be an easy act, but one cannot begin the journey of erasing pain without the intentional step of forgiveness. Forgiveness is seldom a one-time event; it is a process that may require continued effort.

Exercise: A Letter to Give

Some people may want to write a letter to give to a father that has been absent. A letter to give should be constructive and provide a platform to move forward. This sort of letter can give the absent parent constructive information, as well as provide an opportunity to parent in the present. There are a number of general rules that can guide the writing process; the letter should not be accusatory, should not blame or sound defensive, should allow the writer to take responsibility for his feelings, and allow the letter’s receiver to take responsibility for his actions. In addition, the letter should make

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93 Tutu, No Future without Forgiveness, 272.

94 Smedes, The Art of Forgiving, 176.

95 Ibid.
suggestions on reconciliation, and the writer should articulate what is needed currently from the absent parent. This sort of letter opens dialogue which can give the absent parent constructive information and an opportunity to parent in the present.

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES

“Two are better than one: because they have a good reward for their labour.”

- Ecclesiastes 4:9

The Council on Families in America affirms that although other factors contribute to the deteriorating well-being of children, it is the weakening of marriage as an institution that is the most devastating. Marriage is declining in American culture, and cultural messages are increasingly hostile toward the traditional institution. In fact, Sociologist Kingsley Davis has said, “At no time in history, with the possible exception of Imperial Rome, has the institution of marriage been more problematic than it is today.” According to Elhage, “One way to address the growing problem of fatherlessness is to focus on strengthening marriage and to educate men and women about the negative impact father absence can have on children.”

Ron J. Clark, Director of the Virginia Fatherhood Campaign says, “One of the things we need to do is promote

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96 Finis, KJV Dake, 670.

97 Council on Families in America, Marriage in America, 2.

98 Ibid.


100 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 2.
fatherhood in the context of marriage.”\textsuperscript{101} Promoting marriage is biblical, and is one way to recreate a marriage culture in America, manage family decline, and reverse the trend of declining child well-being.\textsuperscript{102} Promoting marriage does not mean that every couple that has a baby together should be married or that every marriage should stay intact.\textsuperscript{103} It is a healthy marriage, as is the quality of the father-child relationship that is most important. Considering quality, in some cases the parents and children are better served with absence, such as in cases that involve abuse.\textsuperscript{104} As acknowledged by the Council on Families in America, “In individual cases, divorce can sometimes be the least bad solution for a highly troubled marriage.”\textsuperscript{105}

Marriage is a sacred union, in which God brings together two imperfect individuals with distinct personalities and fuses them into one, to complement and fulfill each other. Marriage is not a mere human arrangement that can be made, broken or adjusted for convenience. It is the most intimate fellowship of love between one man and one woman. Marriage is a bond orchestrated by God and is His way of fulfilling one’s need for attention, affection, affirmation and comfort at the deepest level of intimacy.

Marriage was instituted by God and is designed to be a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-9). The Scripture’s concept of marriage is a one-flesh union; the unique joining of two lives into an indissoluble bond.

\textsuperscript{101} Public/Private Ventures, \textit{Mentoring the Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationships}, 17.

\textsuperscript{102} Council on Families in America, \textit{Marriage in America}, 2.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
Today, instead of keeping a lifelong commitment, couples are divorcing casually.\textsuperscript{106} Unfortunately, even the church world has succumbed to the values that the world imposes, and Christians are divorcing at a rate equal to non-Christians.\textsuperscript{107} The Barna Group, an organization that studies trends among evangelical Christians, noted in a recent study, “The likelihood of married adults getting divorced is identical among born again Christians and those who are not born again.”\textsuperscript{108} Cultivating a marriage culture may “increase the proportion of children who grow up with their married parents and decrease the portion of children who do not.”\textsuperscript{109}

Marriage is supposed to be a place of mutual support, love, a sense of belonging, and open communication. Couples should make each other feel important and valued, as well as respect and esteem each other. It should be noted that marriage takes a tremendous amount of effort, and at some point, couples may encounter stress and varied complications. A growing response to marital difficulty is to evacuate during the turbulence; “For the average American, the probability that a marriage taking place today will end in divorce or permanent separation is calculated to be a staggering 60\%.”\textsuperscript{110} The blending of two lives, two wills, and two personalities into one will inevitably involve some discomfort. Problems will surface in marriage, but working through the issues in a


\textsuperscript{107} The Barna Group, \textit{The Barna Group Update: Born Again Christians just as Likely to Divorce as are Non-Christians}, (September, 2004), Retrieved December 13, 2004 from www.barna.org, 1.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Council on Families in America, \textit{Marriage in America}, 3.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
constructive manner strengthens the bond and helps the relationship to mature. Each marriage partner must be committed to discuss the problems, seek God’s wisdom and diligently pursue resolution, rather than a gateway out. A good marriage does not automatically come from feelings of “being in love.” It requires an irrevocable commitment to work together for the benefit of the union in good and bad times, agreements and disagreements, and in sickness and health.

Childhood experiences and expressions of love often form the templates by which man gives and receives love as an adult. Unfortunately, this includes even faulty, dysfunctional, and distorted love exchanges, which may result in people entering adult relationships with a tremendous amount of emotional baggage. In addition to faulty templates, some people enter marriage with unrealistic expectations, such as the belief that marriage will resolve all relationship difficulties, lead to wholeness, erase everything bad in life, and the happily-ever-after myth.

Others enter marriage with the premise that with time and effort they can change their mate. Marriage is to be adaptive instead of static, as it involves two ever-changing people. However, it should be emphasized that one partner cannot change the other; at best he can change himself. Adaptation is a vital component of a good marriage, for the relationship is not only long-term, but it is ever-growing. Problems and an assortment of stress-provoking issues emerge in marriage, but with effort and God-given resources, a

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111 Clinton, *Attachments*, 12, 212.
113 Ibid., 38.
marriage can be strong and enduring. It can endure life’s crises and stand strong amidst the changes that are inevitable.

Many Christians are struggling in their marriages and see no possible redemption. Even the most desolate marriage can find recovering power and experience springs of renewed love. The relatively small number of children who are growing up with the direct positive benefits from their parent’s marital life is disturbing. The lack of an example of an enduring marital relationship is contributing to the current deterioration of the societal well-being of children. Furthermore, the breakdown in the married, father-mother child rearing principle deprives children of a positive point of reference, which would demonstrate the beauty, purposes and responsibilities of marriage. The church is challenged to “Recover the viewpoint that sees marriage as an institution of covenental permanence, as the proper context for raising children, and as a relationship of mutual sharing and comfort between husband and wife.” This step of reestablishing the biblical concept of marriage as a “permanent covenant” is one role that the church can play in “rebuilding a family culture based on enduring marital relationship.”

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115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Council on Families in America, Marriage in America, 2.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., 12.
121 Ibid., 1.
Council on Families in America says, “For unless we reverse the decline of marriage, no other achievements – no tax cut, no new government program, no new idea – will be powerful enough to reverse the trend of declining child well-being.”\textsuperscript{122} They maintain that promoting marriage is the vital factor in managing the decline of the family and puts America a step further in ameliorating the injurious results of divorce.\textsuperscript{123} Efforts to strengthen marriage and promote marital commitment can help reverse the negative trends for children.\textsuperscript{124} Coontz and Folbre noted in a paper presented at the 5\textsuperscript{th} Annual Council on Contemporary Families Conference, “Marriage often leads to higher levels of paternal involvement than divorce, nonmarriage, or cohabitation.”\textsuperscript{125}

\textbf{DIVORCE: STAY TOGETHER IF POSSIBLE}

“Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”\textsuperscript{126}

- Matthew 19:6

A shift in American values has contributed to the decline in marriage, as the Council on Families in America explains,

\textsuperscript{122} Council on Families in America, \textit{Marriage in America}, 2

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{124} Public/Private, \textit{Mentoring the Quality of Mentor}, 17.


\textsuperscript{126} Finis, \textit{KJV Dake}, 20.
Our nation has largely shifted from a culture of marriage to a culture of divorce. Once we were a nation in which a strong marriage was seen as the best route to achieving the American dream. We have now become a nation in which divorce is commonly seen as the path to personal liberation.127

America’s divorce-saturated culture and the “no-fault” laws that emerged in the 1970s have been contributing factors.128 Furthermore, the relatively low cost of getting a divorce has made it an appealing solution for many struggling couples.129 However, as easy as the option of divorce may appear, it leaves many scars, such as emotional trauma. For instance, divorce often has a tremendous emotional impact on children, which may continue into adulthood.130 According to the signers of the Marriage Movement’s Statement of Principles, “When marriages fail, children suffer. For many, the suffering continues for years. For some, it never ends.”131 Children of divorce often journey through life with a pervasive fear of being disappointed, betrayed or abandoned. Rarely do the wounds diminish with time.

Research suggests that children whose parents divorce are more likely to have

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129 Ibid.


unhappy and unstable marriages themselves. Furthermore, researchers demonstrate that children who experience divorce are more likely to divorce as well. Children whose parents divorced were 76% more likely to divorce themselves according to one study even after controlling for family characteristics and quality of the marriage pre-divorce. Wendy Sigle-Ruston and Sara McLanahan, examining Amato’s literature, makes the following conclusion concerning the circular effects of divorce: “If one spouse’s parents had divorced, the probability was between 14 to 16%, and if both spouses had experienced a divorce the probability was 28% that the children will divorce.” Divorce has become a normative experience; children from broken homes are most likely to repeat their experience. Considering the strong propensity to marital disruption, the marital stability in America is destined to continue to plummet.

Society has sanctioned a short-term view of marriage, causing couples to see divorce as a viable solution. This view motivates people to evacuate at the slightest sign of turbulence. Hardships may emerge in marriage, but couples can survive the challenges and crises. A person’s propensity to withdraw or for flight in response to crisis may be

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137 Ibid.
triggered by belief systems, family-of-origin themes and myths. Marriage is rarely a carefree, non-turbulent journey, because it involves the blending of two unique people. Change and healing are processes that require time and effort. All of the exits must be closed in order for a marriage to work. It is difficult for a marriage to survive when every time the couple faces a crisis, they want to concede to failure. This type of attitude prevents them from investing the energy needed to make the relationship work.

The permanence that God intended for marriage is indisputable. In Genesis 2:24, God said, “A man should leave his family and cleave to his wife.” This “cleaving” denotes a permanent attachment. Therefore, the marriage bond is designed to be indissoluble, for a man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife in a one-flesh relationship, and they are to be inseparable. The people of Jesus’ day challenged Him, asking if divorce was not good, why Moses made provisions for it in his time. Jesus indicated that divorce was never God’s intention for marriage, but Moses granted permission for it because of the hardness of the people’s hearts (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 19:7). The Scripture says that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). God intended for husbands and wives to live together for life. The only exception concerns cyclical marital infidelity (Matthew 5:32).

God’s desire for permanence in marriage does not mean that divorced Christians are not saved. Divorce is not God’s ideal standard for a problem marriage, but it is not an unforgivable sin. The world’s position on turbulent marriages has been reduced to two options: divorce or living together in name only.138

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138 Clinton, *Before a Bad Goodbye.*
Many struggling marriages see divorce as the only reasonable solution. Dr. Tim Clinton contends, in his book *Before a Bad Goodbye*\(^{139}\) that divorce is not a viable solution, and he stresses that there is no problem beyond the scope of God’s healing and redeeming power. According to Dr. Clinton the only alternative for Christian couples is to stay together and turn their marriage around by reinvesting in their union. This alternative is in step with the plan of God.

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES**

“As a foundation for family life and raising children, marriage is better than its fast-growing alternatives.”\(^{140}\)

– The Council on Families in America

The Council on Families in America offered the following strategies and recommendations for religious leaders and organizations as steps that will aid in reversing the trend of fatherless homes through strengthened marriages:

1. Reclaim moral ground from the culture of divorce and marriage.
2. Recover the viewpoint that sees marriage as an institution of covenantal permanence, as the proper context for raising children, and as a relationship of mutual sharing and comfort between husband and wife.
3. Avoid the mistake of equating marriage with concepts such as “committed relationships” which have no institutional embodiment.
4. Reach out, within the congregation and in the surrounding community, to the children of divorce and non-marriage, offering them care and concrete assistance, while demonstrating by example the value of marital commitment.

\(^{139}\) Clinton, *Before a Bad Goodbye*.

5. Establish new educational and pastoral programs in seminaries and in congregations, designed to promote commitment to marriage, prepare young people for the parental vocation, and uphold the ideal of marital permanence.

6. In each local congregation, strive systematically to improve marital satisfaction and to lower rates of divorce and non-marital childbearing.

7. Establish and strengthen premarital counseling and marital enrichment programs.

8. Strive to establish, in your congregation, a culture of marriage and support for marriage.

9. Encourage young people in the congregation to honor, and learn from, older people who model excellence in marriage.¹⁴¹

MENDING FATHER-MOTHER RELATIONSHIP

“It is critical that parents act with respect towards each other when exercising their parental rights and responsibilities.”¹⁴²

– California Senator Bill Morrow

An effective program addressing the issue of father absence must focus on mending the relationship between fathers and mothers.¹⁴³ The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice concludes, “The father’s relationship with the mother is the single greatest determinant of significant and successful father involvement.” Many men blame their inability to get along with their children’s mother as the reason for their abandonment. Parents must find a way to share parenting even when living apart. One of the greatest barriers in maintaining healthy relationships between parents in some divorce and never married scenarios is hostility and unresolved

¹⁴¹ Council on Families in America, Marriage in America, 12.


anger. In many instances the anger ensuing from the father-mother relationship is passed to the children. Fathers and mothers must be respectful to each other. They must seek peace, be civil and make decisions based on what is best for the children.

**SHARED PARENTING**

“Shared parenting ensures continuation of family life for the child, with the advantage of nurture from both parents rather than just one.”

– Shared Parenting Information Group

Defining shared parenting can be challenging, because of the numerous and varied arrangements of family structures. According to the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF),

Parental participation occurs primarily in three family arrangements: married or cohabiting fathers in intact families; separated or divorced fathers living apart from their former wives, the mothers of their children; and unwed young fathers who do not share a household with their offspring but, instead, continue to reside with a parent, parents, or other family members.

The term co-parenting is often used interchangeably with shared parenting. However, shared parenting is the preferred term for this manuscript. Diana Mercer and Marsha Kline Pruett in their book, *Your Divorce Advisor* indicate that it is possible for

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146 Diana Mercer and Marsha Kline Pruett, *Your Divorce Advisor* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), 199.
parents to raise their children together even after a divorce.\textsuperscript{147} Shared parenting can be effective if the parents are able to set aside their differences and focus on the child’s needs.\textsuperscript{148} They suggest a number of ways that a child can benefit from shared parenting arrangements. Among these benefits, “The children have fewer behavior and emotional problems and report fewer negative experiences with the divorce. Boys derive special benefits from shared parenting, and the contact it affords them with their fathers.”\textsuperscript{149}

Unwed young fathers provide the lowest participation in child caretaking.\textsuperscript{150} Contemporary American norms expect fathers to do less parenting work than mothers. Parental involvement for fathers is often viewed as discretionary.\textsuperscript{151} Dismantling the idea that fathers are superfluous is a positive step toward creating a cultural climate that expects and empowers fathers to equally share parenting responsibility.\textsuperscript{152}

Shared parenting can be defined as both parents contributing to the decision-making process for the good of the child.\textsuperscript{153} Shared parenting is one way to effectively address the problem of low father participation.\textsuperscript{154} A report prepared for the United States Department of Health and Human Services suggests that a fathering program should as

\textsuperscript{147} Mercer, \textit{Your Divorce Advisor}, 203.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 199.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 202.

\textsuperscript{150} Arendell, \textit{Co-Parenting}, 30.

\textsuperscript{151} Council on Families in America, \textit{Marriage in America}, 8.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{154} Mercer, \textit{Your Divorce Advisor}, 203.
one of its emphases, “Promote collaborative co-parenting inside and outside marriage.”\(^{155}\)

Shared parenting is a viable solution in cases of separation, divorce and never married scenarios, for it allows continuation of family life for the child.\(^{156}\) This parenting style requires shared decision-making, responsibilities and involves the child spending time between two homes.\(^{157}\) Parents must be cooperative, communicative and open to discuss the various aspects of child rearing.\(^{158}\)

Traditionally, fathers are not highly involved in child caretaking, and therefore, equally distributed parenting responsibilities are an anomaly.\(^{159}\) Father participation in child caretaking maybe easier in married, intact families, because the father lives under the same roof with the child.\(^{160}\) Noncustodial fathers may find it challenging to remain involved with their children after a divorce or a breakup.\(^{161}\) The parental involvement of noncustodial fathers with their children declines over time, as stated in the literature, “When fathers do not live with their children, the relationship between father and child typically dissipates.”\(^{162}\) The Marriage Movement offers an explanation for the decline in noncustodial father involvement. They explain,

One reason is that when fathers are not married to the mother of their children, they develop difficult, competing obligations to new partners and new children.

\(^{155}\) Doherty, *Responsible Fathering*, 1.

\(^{156}\) Mercer, *Your Divorce Advisor*, 199-203.

\(^{157}\) Ibid.

\(^{158}\) Ibid.

\(^{159}\) Arendell, *Co-Parenting*, 5.


\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.
Time, energy, and money are limited resources. When a father doesn’t live with the children’s mother, his fathering must be spread out over at least two households, and often more. Outside marriage, the difficulties of fathering multiply, and the number of successful fathers dwindles.

Children benefit when parents collaborate and share parenting responsibilities after divorce.\(^{163}\)

There are a number of principles that contribute to the success of the shared parenting model.\(^{164}\) Separated and divorced parents must be committed to the well-being of the child. Thus certain behaviors should be avoided including: loud and argumentative behaviors, not talking negative about the other parent in the child’s presence, not undermining the other parent and not interrogating the child during or after a visit.\(^{165}\) Similarly, parents should establish a mutual plan for resolving conflict.\(^{166}\) This can be accomplished by a consistent plan to honor each other’s privacy, keep open communication, establish and keep a consistent visitation schedule and respect each other.\(^{167}\)

Respecting each other as parents allows the child to honor and model the respect shown to both parents.\(^{168}\) This allows children to feel free to interact with each parent without fear of reprisal or negative consequence.\(^{169}\) Children should be assured that

\(^{163}\) Mercer, *Your Divorce Advisor*, 199-203.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 199.

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 204.

\(^{166}\) Ibid.

\(^{167}\) Ibid.


\(^{169}\) Ibid.
building a relationship with the non-custodial parent is welcomed. Children often seek
the parent’s approval for interaction and visits with the non-custodial parent.

RECONNECTING FAMILIES THROUGH BUILDING HEALTHY
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

“Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.”

- Rollo May

Communication is verbal and nonverbal language that exchanges information from one person to another. Effective communication requires effort and should be a goal of both father and child. Successful communication is achieved when the intended message is perceived by the recipient in the manner that it was intended. Effective communication is one of the most important factors in relationships. Dysfunctional communication often leads to the breakdown of relationships.

John Gottman identifies four destructive communication patterns that may hinder progress in the father-child reconnecting process: criticism, contempt, defensiveness and

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171 Ibid.

172 As quoted by Heartmath, Quotes of the Heart: Communication Quotes and Proverbs (Boulder Creek, CA), Retrieved March 1, 2006 from http://www.heartquotes.net/communication, 1.


stonewalling. This type of communication is primarily defensive, protective actions that facilitate distance in a relationship. Criticism usually involves accusatory statements, such as “you always” and “you never,” which focuses on who one is, rather than what one has done. Criticism becomes a vicious circular phase that becomes more intense with each loop. The contempt phase is an expression of hardness of heart and is manifested by intentional insults, such as name-calling and deliberate put-downs. Defensiveness is the natural response to contempt, but it only facilitates the distance when a father and child are attempting to reconnect but dominant unresolved anger hinders the process. The next phase is characterized by stonewalling where “walls go up,” which represents a total breakdown in communication. Usually, one or both parties have “given up on the relationship,” at this phase.

Effective communication plays a major role in the process of healing father-child bonds. Barbara F. Okun identifies ineffective communication as the major culprit in interpersonal problems. She says:

Research indicates that communication problems are the major source of interpersonal difficulties. For example, most marital and family problems stem from misunderstanding from ineffective communication, which results in frustration and anger when implicit expectations and desires are not fulfilled. And

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175 Gottman, The Seven Principles, 29-34
176 Ibid., 27-29.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid., 29-31.
180 Ibid., 31-34.
181 Ibid., 33-34.
a major problem of those who seek professional help is their inability to recognize and communicate their problems or concerns.  

Ineffective communication is often the impasse that creates frustration and anger and impedes the healing process as father and child seek to mend broken bonds.

The father and child must strive to genuinely listen to each other, which may require tremendous work, depending on the level of pain. There may be a prevailing temptation to analyze and interpret what is being said, but the listener must resist and seek to hear the message that is being spoken. Active listening is an important listening skill; as the Apostle James said, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Active listening is a verification and feedback process, rooted in a genuine interest in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling and desiring to communicate (Appendix B). When the listener is actively involved in the communication process, he can hear the message. If he is only passively involved in the communication, he most likely will only hear the words that are being spoken and never embrace the message.

Non-verbal communication can be an issue in attempting to heal broken-relationships. Often, strong emotions are associated with feelings of rejection and abandonment that may accompany father absence. Both father and child must pay attention to nonverbal messages, including facial expressions, body posture, hand

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gestures and tone of voice, which can bring clarity to the message that is being verbalized.\textsuperscript{184}

**BOUNDARIES**

“Those people in our lives who can respect our boundaries will love our wills, our opinions, our separateness. Those who can’t respect our boundaries are telling us that they don’t love our no. They only love our yes, our compliance.”\textsuperscript{185}

- Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John S. Townsend

Establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries are essential in mending father-child relationships for many “relational struggles find their root in conflicts with boundaries.”\textsuperscript{186} A boundary is a property line that indicates a person’s existence and specifies the things for which he is responsible.\textsuperscript{187} Clear boundaries are imperative for parental relationships; they determine both the parent and child’s responsibility and accountability. A lack of understanding of personal parameters and misperceived boundaries may lead to pain or may result in a boundary reinjury. Boundaries distinguish limits that enable people to keep the good in and the bad out. When boundaries are in place, a person can guard, protect and take care of himself.\textsuperscript{188} However, boundaries must

\textsuperscript{184} The Texas A & M University System, *Keys to Effective Father Child Communication*, 2.

\textsuperscript{185} Cloud, *Boundaries*, 108.

\textsuperscript{186} Mercer, *Your Divorce Advisor*, 26.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 27-33.

\textsuperscript{188} Mercer, *Your Divorce Advisor*, 31-32.
not be so rigid that one is unable to adjust them in order to successfully keep the good in and the bad out.\textsuperscript{189}

In reestablishing broken relationships, it is essential that one understands the difference between healthy boundaries and walls.\textsuperscript{190} Many people misconstrue boundaries to mean walls. Walls isolate and prevent even good things from getting inside.\textsuperscript{191} Cloud and Townsend in their Gold Medallion award-winning book \textit{Boundaries} say, “In short, boundaries are not walls. The Bible does not say that we are to be ‘walled off’ from others; in fact, it says that we are to be ‘one’ with them (John 17:11). We are to be in community with them. But in every community, all members have their own space and property.” God’s desire is not that a person be isolated from others, but that nurturing relationships are developed and sustained. However, when a person has been hurt or deeply disappointed, they often allow walls to go up, which prevent people from getting too close to them. Hence, people in these scenarios often sabotage relationships that start too get to intimate. Cloud and Townsend believe that an important factor in reestablishing boundaries or community “is that property lines be permeable enough to allow passing and strong enough to keep out danger.”\textsuperscript{192}

Setting boundaries is pivotal in reestablishing a relationship, such as with an absentee father because of the emotions and pain that is naturally involved. The first step in this process is that a person must first change his relationship with himself. When a

\textsuperscript{189} Mercer, \textit{Your Divorce Advisor}, 32.


\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{192} Cloud, \textit{Boundaries}, 32.
person changes his core relationship with himself, he is empowered and more prone to set appropriate boundaries, which communicate to others that he deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

The things that differentiate one person form someone else represent boundaries. Words can be used to delineate boundaries. The ability to use the word “no” effectively keeps one from being subdued by pressure to comply with requests that violate boundaries. Furthermore, words clearly communicate one’s boundaries to others. Boundaries allow a person to be able to protect and defend himself, as well as let others know when they are behaving in a manner that is unacceptable. In some cases, to maintain boundaries means to withdraw from the situation that is the cause of the pain. It is not the will of God for people to continue endlessly in painful circumstances, so in some cases a person may need to remove themselves from a person that is causing pain or a project that is causing distress and reassess his boundaries.

Personal boundaries are necessary in order to build healthy relationships.\textsuperscript{193} Healthy, strong and clearly defined boundaries keep people from deriving their identity from others or completely losing theirs in relationships.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{193} Cloud, \textit{Boundaries}, 27-33.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
REESTABLISHING TRUST AFTER A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP

“Children with strongly committed fathers learn about trust early on. They learn about
trust with their hearts.”\(^{195}\)

– Former Vice-President Al Gore

Trust is the most fundamental component in all relationships. The Soul Care Bible
describes trust as, “the foundation of all positive, healthy relationships. Trust is the glue
that holds people together through life’s most difficult experiences.”\(^{196}\) It is the
confidence that one person places in another person that they will be completely honest
and faithful. It is a firm reliance on the other person’s integrity that they are who they say
they are, and that they will do what they say they will do. Often, it is only in crises that
people actually see a need to grow in trust. This growth process requires transparency, an
act of honesty that means becoming vulnerable enough to be known by another person.
Trusting another person means that there is a possibility of getting hurt in the process.

Relationships have the capacity to grow in trust and truthfulness through an
environment of unconditional love, openness and acceptance. Honesty is an integral
component in building trusting relationships, and is the foundation on which all other
aspects of the relationship are hinged. Honesty means keeping the communication lines
completely open. Honesty must be the cornerstone of every relationship, for it is through
this venue that trust is built.


\(^{196}\) Tim E. Clinton, *The Soul Care Bible: [Experiencing and Sharing Hope God’s Way]* (Nashville,
Tenn.: T. Nelson, 2001), 1180.
When a father has been absent and returns, children are faced with the question of whether he will leave again. Children often have to overcome the barrier of distrust as they make the vital steps towards reconnecting with an absentee father. The father has to gain the child’s trust.

**ACCEPTANCE**

“Acceptance does not imply endorsement of inappropriate or wrong behavior. It simply refers to a state of mind that allows you to be peaceful and know the difference between things you can help improve and things that are the way they are.”\(^{197}\)

– Peter M. Kalellis

In seemingly impossible reconciliatory situations, God often sends along a tangible motivator to stimulate desire and the door for communication is opened in the process. The question is often who will walk through the open door, the child, the father or both? For the writer, one such motivator was the *Antwone Fisher* movie,\(^{198}\) which portrayed the real life story of Antwone Fisher. For the writer, this story stimulated desire for reconciliation, and she found strength to reach again into the distance for the hand of her absent father.

In the movie, Antwone had internalized anger and experienced a number of psychological problems that were traced to his childhood. Mental, physical and sexual abuses were other variables that affected Antwone’s outcome. He suffered these abuses at the hands of a foster mother. However, according to Antwone’s therapist, his major issue

\(^{197}\)Peter M. Kalellis, *Five Steps to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 68.

\(^{198}\)Fisher, *Antwone Fisher* [Movie, American Drama, 2002].
and the root of much of his anger was the absence of his parents. Later in the movie, he confronted his mother, the only surviving parent, and asked her a common question that children from fatherless homes ponder, “Did you ever love me, think of me or ever wonder how I was doing?” The mother made no response.

The writer had a very similar experience, where she made another attempt to have contact with her biological father, but during the visit, he sat in silence. This experience enlightened the writer to the painful reality that some father-child relationships will not be reconciled. In these cases, the people who seek reconciliation have to come to a place of acceptance and bring closure for themselves. There are two choices; both involve accepting that which they cannot change. One is accepting the father where he is and for whom he is without limitations or expectations of something different. The second is acceptance of the situation that one cannot change. In this event, “Acceptance is often suggested when a situation is both disliked and unchangeable, or when change may be possible only at great cost or risk.”\(^{199}\) The question for the writer became could she receive her father as he was and embrace the pain that he still inflicted.

Acceptance is the essence of the serenity prayer. A powerful yet plainly stated acknowledgement that some things are out of one’s power to change, the serenity prayer offers a challenge to “accept the things that one cannot change.” To accept a person is to receive them completely and without conditions. One encyclopedia states, “Acceptance does not require that change is possible or even conceivable, nor does it require that the situation be desired or approved by those accepting it.”\(^{200}\) Antwone Fisher closes with a


\(^{200}\) Ibid.
final acceptance after which he is able to move in a positive direction with his life. This movie became a prevailing tool for the writer. While on the path to ultimate acceptance, she engaged in personal, cognitive, and emotional processing of the similarities of the movie to her own life. In so doing, she found another aspect that can become a major catalyst to change, which is that acceptance can be of the circumstance, rather than the person that continues to cause pain.

A male friend in discussing the movie, *Antwone Fisher*, shared the impact it had on his life. He had been estranged from a now adult son, whom he had never met. In this case, the father received word that a girlfriend had given birth to his son. At the time, he was in the Navy, and having a child was perceived as a disruption to the family and career that he had established. The father relocated shortly after receiving the news of the birth of his son. Through time, the thoughts of his son were pushed to the back of his mind as life took him through many adjustments, such as relocations and career changes.

When the son was six years old, his mother gave him a picture of his father, which he cherished. The picture became a permanent fixture on top of his dresser. The son was another person that “against hope believed in hope” that one day he would be reconciled to his father. This picture was a point of reference, where he placed his faith that one day he would have an opportunity to build a relationship with his father. He remained open to the possibility of reconciliation, even into adulthood. When the son left his mother’s house, he took his father’s picture with him. He gave the picture a new home upon his mantle, so that anyone who entered his home was instantly introduced to his father. He never lost hope that one day he would be united with him.

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201 Marvin Carrington, New York, NY, personal interview with this thesis project writer, 18, August, 2004.
The father and his wife of three years went to see the *Antwone Fisher* movie, and through that experience a burning desire to find his son surfaced. After the movie and over the next week, the father pondered the possibility of locating his son. He had never mentioned this son to his current wife, which complicated the issue and added to his distress. The wife realized that something was heavy upon his mind, so she asked, “What is bothering you?” He revealed to her that he had a son, whom he had never seen. He continued to explain that since the movie, he had an overwhelming desire to find him. Furthermore, he realized for the first time in his life that his involvement in his son’s life was necessary. She responded, “Then, we must find him.” He asked, “How?” and continued with, “It’s been over twenty years and I wouldn’t know how to begin searching for him.” His wife was computer savvy, and with just the mother’s name and last known address, she came back with contact information, including a telephone number.

He called the mother, and she instantly recognized his voice. She said, “You are looking for your son.” It appeared that she had long awaited the day that the father of her son would reach out into the distance for the sake of reconciliation. She gave him the son’s phone number. The father held on to the number for almost a week, debating questions such as, “What if he hates me for not being there? What if he doesn’t want to see me?” On the Sunday of the second week, the father was heading out the door to church and was compelled to call his son that morning. It was a strong compulsion, one that he surrendered to.

The long awaited day had arrived, the son on one end of the phone and the father on the other. At first, the son thought it was one of his friends who was playing a joke on him. It all came together when he heard the words that he had hoped to one day hear,
“This is your father.” What a reunion! By this time the son was on the speaker phone so that his fiancée could hear and the father also so that his wife could hear the evolving conversation. The son was accepting and embracing; nothing like the father had feared. All were in tears or crying. The prodigal father, who had been lost, found his way to the heart of his son who had long awaited his return.

The son asked his father whether he had an e-mail address. He continued with “I look exactly like you and would like to send you a picture of me to show you . . . you tell me whether I look like you.” As this writer sat interviewing this father, he opened his wallet and said, “Here is my son.” In the words of the son, “He looked exactly like his father.”

The first steps to healing a broken relationship are often painful. It is good for a person to have vision that allows them to see the eventual healing of a broken relationship. The journey of healing can be planned from the relationship’s current place. Acknowledging where the relationship is can help the momentum of change and growth. One cannot bypass the place of pain and launch into an instantaneous healing.

If one is accepting of a person, then he must accept him along with his differences, defects, and shortcomings. Acceptance is not synonymous with compromise, nor is it an appeal for conformity. Acceptance must be of the person and not the image of what one may hope for them to be. Jesus was accepting of all people, even sinners, in that He valued them as people. However, He was not accepting of their sin; instead He presented truth and allowed people the space to change. He never imposed His way on others, but allowed them to make choices from the place of free will. In the same manner,
a child cannot force his father to change, but in the process of acceptance, must leave him free to do so.
CHAPTER IV

THE FATHER PRESENCE MATTERS: TWELVE-STEPS

“The Twelve-Steps form a process that promotes two qualities in its membership: honesty and spirituality. Starting with the first admission of powerlessness, the Steps demand a high level accountability to oneself and others. Only one way exists to maintain that level of integrity: a committed spirituality.”

- Dr. Patrick Carnes

Twelve-Step programs are structured fellowships that “aim at the recovery of its members from the consequences of an addiction, a compulsion, or another harmful influence on their lives.” These programs focus on the journey of recovery from a particular addiction, such as alcohol, gambling, food, sex and others. This dissertation component focuses on recovery as it concerns healing from the pain of father-absence, rather than a particular addiction. It is the contention of this writer that the journeys are similar whether recovery from addiction or healing from pain. In each journey the first

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step is that one has to admit that there is a problem. This first step is “One of the most
widely-recognized characteristics of Twelve-Step groups; members admit that they ‘have
a problem.””

The writer contends that forgiveness is a necessary component in the journey of
healing and recovery. The Twelve-Step component of this project takes its roots from the
training curriculum topic on forgiveness. Project participants advance to the Twelve-
Step component after completing the 12 weeks of curriculum training. This training
included the topics: healing from loss and forgiveness and the process of letting go. The
writer maintains that a Twelve-Step group can help further the healing and reconnecting
process as its participants move towards a place of forgiveness. The first step involves
identifying the pain or problem and surrendering it to God. In Step 1 a person
acknowledges that they are unable to heal themselves of the pain associated with loss or
father-absence.

Step 1:

We admit that in our own strength we are powerless to heal broken father-child bonds,
whether caused by death, abandonment, or abuse and if possible make the necessary
steps towards reconnecting in a meaningful way.

A person often takes the first step when they have done everything imaginable to
mend the father-child bond on their own but to no avail. It is not uncommon for a person
to think that they have completely healed only to be triggered later and experience the

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4 See the Forgiveness section of the Father Presence Matters Curriculum in Chapter 3 of this work.
same emotions as if the loss had just occurred. In other instances, a person can suppress the emotions that surround a father’s absence to have them burst forth in an inopportune time. A person may have done all that is within his power to heal from his pain, but having found no real path of recovery is now willing to place hope in God for healing. At the point of admitting powerlessness to heal oneself, the journey through the Twelve-Steps can begin.

The word “powerless” does not mean that a person cannot make life changes. In this context powerless is rooted in the idea of accepting the things that one cannot change. There will be some things that are beyond an individual’s control because reconciliation involves more than one person. Here, one must acknowledge that he is powerless to heal the broken relationships on his own, and in the process he empowers himself to take control over the things in his life that he can change. In Step 1 the person acknowledges that he has a problem that he cannot solve alone. This place of surrender will mark the beginning of a new road where he no longer relies on self-will or his own power to heal the broken father-child bonds. Instead, he anchors in God’s strength and is able to commit to move towards personal healing and reconnecting in a meaningful way where possible with the absentee father. In this posture of surrender, he can exchange his burden with Christ’s, for He has promised, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).
Step 2:

_We accept God’s power to heal the memories, hurts and pain of all involved parties._

In Step 1 a person acknowledges that he has a problem that he could not solve alone. In Step 2 the person realizes that there is someone “greater than himself” that is able to help him to heal, solve his problem, and in the cases of father-absence provide a path of reconciliation. There is hope for healing and reconciliation through the, second step. In working this step, a person can anchor in God as the source of strength, courage, and hope because He is able to help him accomplish what was previously deemed impossible. The individual does not have to be a silent sufferer, carrying his pain alone, whether this surrounds father-absence or proceeds from another source. Dr. Jerry Hirschfield in his book, *The Twelve-Steps for Everyone* describes Step 2 as the “Hope Step,” because it “gives us new hope as we begin to see that there is help available if we will just ‘come to believe.’” The core of the second step is that God is able and willing to restore parental bonds, help people to heal from their pain and to recover from compulsions and addictions.

Step 3:

_We have made a decision to surrender our own wills and to rely on God’s care throughout this restorative journey._

Step 3 is an action step, where the person turns over his will to God, and surrenders to His care and makes the decision to walk in forgiveness. In this step a

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5 Jerry Hirschfield, *The Twelve-Steps for Everyone* (Center City, Minnesota: Hazeldon, 1990), 34.
commitment is made to the journey of restoration with the understanding that it is a process. Terence T. Gorski identifies two functions in Step 3:

The first is emotional – it gives people the courage, strength, and hope to move ahead in recovery. The second is intellectual and behavioral – it gives them the knowledge about what they need to do and then motivates them to do it.\(^6\)

The action is infused in this step, when the person reaches the place that he is ready and willing to take direction from God.

**Step 4:**

*We first take a personal inventory of ourselves, discerning our own mistakes and shortcomings before assessing the mistakes and shortcomings of others and before calculating a suffered wrong.*

One may be tempted in a broken relationship to point the finger and detail the other person’s faults, mistakes and shortcomings. Step 4 requires that the attention be taken off the offender or the absentee father and be placed on the person working the steps.

Step 4 is reflective in nature and here the “action” part of the Twelve-Step journey begins. In this step a person is required to take a moral self-inventory. In this personal assessment, the unconscious emotions, motives and character defects that prevent a person from living a completely victorious Christian life are revealed. A fourth step inventory is designed to search out character defects, which Gorski defines as “a combination of four elements: mistaken beliefs, automatic irrational thoughts, painful

feelings and self-defeating behaviors.”

One of the case family members discovered in taking the fourth step that she had an abandonment issue that stemmed from her father’s absence. The character defect here or as Gorski explains the “mistaken belief,” was that other people would abandon her, so she felt it was necessary that she ended relationships first. Later in Step 8, she was able to make a list of the people that she had hurt because of this character defect and move forward in the process of making amends to each one of them.

According to Hirschfield, this searching inventory is a process of cleaning one’s mind and, “will be the beginning of our capability to adopt new attitudes, to ‘let go of our old ideas absolutely.’”

The purpose of the personal inventory of Step 4 according to Gorski is “to look within and inventory your strengths and weaknesses so you can build on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses.”

Step 5:

*We confess to God and the person that we have wronged, before witnesses, the exact nature of our offense.*

Step 5 provides the opportunity for a person to admit his mistakes, wrong doings, character defects, unforgiveness and any other things found in Step 4’s inventory. Step 4 requires humility and involves admitting to oneself and God the weaknesses found in Step 4. In addition, this step requires the individual to admit to another person, “the exact

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7 Ibid., 83.

8 Hirschfield, *The Twelve-Steps for Everyone*, 46.

nature of his wrongdoings.” This step is not designed to be completed alone. The barrier of isolation is broken when a person is able to share the results of his personal inventory with another person. There is a cleansing element inherent in confession (Psalms 32:3-7; Matthew 3:5-6; Acts 19:18-20; James 5:16). The apostle James indicates that people are able to confess their faults to each other and in doing so they are able to find healing. He says, “Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16). The fifth step should be shared with someone that is trustworthy and capable of giving feedback.

Step 6:

We are ready for God to remove hurts, abandonment issues and rebellion as a result of father loss.

In Step 6 a person becomes willing to allow God to remove all of the negative issues found in the personal inventory of Step 4. A person may arrive at this step quickly or slowly and gradually. Willingness is essential in this step as Gorski says, “You can’t change until you are ready to do so, and this step recognizes that fact.”

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Step 7:
We request and are willing to allow God to remove barriers in our personality, character and nature that may hinder the healing and reconnecting process.

Step 7 is where a person “humbly” asks God to remove his shortcomings. This request is made to God, and as He grants the courage and strength, the individual has to do what Alcoholic Anonymous calls “the legwork.”\textsuperscript{11} This step is the process of putting one’s “newfound strength into action.”\textsuperscript{12} According to Gorski, “Asking for the removal of your defects facilitates an internal change that prepares you for Steps 8 and 9. You repair yourself inwardly so you can begin repairing your life outwardly. The healing process moves from the inside to the outside.”\textsuperscript{13}

Step 8:
We have made a list of all the people that we harmed because of the pain we have suffered and we are willing to make direct amends to them.

In Step 8, people often realize that they may have responded to others out of their personal pain. This step requires an honest attempt to repair and make amends for the pain that they caused others. Each person should make a list of all the people that they have harmed and from that point on must be “willing to make amends.” According to Hirschfield, the process whereby one becomes willing to make amends, “requires two

\textsuperscript{11} Gorski, \textit{Understanding the Twelve-Steps}, 105.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 38-39.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 39.
things: first, that we become willing to forgive, and second, another large dose of humility.” In this step, the family member with the abandonment issues as related in Step 4’s description, was able to make a list of the people that she hurt by closing the door on relationships prematurely or abruptly because of her fear of being rejected. This is the sort of list that a person is empowered to generate by working Step 8.

A person should avoid generalizations in Step 8, but rather be specific as to who was hurt, what was the offense and what can be done to make amends.

**Step 9:**

*We take personal inventory of our lives, and take responsibility for our actions. We make direct amends with those we have harmed as we walk in forgiveness toward them. We are willing to forgive or ask forgiveness of those we have hurt or offended regardless of whether a request for forgiveness is forthcoming. We are willing to walk in reconciliation where possible.*

Making amends means “to correct, to fix, or to recompense for grievance or injury.”

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Gorski explains, “You don’t forgive other people in order to help them; you do it to help yourself.”16 This step allows room for spiritual growth.

**Step 10:**

*We take continued personal inventory of our lives and are determined not to use our pain as an excuse to hurt others.*

Step 10 requires the person to take daily inventory, which would involve monitoring his thoughts, feelings and behaviors. In this step, a person is able to acknowledge his ongoing strengths and successes and can continue to address his weaknesses as they arise.

**Step 11:**

*We purpose to grow in our knowledge and intimacy with God and commit to pray, seek and fulfill His will for our lives.*

In Step 11 a person makes a commitment to grow in his relationship with God. This growth will come as the individual grows in intimacy with God through practicing the spiritual disciplines such as, prayer, meditation, devotion and other spiritual disciplines. Dallas Willard says, “The disciplines are activities of mind and body

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16 Ibid., 132.
purposely undertaken to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with divine order.”

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**Step 12:**

*We rejoice in the spiritual awakening and in the healing and restoration that has occurred as a result of these Steps and therefore we purpose to help restore others in their “fatherly” struggles.*

In Step 12 a person realizes that he is different. This is “the spiritual awakening” that comes as a result of working the steps. When a person has been healed and transformed, he is able to take the message of recovery to others. It doesn’t say that when reconciliation has occurred, but rather when a person has healed and been restored, that he can help others. A person may not be reconciled in the broken relationship, but can experience a “spiritual awakening” through working the steps. An individual can emerge as a credible witness to the reality of a “spiritual awakening” when he has worked the steps. At this point, he can tell others what has occurred and what continues to happen in his journey toward healing. After completing Step 12, project participants can advance to the 12-month mentorship.

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THE TWELVE-STEPS

Step 1
We admit that in our own strength we are powerless to heal broken father-child bonds, whether caused by death, abandonment, or abuse and if possible make the necessary steps towards reconnecting in a meaningful way.

Step 2
We accept God’s power to heal the memories, hurts and pain of all involved parties.

Step 3
We have made a decision to surrender our own wills and to rely on God’s care throughout this restorative journey.

Step 4
We first take a personal inventory of ourselves, discerning our own mistakes and shortcomings before assessing the mistakes and shortcomings of others and before calculating a suffered wrong.

Step 5
We confess to God and the person that we have wronged, before witnesses, the exact nature of our offense.

Step 6
We are ready for God to remove hurts, abandonment issues and rebellion as a result of father loss.

Step 7
We request and are willing to allow God to remove barriers in our personality, character and nature that may hinder the healing and reconnecting process.

Step 8
We have made a list of all the people that we harmed because of the pain we have suffered and we are willing to make direct amends to them.

Step 9
We take a personal inventory of our lives, and take responsibility for our actions. We make direct amends to those we have harmed as we walk in forgiveness toward them. We are willing to forgive or ask forgiveness of those we have hurt or offended regardless of whether a request for forgiveness is forthcoming. We are willing to walk in reconciliation where possible.

Step 10
We take continued personal inventory of our lives and are determined not to use our pain as an excuse to hurt others.
Step 11
We purpose to grow in our knowledge and intimacy with God and commit to pray, seek and fulfill His will for our lives.

Step 12
We rejoice in the spiritual awakening and in the healing and restoration that has occurred as a result of these steps and therefore we purpose to help restore others in their “fatherly” struggles.18

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18 The following disclaimer is taken from the Alcoholics Anonymous World Services’ letter to the writer, Appendix F: “While the Twelve-Steps for the Father Presence Matters Recovery Program were inspired by the Twelve-Steps of Alcoholic Anonymous, they are not really an adaptation. Rather, they were created specifically for this publication and program, and should not be construed otherwise. Alcoholic Anonymous is a program concerned only with recovery from alcoholism and is not in any way affiliated with this publication.”
QUESTIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND EXERCISES FOR THE TWELVE-STEPS  
(Group Meetings)

*Group Meeting 1*

The first step deals with acceptance. The individual realizes that he is powerless in his own ability to heal the pain from father-absence. In addition, one cannot mend the broken relationship without the willingness and support of the other person. However, the person can journey through the Twelve-Steps and receive personal healing regardless of the willingness of the other person.

Step 1: We admit that in our own strength we are powerless to heal broken father-child bonds, whether caused by death, abandonment, or abuse and if possible make the necessary steps towards reconnecting in a meaningful way.

Exercise: The group leader should ask the following questions: Has there been any personal attempt to mend the broken relationship with the absentee father? If so, what was his response, action, or behavior? Participants should be encouraged to discuss specific attempts to reconnect or mend the broken relationship with their absentee father. As the individual is relating each instance, the group should pay attention to the responses, behaviors and/or attitudes that were generated from both parties and then determine whether the pain of father-absence was strengthened or weakened in these attempts?

*Group Meeting 2*

Participants should be asked to think of a memorable event in their life, and then be asked whether they would like to share this event with their father? If so, discuss ways to share the account with the absentee father? If not, explain why not.
Step 2: We accept God’s power to heal the memories, hurts and pain of all involved parties.

Exercise: Past Reflection (Group Size/Limit 8)

This exercise will allow individuals to reflect upon the past, and learn from it in the process of moving forward.

Ask the participants to take turns discussing their relationship with their father while growing up. Children from absent father homes can choose to discuss a male that has been significant in their life. In instances where there has been absolutely no male influence in a participant’s life, the child’s expectations of a father may be used for points of discussion.

The group should be divided into groups of four and after reflecting upon their fathers’ overall influence, each person can make a list of the positive and negative elements of the way they were fathered. As participants are willing, the group can then discuss these points.

*Group Meeting 3*

Participants should be asked to identify the greatest need that they have from their father and determine whether this need has always been the greatest?

Step 3: We have made a decision to surrender our own wills and to rely on God’s care throughout this restorative journey.

Exercise: What is an effective father?
The group should sit in a circle and take turns discussing the question, “What are the characteristics of an effective father?” The group leader should give an overview of what it means to be an effective father and discuss the listed examples:

1. Effective fathers spend quality time with their children.
2. Effective fathers are nurturing.
3. Effective fathers are emotionally available.
4. Effective fathers love unconditionally.
5. Effective fathers are involved.
6. Effective fathers provide financial, emotional, mental, physical, spiritual and social support.
7. Effective fathers practice appropriate discipline.
8. Effective fathers provide consistency.
9. Effective fathers are good listeners.

Group Meeting 4

Kübler-Ross indicates in her work on grief that a goal of walking through the grieving process is to arrive at a place of acceptance, where one is able to accept the loss, see and acknowledge the good even in difficult and painful situations. Considering Kübler-Ross’s perspective, allow the participants to determine what good can be seen and acknowledged from their individual father-absence experiences?

Step 4: We first take a personal inventory of ourselves, discerning our own mistakes and shortcomings before assessing the mistakes and shortcomings of others and before calculating a suffered wrong.

Exercise: Participants should be allowed the opportunity to circle all of the father roles that apply to their lives. Participants will discuss these roles as they relate to their unique experience.
The group leader will provide definition and discussion examples on the various roles.

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<th>Role Model</th>
<th>Security</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Protector</td>
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**Group Meeting 5**

Has your “trust” been challenged in relating to other male-figures?

Step 5: We confess to God and the person that we have wronged, before witnesses, the exact nature of our offense.

Exercise: Often people that have been hurt by a male will shun and mistreat or reject other men, even when they respect and admire them or want them to be in their lives. Have you mistreated someone because you were triggered by their presence or behavior and been reminded of a pain from the past? Discuss in the group setting these wrongs and try to identify the trigger.
**Group Meeting 6**

What does it take to reconnect with an absent father? What does this reconnection require of the child? What does this reconnection require of the father?

Step 6: We are ready for God to remove hurts and deal with abandonment issues and rebellion as a result of father loss.

Exercise: Everyone in the group should close their eyes and try to recall the one specific occurrence that pushed them over the edge or was the final straw as it concerned the absent father. Recalling this event and talking through it will help in the forgiveness process. It will provide a new freedom for the individual and aid him in the reconnection process.

**Group Meeting 7**

Barriers often evolve as a result of defenses that were previously used as a way of coping with a situation. These dysfunctional defenses manifest in thoughts and behaviors and are often reinforced by negative self-talk. Thus, a vital part of the recovery process will be to replace these unhealthy messages with positive affirmations. What are the shortcomings in your life? Are they reinforced by negative self-talk?

Step 7: We request and are willing to allow God to remove barriers in our personality, in our character, and in our nature that may hinder the healing and reconnecting process.

Exercise: Participants should make a list of shortcomings and personality traits that bring negative results. As they are confessed within the group setting, surrendering to God should occur. The group will brainstorm to assist the person sharing to replace the
negative quality of surrender with a positive result. For example, if the shortcomings are feelings of unworthiness, the group will help determine that worthiness is what he now needs to work on. This is the process of transforming a weakness into a strength.

*Group Meeting 8*

In Step 8 a person identifies the people that they have harmed as a result of their pain. It is important to understand the principles of forgiveness before getting to Step 9, which is where amends are actually made for the wrong. What is your opinion of forgiveness? For example: Do you think it’s a one-time event or a continual process? Does forgiveness depend on the contrition of the offender?

Step 8: We have made a list of all the people that we harmed because of the pain we have suffered and we are willing to make direct amends to them.

Exercise: Before getting into the group circle, the leader should give each participant a piece of paper and allow them to make a list of the people that they have harmed (e.g. acting out, withdrawing, drinking and violence). Allow each participant to discuss someone on his or her list. Discussion may include thoughts and feelings about the harm and intentions towards making amends.

Step 8 is a soul-searching step and may require personal work beyond the group time. Group participants should be encouraged to actualize their list of amends and seek forgiveness and reconciliation where possible. They should also be encouraged to complete restitution when possible.
Group Meeting 9

How can forgiveness help someone heal their father-absence pain and achieve positive things in his or her life?

Step 9: We take a personal inventory of our lives and take responsibility for our actions. We make direct amends to those we have harmed as we walk in forgiveness toward them. We must be willing to forgive or to ask forgiveness of those we have hurt or offended regardless of whether a request for forgiveness is forthcoming. We are willing to walk in reconciliation where possible.

Exercise: Forgiveness is a choice. Choosing not to forgive someone results in a continual connection to them. To demonstrate this principle, the group leader will divide the group up into pairs and one person will put his hand on the shoulder of his partner and follow him around for five minutes. The unattached partner remains free to play, sit down, eat or do whatever he chooses. The attached individual, however, is restricted. After five minutes the partners will switch roles. This exercise will help the group realize the impact of unforgiveness, which follows the person around like a hand on the shoulder and provides for an unhealthy connection to the offender.

In the second part of this exercise, the individuals will get up and do whatever they want to for five minutes. When the group session resumes, the leader can relate the experience of freedom to do whatever one chooses to the freedom and liberty that results when a person decides to forgive. What are the alternatives to not forgiving someone that has wronged you?
Group Meeting 10

It is the individual’s response to the events in his life that are the most important. For example, would you get angry if a person spit in your face? Why? Did the person make you angry or spit in your face? The person spit in your face, but you made the decision to get angry. That response is the part that you can change. A person doesn’t have power over certain life circumstances, but he always has power over his response.

Step 10: We take continued personal inventory of our lives and are determined not to use our pain as an excuse to hurt others.

Exercise: Group discussion should surround this example and individuals can share whether they have hurt others because of their own pain. Further discussion should include different intentions for these situations.

Group Meeting 11

What are some ways that a person may grow in relationship to God (e.g. prayer, daily readings, meditation, practicing the spiritual disciplines and journaling?)

Step 11: We purpose to grow in our knowledge and intimacy with God and commit to pray, seek and fulfill His will for our lives.

Exercise: Praying and reading the Word of God is one way that a person can grow in their faith and in relationship with God. Here are two passages that can be used to teach the group how to pray God’s Word:

He sent His word, and healed me, and delivered me from my destructions. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! (Psalm 107:20, 21)

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine
iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's (Psalm 103:1-5).

*Group Meeting 12*

What are some ways that a person can share his personal transformation and victories with other people in a similar father-absence situation?

Step 12: We rejoice in the spiritual awakening and in the healing and restoration that has occurred as a result of these steps and therefore we purpose to help restore others in their “fatherly” struggles.

Exercise: In groups of two, the pairs will role-play how they would share their message of recovery with other people in similar situations. After each role-play the group will have open discussion.
CHAPTER V

FATHER PRESENCE MATTERS MENTORSHIP

“In the absence of fathers, children need more than funding and programs, they need mentors and examples.”\(^1\)

– Indiana Senator Dan Coats

In keeping with the biblical principle to train up a child, it is believed that modeling occurs in the lives of young people (Proverbs 22:6). Thus, providing positive role models should begin to change the statistics that indicate that children, who are not fathered, become parents who do not parent.\(^2\) According to Elhage, mentoring is “something that can be done right now to stop the endless cycle of failure in school, drug abuse, gang involvement, poverty and criminal activity” that often occur among fatherless children.\(^3\) Research has demonstrated that mentoring “can positively affect


\(^{3}\) Ibid.
young people.”4 Public/Private Ventures conducted an eight-year study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, which concluded that young people with mentors were:

- 46 percent less likely to start using drugs;
- 27 percent less likely to start drinking alcohol;
- 53 percent less likely to skip school;
- 37 percent less likely to skip a class; and
- 33 percent less likely to hit someone5

Effective mentoring programs can be a positive step towards reversing the negative impact of fatherlessness, by yielding “a wide-range of tangible benefits for children.”6 Therefore, mentoring can provide a pathway for positive influence for the millions of children who are growing up without their fathers.7 Society cannot afford to wait until the father absence cultural script changes, because it “is reaping the consequences of what happens when too many fathers are absent from the home and the men who could make a difference choose to do nothing about the children who are left behind.”8 Faith-based communities and private organizations can become proactive by creating opportunities for mentoring programs.9 Elhage contends that “fatherless children

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5 Ibid., 9.

6 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 3.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.
need men who will take time to show them what it means to be a man of character, who will affirm them, and who will give them hope for the future.”

A mentor is not meant to replace a parent or guardian. Ideally, a mentor can provide a healthy role model for fathering and marriage, and teach boundary setting and family responsibility. A mentor is a part of a team of caring adults who extend friendship, encouragement and a listening ear to young people. The primary roles of mentors according to Private/Public Ventures are “to become a friend to the youth and to be a caring and supportive adult.”

A youth’s one-on-one relationship with a positive and supportive adult can lead to a number of positive outcomes. Such benefits may include a stronger sense of self-worth for children, improved academic achievement, decreased drug and alcohol use, and enhanced relationships with parents. Private/Public Ventures maintain that:

These benefits of mentoring emerge for youth who are in relationships that have been able to develop and endure. Mentors promote positive outcomes when they serve as role models; provide emotional support and positive feedback; and become a steady, reliable, constructive presence in the lives of youth.

The mentoring component in this dissertation project is faith-based and involves a one-year mentoring relationship between a child and a qualified male adult. This component provides male role models who can offer friendship, support and encouragement to children. The mentorship is designed to be a structured, year-long partnership that allows positive, one-on-one interaction between a child and male adult.

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10 Ibid.

11 JuCovy, *The ABCs of School-based Mentoring*, 16.


13 Ibid.
The goal of this mentorship is to help meet the child’s need for positive adult contact, enhance the child’s life skills, and give him support, guidance and encouragement in the process. Project participants will be chosen on the basis of need; children with completely absent fathers and those with little contact with other males will be given placement priority. There will be a set time period where the mentor-mentee relationship begins and ends. The mentor and mentee will follow an exit process for the ending of the mentorship.  

*Mentor Qualifications:*

A mentor should have a life that is worth imitating. The candidate’s levels of maturity in the faith and character qualities are factors that are considered in the selection process. In this project, mentors must be born-again Christians and have a heart for children and youth. Mentors must be at least 21 years of age, be able to commit to one year of service, possess the ability to actively listen, and have empathy and value diversity. The mentor candidate must complete and sign a written application, which includes personal, pastoral and professional references (Appendix G). In addition, the candidate must return a copy of a valid driver’s license and proof of auto insurance (Appendix Z). The application is the project staff’s first opportunity to screen potential mentors and mentees. The purpose of screening in mentoring programs “is to separate safe and committed applicants from those who would not be successful mentors.”  

Public/Private Ventures suggest that programs screen for safety and suitability by implementing the following tools: “a written application, a face to face interview,  

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14 See Closure Process on page 145 on this project.
references, criminal and background checks.”¹⁶ This project has implemented these suggested screening tools. The benefit of screening is not just to ensure safety of the youth, but it also helps in matching the applicant’s interests and strengths with a mentee.¹⁷

The application process mandates the following inquiries: employment verification, driving, criminal background checks, and reference checks (Appendix D). The Delaware Mentoring Council emphasizes the importance of the thorough screening of mentor applicants, especially in community-based mentoring situations.¹⁸ They suggest the following steps for mentoring programs to assure the safety of children: “identify criteria for volunteer participation, require completion of a written application that includes references . . . conduct in person interviews, and a national criminal history record screening.”¹⁹ After a comprehensive background check, an extensive interview, training and orientation sessions, mentors will be matched with a child from a home where the father is absent or has little involvement with the child.

Mentor Qualities:

Mentors who serve as father-role models should have qualities such as:

_____ Good listener

_____ Integrity and self-respect

_____ Strong work ethic

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ JuCovy, The ABCs of School-based Mentoring, 29.


¹⁹ Ibid.
Love for the Lord

Desire to inspire children

In addition to these qualities, Stanley and Clinton suggest the following characteristics for an effective mentor:

- Ability to readily see potential in a person; tolerance with mistakes, brashness, abrasiveness, and the like in order to see that potential develop; flexibility in responding to people and circumstances; patience, knowing that time and experience are needed for development; perspective, having vision and ability to see down the road and suggest the next steps that a mentee needs; and gifts and abilities that build up and encourage others.²⁰

**Engaging Parents in the Mentoring Process:**

The project staff will conduct a parents’ orientation session, where the following items will be reviewed:

- Program goals and objectives; indicate how the child can benefit from participation and how the family may be positively impacted in the process.
- The importance of parental participation to the overall success of the program.
- Ask parents to support the mentoring efforts by encouraging their child or children to attend and be on time for all sessions.
- Provide parents with appropriate phone numbers, such as those of the program director, the mentors, and the sponsoring agency.

After the orientation, the parent will be asked to sign the parent consent form (Appendix I), which gives permission for the child to participate in the various components of the Father Presence Matters project. This will include participation in the 12-day Twelve-Step component, the 12-week curriculum sessions and the 12-month mentorship.

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**Face-to-Face Interview:**

The interview is the second screening tool and allows the project coordinator and the mentor to review the application and clarify any issues. This structured interview will include specific questions. The questions designed for this project are in Appendices L and M.

**The Matching Process:**

A quality matching system for the mentor and mentee is essential in having an effective mentoring program. A designated project coordinator will begin the preliminary match process by reviewing the application, interview notes and the interest preferences of both the mentor and mentee. The coordinator must pay close attention to the indicated preferences of the mentee, keeping in mind that it is his needs that the project seeks to meet. The preferences of the mentor and the parent or guardian are also assessed in the process. A criteria guide may include making a match based on ethnicity, common interests, personalities, time constraints, and living proximities.

When a match has been made, the coordinator must check the records to ensure that both the mentor and mentee have successfully cleared the screening process and have met the eligibility requirements. Then a match worksheet will be completed by the coordinator and placed in both files (Appendix O). The prospective mentor will be contacted and given a description of the prospective mentee and other pertinent information to determine level of interest. If the mentor is interested in this match, the parent or guardian is contacted and given information about the prospective mentor. If the parent or guardian agrees, then information about the prospective mentor is presented to

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the child. During this process, the coordinator provides each contact with only the first
name as to protect confidentiality at this initial stage.

Once there is mutual agreement concerning the match, the coordinator will set up
and facilitate an introductory meeting. The meeting will provide the mentor the
opportunity to discuss why he wants to be a mentor as well as discuss his interest and
hobbies. The mentee will follow the same model of discussions. If all parties wish to
proceed with the match, the agreement will be finalized in this initial meeting; contracts
will be signed and copies of the contracts will be distributed (Appendices P, Q, and R).
Any person involved in the meeting can opt to take more time to consider the agreement
before entering into the contract. The meeting date for the mentor and mentee should be
confirmed in this meeting; contact information should be exchanged, a copy of the child’s
insurance card should be provided to the mentor and the medical authorization form must
be completed (Appendix K).

The coordinator will give a follow-up call to the mentor, mentee and parent or
guardian within five days of the first meeting. The coordinator will keep a meeting log in
both the mentor and mentee files.

*Mentee Orientation:*

The goal of the mentee orientation is to provide a clear understanding of the
project’s expectations of the mentoring experience and answer mentoring questions for
the mentee. This orientation will include the following topics: meeting someone new,
mentoring expectations, basic communication skills, ways to interact with the mentor,
basic problem solving and conflict resolution. In this orientation, the project’s reporting
process will be explained. In the same manner, staff will emphasize the importance of informing the coordinator of difficulties or areas of concern as they may arise in the mentor-mentee relationship.

*Mentor Orientation:*

An orientation session will be scheduled for mentors, where they will be provided with information and guidance. Session topics will include information on the Father Presence Matters project’s history, vision, core values, objectives, and program policies. Session discussions will include qualities of successful mentors and mentor expectations such as level of time commitment and safety and security issues. In the same manner, discussion topics will include confidentiality, expectations of the mentor/mentee relationship and specific characteristics and needs of the mentees. The candidate will be given a letter of completion after he has successfully completed the orientation.

Ongoing training and support will be provided for mentors. These group sessions will be scheduled quarterly and will be an opportunity for mentors to come together to ask questions, share and exchange ideas. Topics for ongoing mentor training sessions may include: enhancing communication, problem solving and goal setting skills, active listening, learning of leadership and counseling skills, and understanding current youth issues.
Journaling:
Both the mentor and mentee are encouraged to keep a journal throughout the mentoring experience. Journaling has many therapeutic benefits, which include providing a release for feelings and tensions. In addition, journaling provides a path to self-awareness and is a healthy way to gain perspective on emotions and to resolve past issues. A journal log is provided in Appendix N. The mentor and mentee may use this log to capture their thoughts during meetings and activities or shortly thereafter. It is expected that both mentor and mentee will grow throughout the mentoring experience and journaling will give an accurate perspective of the journey.

There is no structure to journaling, one may pick up a pen or pencil and let his ideas flow freely. Although journal entries are personal, the mentor and mentee can use them as a reference when self-evaluating the Father Presence Matters project at the end of the mentorship.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Procedure:
Any staff person, project representative or volunteer for the Father Presence Matters project will follow the procedures detailed in this section for suspected child abuse and neglect. Staff personnel in this project are considered to be mandated reporters and therefore when there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or

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23 Ibid.
neglected, in their professional capacity they are required by law to immediately report the case to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).\footnote{Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), \textit{FAQ's Child Abuse and Neglect}, Retrieved on December 5, 2005 from \url{www.state.il.us/dcfs/FAQ}, 3.}

A report of suspected child abuse or neglect must be made orally to the DCFS either by calling the statewide 24-hour child abuse hotline number at 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE) or by contacting the nearest DCFS office by telephone or in person. The oral report must be confirmed in writing to the appropriate Child Protective Service Unit within 48 hours.\footnote{Ibid., 5.} In addition to the DCFS paperwork, the Father Presence Matters project coordinator must complete the Child Abuse and Neglect Report form regarding the alleged incident (Appendix AA). This form will be kept in the mentee’s file.

The DCFS provides the universal definition for an abused child:

An abused child is one whose parent, or immediate family member, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare, or any individual residing in the same home, or a paramour of the child’s parent, inflicts upon or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury to the child, commits a sex offense against the child, or commits torture or inflict excessive corporal punishment upon the child.\footnote{Ibid., 1.}

The DCFS also provides a standard definition for determining whether a child has been neglected. According to this definition:

A neglected child is any child who is not receiving the proper or necessary care and support recognized under State law as necessary for a child’s well-being, or other care necessary for his or her well-being, such as nourishment, medical care, adequate food, clothing and shelter, or who is abandoned.\footnote{Ibid., 2.}

When making a report to the DCFS, the following information is required, if known:
1. The name and address of the child and his/her parents or guardian.
2. The child's age, sex, and race.
3. The nature and extent of the abuse or neglect.
4. Any evidence of previous injuries, abuse or neglect of the child or his/her siblings.
5. The names of persons apparently responsible for the abuse or neglect.
6. The family’s composition, including the names, ages, sexes, and races of other children.
7. The reporter’s name, occupation, and a place where he/she may be reached.
8. Any other information the reporter believes may be relevant or helpful.  

After notifying the hotline, the mandated reporter must inform the project coordinator or other supervisor of the report. A mandated reporter shall not notify a parent, guardian or suspected perpetrator of allegations or investigations of suspected child abuse/neglect. The Department of Children and Family Services or the police will handle notification.

__Monitoring the Match:__

The coordinator will be responsible for monitoring the match process. He will keep the lines of communication open with the mentor, mentee and parent/guardian, as well as consistently check in on the relationship. The coordinator will follow up with each match at least once a month. The coordinator will keep written records of the progress of the mentor/mentee relationship and follow-up details, such as phone calls, correspondence and quarterly meetings. There are a number of goals for monitoring a match as delineated by Public/Private Ventures. Monitoring the match can indicate whether the mentor and mentee are meeting and whether their relationship is developing.

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28 Department of Children & Family Services, FAQ’s, 2.

29 Ibid.
positively. In the same manner, monitoring can help the coordinator identify troubled relationships so that the appropriate intervention can be provided.

*The Closure Process:*

The mentor and mentee relationship should be considered a serious commitment and should not be taken lightly. However, early closure may become necessary when there are extenuating circumstances, such as relocation or an unforeseen personal crisis. In other cases, a mentoring relationship may end because it was a difficult match. The mentoring relationship may also end when the one-year commitment is expiring. The mentoring relationship should not end abruptly; rather the project staff should “plan carefully for closure.” It is ideal for the mentor and mentee to be allowed an opportunity to say a proper goodbye by going through a structured exit process. In all closure cases, the project staff will meet with the mentor, mentee and the parent/guardian. This meeting will involve open discussion about the ending mentoring relationship and the project policy on continuing a relationship after the mentorship has ended. Exit surveys will be completed at this time.

**PROJECT EVALUATION**

Evaluations will provide the Father Presence Matters project valuable feedback that can be used to make revisions and improvements to better meet the needs of its

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30 JuCovy, *The ABCs of School-based Mentoring*, 44.

31 Ibid.

32 JuCovy, *The ABCs of School-based Mentoring*, 48
participants. This evaluative process is critical in that it demonstrates whether the project objectives were actually met.

The purpose of the Father Presence Matters project is to provide outreach, training and mentoring to fatherless children and to help them where needed to heal from the pain that father-absence often leaves behind. The primary objective of this project is to reconnect as many children as possible to their biological fathers. The objective of the training level is to educate children in areas associated with fatherlessness. Through the training curriculum, children can observe the negative outcomes and avoid the pitfalls that are characteristic of children from fatherless homes. This educational journey is geared to help take fatherless children away from being another negative outcome statistic. The project objective at the Twelve-Step level is for children from fatherless homes to experience the benefits of being in-group with children with similar fatherly issues. Here, children are able to begin the journey of healing from the pain of their father’s absence and in some cases reconciliation will occur. In other cases reconciliation may not be possible, and therefore the children will learn to accept their loss and bring closure for themselves. The lack of reconciliation may be because one party is not willing to make the necessary investment or lacks the skills or desire to develop the relationship. In these scenarios, the child will have come to a place of acceptance, whether it is of the person or circumstance. The mentoring level is designed to create mentor-youth matches that develop into the type of supportive relationships that will help produce positive outcomes for fatherless children.
Evaluations are one way to help a program to strengthen its infrastructure. Every mentoring program will have some relationships that are not a good fit, or a bad match. Often the causes for bad matches are outside the program’s control, such as relocation on the part of the mentor or mentee. According to Public/Private Ventures, “in many cases, failed matches are a result of weak program infrastructure,” such as inadequate training of program volunteers, or poor screening mechanisms.

The writer sought an evaluation tool that would measure the quality of the matches and determine which project elements are effective and which ones need to be modified. The Youth Survey is a measuring tool designed to measure the quality of mentor-youth relationships and will be used to evaluate the Father Presence Matters project (Appendix BB). This survey was originally used to evaluate the quality of the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentor-youth relationships. It is designed “to help programs both monitor individual matches and develop a larger picture that provides a composite view of the strengths and shortcomings of all their matches.” The survey has nineteen questions that measure three qualities of a mentoring relationship, which are: “The extent to which the relationship is centered on the youth, the youth’s emotional engagement, and the extent to which the youth is dissatisfied with the relationship.” The survey can be administered early, because project practices may have to be modified as determined by

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33 Public/Private Ventures, *Mentoring the Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationships*, 10.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
evaluations. The full cycle of this project is 18 months, which includes three months of curriculum training, a three month Twelve-Step component and a twelve month mentorship. Therefore it becomes impossible to implement project improvements if evaluations only occur at the end of the project.

A successful mentoring program must monitor the matches carefully, especially early in the mentorship. An outcome-based evaluation is appropriate at the end of the 18-month cycle, but the mentoring relationship should be closely monitored and perhaps surveyed on the 3, 6, 9 and the 12 month intervals. The youth survey can be taken multiple times throughout the mentoring process and the results can identify troubled relationships and allow ample time for them to be strengthened where necessary early in the process. Allowing the survey to be taken at multiple intervals will reveal the progression of each mentor and mentee relationship. In the same manner, the tool will reveal the relationships that are not developing. Identifying problem relationships early on allows project staff to intervene and resolve the problem with the mentor, youth or both.

The outcome-based report should answer the following questions concerning the overall project: What did the Father Presence Matters project set out to achieve? What did it actually achieve? And what can be done to improve the project? Specifically the

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
report should include answers to the following questions concerning the mentorship:

How many children and mentors were actually matched? How many matches were still intact after three months? During the three-month period were there any problems in the relationship? How many matches were bad? Was there adequate attendance and participation of the mentees? Was there adequate attendance and participation of the mentors? How many matches were still together at the 12 month mark?
OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

The trend of fatherlessness is a tremendous cost to society as Blankenhorn explains, “Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well-being in our society.” The reality is that children from fatherless homes are significantly disadvantaged when compared to those from intact families. The adverse effects of father absence for children include: diminished levels of cognitive competence, poor school performance, low self-esteem, promiscuous sexual activity, emotional problems, substance abuse and violent behaviors. As evidenced in the literature and through the lives of the case family, the cycle of father absence often continues through generations.

The writer believes that the crisis of fatherlessness merits a faith-based response. This response should include encouraging children to heal from their pain, to walk in forgiveness and providing support and healthy, positive adult interaction. In a similar manner, the response for fathers should include education and raising awareness to the consequences of father absence. Educating men on how to be committed, responsible and involved fathers and teaching them that their role and contributions are significant in the healthy development of their children are worthy steps toward breaking the cycle of fatherlessness. As father’s importance is emphasized, prayerfully, they will come to understand the pain and disadvantages that absence leaves behind, and they will be compelled to reconnect with their children. The writer believes that “father presence

1 Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 1.

matters” and in developing “a case for family” offers this three component faith-based response.

The writer presents through this project three components: training, Twelve-Steps and a mentorship to help children journey in a place of healing as they move forward in reconciling with an absentee father. The training curriculum was designed to bring awareness to the issues surrounding fatherlessness and to offer children a pathway to heal from their pain through the conduit of forgiveness. The writer contends that the child’s role in the reconciliation process often involves forgiveness and acceptance. Fathers are challenged through this project to understand that positive and healthy father-child relationships contribute to the overall well-being of children. Hence, the father’s role is not discretionary, but essential.

The Twelve-Step component offers children community with others who have father absence issues. This journey focuses on recovery from the pain of father absence, through forgiveness as the individual prepares for reconciliation. The mentorship is the third component of this project. The writer recognizes the need for children to have positive male role models, as Elhage explains:

Something must be done to provide to provide these children with the male role models they need. Wishing their fathers were there to meet these needs will not change the fact that they are absent. The answer is not to attempt the impossible task of forcing these delinquent dads to spend more time with their kids. Short of a change of heart and a transformation in their own lives, this will not happen overnight. Before these kids turn to their peers, men of character need to step in and be examples.

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Reconnecting fathers to their children is a process. Mentoring is a way to provide an example and to provide children with the positive interaction of a male role model during this process. When a child is mentored, “The course of a life can change drastically.”

The unique structure of this project combines training, Twelve-Steps and a mentoring component to provide children with adequate resources as they move where possible towards reconciling with their fathers. Blankenhorn offers a great conclusion to this project, when he asks this fundamental question:

Does our society wish to recover the fatherhood idea? If the answer is “no,” then neither these proposals nor any like them will make much sense. They will seem jarring and arbitrary. But if the answer is “yes,” or even “maybe,” then these proposals might at least point us in a certain direction. That direction is away from a culture of fatherlessness, toward fatherhood.

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6 Elhage, Too Many Fatherless Children, 3.
7 Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, 234.
Appendix A

SINGLE PARENT STATISTICS

Did you know?

There are 11.9 million single parents in the US. (7)
28% (20 million) of all children in the US under 18 live with one parent. (6)
84% of children who live with one parent live with their mother. (6)
The percentage of children who live with two parents has been declining among all racial and ethnic groups. (1)
32% of all births were to unmarried women in 1997. (2)
56% of single parent households had no other adult living in the house. (6)
The number of single mothers (9.8 million) has remained constant while the number of single fathers grew 25% in three years to 2.1 million in 1998. Men comprise one-sixth of the nation's single parents. (7)

Of children living with one parent:
38% lived with a divorced parent;
35% with a never-married parent;
19% with a separated parent;
4% with a widowed parent;
4% with a parent whose spouse lived elsewhere because of business or some other reason. (8)

Most single parent children live in metropolitan areas (14.5 million), and six in 10 of them (9.2 million) are in cities with populations of 1 million or more. (8)

(1) US Census Bureau
(2) National Center for Health Statistics
(6) US Census Bureau March 1998 Supplement to the Current Population Survey
(7) US Census Bureau Household and Family Characteristics March 1998
(8) US Census Bureau-Census Brief "Children with single parents-how they fare" September 1997

Appendix B

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE FATHER–CHILD COMMUNICATION

Be an active listener. An essential aspect of effective parent-child communication is the ability and/or willingness to listen to what children have to say. Being an active listener involves trying one’s best to understand the perspective of the other person. When listening to a child, it is extremely important to pay close attention to his verbal and non-verbal messages. Fathers who actively listen to their children acknowledge and respect their children’s point of view. For example, when listening to a child, a father can nod his head or say, “I understand,” which conveys to the child that what he has to say is important. Another aspect of active listening is seeking clarification from a child when the message is not understood. This can be done by simply asking, “What did you mean when you said . . . ?,” or “Help me understand what you are saying.”

Communicate frequently. In order to for a father to develop a strong relationship with his children, he must communicate with them on a regular basis. Frequent communication enables a father to know the needs of his children. Fathers, whether they live with their children or not, must create opportunities to talk and listen to their children. Communication can take place in a wide variety of settings (e.g., at the dinner table, in the car, on the telephone, at bedtime, through letters, etc.).

Communicate clearly and directly. Fathers who are effective at communicating with their children are those who are clear and direct. This means that the intended message can be clearly understood by the listener and is directed at the appropriate target (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller, and Keitner, 1993). Children will be much more likely to develop effective communication skills if their fathers model and encourage clarity and directness.

Use “I” messages. I-messages are parental statements that reflect what a parent is thinking or feeling at a particular moment. I-messages focus on the parent, rather than the child. These statements are typically non-threatening and non-judgmental. I-messages stand in contrast to You-messages, which often put down, blame, and nag children (Dinkmeyer, McKay, and Dinkmeyer, 1989). For example, a father may say to a child, “You did a bad job on your homework.” The same parent using an I-message, could have said, “I think you could have put more effort into your homework.” I messages tend to be phrased more positively and encourage cooperation.

Emphasize the positive. While it is often necessary to address problematic behavior with children, effective communication is primarily positive. Family researchers have discovered that unhappy family relationships are often the result of negative communication patterns (e.g., criticism, contempt, defensiveness). Psychologist, John Gottman, has found that satisfied married couples maintain a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions (Gottman, 1994). In other words, couples who tend to be very dissatisfied with their relationships tend to engage in more negative than positive communication. This basic principle can also be applied to father-child relationships.

Positive messages tend to build relationships, whereas, frequent negative messages tend to tear them down.

Model effective communication skills. If fathers want their children to develop effective communication skills, they must be willing to model these skills for their children. If fathers want
their children to listen, they must listen to their children. If fathers want their children to communicate their thoughts clearly and directly, then fathers must communicate their thoughts and feelings in a clear and direct manner.


References


Educational programs of Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Texas Cooperative Extension • The Texas A&M University System • College Station, Texas

Appendix C

TOP TEN FATHER FACTS FOR 2004
From the National Fatherhood Initiative

1. 24 million children (34 percent) live absent from their biological father.


3. 1.35 million births (33 percent of all births) in 2000 occurred out of wedlock.

4. 43 percent of first marriages dissolve within fifteen years; about 60 percent of divorcing couples have children; and approximately one million children each year experience the divorce of their parents.

5. Over 3.3 million children live with an unmarried parent and the parent's cohabiting partner. The number of cohabiting couples with children has nearly doubled since 1990, from 891,000 to 1.7 million today.

6. Fathers who live with their children are more likely to have a close, enduring relationship with their children than those who do not. The best predictor of father presence is marital status. Compared to children born within marriage, children born to cohabiting parents are three times as likely to experience father absence, and children born to unmarried, non-cohabiting parents are four times as likely to live in a father-absent home.

7. About 40 percent of children in father-absent homes have not seen their father at all during the past year; 26 percent of absent fathers live in a different state than their children; and 50 percent of children living absent their father have never set foot in their father's home.

8. Children who live absent their biological fathers are, on average, at least two to three times more likely to be poor, to use drugs, to experience educational, health, emotional and behavioral problems, to be victims of child abuse, and to engage in criminal behavior than their peers who live with their married, biological (or adoptive) parents.

9. From 1960 to 1995, the proportion of children living in single parent homes tripled, from 9 percent to 27 percent, and the proportion of children living with married parents declined. However, from 1995 to 2000, the proportion of children living in single parent homes slightly declined, while the proportion of children living with two married parents remained stable.

10. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy, and criminal activity compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.

Appendix D

PERMISSION TO OBTAIN INFORMATION
(BACKGROUND CHECK)

This document authorizes the Father Presence Matters Program to seek and/or verify specific information about my background. I understand this authorization applies whether I am a current employee or a candidate for employment.

This form may be given to agencies, employers, references and/or schools you have attended for authorization to release information on your past employment, academic history, character and/or criminal background to the Father Presence Matters Program. Employment or Volunteer Service at the Father Presence Matters Program is contingent upon receipt of satisfactory reference checks.

By signing below, I grant permission to release information to the Father Presence Matters Program, relating to my work, character, academic experience and/or criminal background records. I further understand that information obtained may be used by this employer in its sole discretion and without liability to determine eligibility for initial or continued employment. I am willing that a photocopy of this authorization be accepted with the same authority as the original, and I specifically waive any written notice from any present or former employer who may provide information based upon this authorization request.

First, Middle, Last Name (Please print or type)

_____________________________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Social Security Number                  Drivers License #                  State of Issue

If name has changed (through marriage or otherwise), print former name (s) here:

______________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature                                                Date

Please provide current and previous address/es during the past five years:

Current:

______________________________________________________________________________

Previous Address/es:

______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix E

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS REQUEST OF USE LETTER

October 10, 2005

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
P. O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

Dear Representative,

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA. As a dissertation project, I am developing a faith-based program that addresses the issue of father absence. I would like your permission to adapt the AA’s 12-Steps and traditions as a part of my project. The steps will be written to help children from father-absence homes recover from their pain and the emotional traumas, such as overeating, excessive shopping, promiscuity and broken relationships that often emerge as a result of father loss.

It is my hope that after walking through my father presence matters curriculum and the 12-Step Program that, children will not only heal their pains but where possible reconnect to their fathers in a meaningful way.

I understand that permission to make the requested adaptation does not mean that AA has approved the contents of the manuscript. In the same manner, permission does not mean that AA agrees with the views expressed therein.

Thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

Marcia R. Miles, M.Div.
Appendix F

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS PERMISSION OF USE LETTER

November 29, 2005

Marcia R. Miles, M.Div.
P.O. Box 10305
Jacksonville, FL 32247

Dear Ms. Miles:

Thank you for sending us your adapted Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for use in your publication entitled, "A Faith-based Curriculum that Addresses the Issue of Father Absence."

After reviewing your Twelve Steps, they bear a little resemblance to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Hence, while we would have no objection to your proposed use of this material, however, under these circumstances and to avoid any confusion, we are requesting that you use this credit line/disclaimer, which reads as follows:

While the Twelve Steps for “Father Absence Recovery Program, identified were inspired by the Twelve Steps of A.A., they are not really an adaptation. Rather, they were created specifically for this publication and program, and should not be construed otherwise. A.A., which is a program concerned only with recovery from alcoholism, and is not in any way affiliated with this publication.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter and lots of luck in carrying your message.

Best regards,

Darlene G. Smith
Rights & Permissions Assistant
Appendix G

MENTOR APPLICATION FORM

Personal Data:
Name: ___________________________ Social Security #: _____________________________
Address:  
Phone: ___________________ E-mail: ___________________ Date of Birth: __/__/____

Current Driver’s License Number: ________________ Why do you want to become a mentor?
_____________________________________________________________________________ 
_____________________________________________________________________________ 
_____________________________________________________________________________ 
Your special interests: ___________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________ 
Have you ever been convicted of a felony?: YES / NO If yes, explain conviction:
_____________________________________________________________________________ 
_____________________________________________________________________________ 

Time Availability:
How many days a week are you available? ________________
How many hours a day are you available? ________________
How much advance notice do you need? ________________
Can you commit to an agreed-upon fixed schedule (check one)? ________ Yes ________ No 

Work History: (Begin with the most recent)
Name of Employer: _____________________________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________________________________
Last Position Held: _____________________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________________
Name of Supervisor: _____________________________________________________________
Reason for Leaving: _____________________________________________________________
Period Employed: ______________________________
Duties: _______________________________________________________________________

Name of Employer: _____________________________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________________________________
Last Position Held: _____________________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________________
Name of Supervisor: _____________________________________________________________
Reason for Leaving: _____________________________________________________________
Period Employed: ______________________________
Duties: _______________________________________________________________________

Name of Employer: _____________________________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________________________________
Last Position Held: _____________________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________________
Name of Supervisor: _____________________________________________________________
Reason for Leaving: _____________________________________________________________
Period Employed: ______________________________
Duties: _______________________________________________________________________

Name of Employer: _____________________________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________________________________
Last Position Held: _____________________________________________________________
Phone: _____________________________________________________________
Name of Supervisor: _____________________________________________________________
Reason for Leaving: _____________________________________________________________
Period Employed: ______________________________
Duties:________________________________________________________________________

References: (Four references are required and one must the recommendation of a pastor. All other references have to have known the applicant for at least three years).

Pastoral Reference: _____________________________________________________________
Street Address _________________________________________ City ____________________
State ____________ Zip ______________ Phone: _______________________________

Professional Reference: __________________________________________________________
Street Address _________________________________________ City ____________________
State ____________ Zip ______________ Phone: _______________________________

Personal Reference: ____________________________________________________________
Street Address _________________________________________ City ____________________
State ____________ Zip ______________ Phone: _______________________________

Personal Reference: ____________________________________________________________
Position: ____________________________ Supervisor’s Name __________________________
Street Address _________________________________________ City ____________________
State ____________ Zip ______________ Phone: _______________________________

Miscellaneous Information:
Name of church that you attend: ___________________________________________________
Pastor’s name: _________________________________________________________________
In case of emergency, we should contact: ______________________________ (Name)
Contact phone number: ______________________________
Remarks: _______________________________________________________________________

The applicant gives this program the right to conduct a background check regarding driving, and criminal records, as well as verify personal references, and employment history in the abiding and any previous state of residency.

Applicant’s Signature __________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____
Appendix H

MENTEE APPLICATION FORM

Personal Data:
Name: ___________________________ Social Security #: ___________________________
Parent/Guardian Name: __________________________________________________________
Relationship to Youth: __________________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________________
Home Phone: ____________________ Work Phone: ____________________
Date of Birth: ____/____/____ Age: __________________
Gender: □ Male □ Female
Ethnicity: □ Caucasian □ Hispanic □ African American □ Asian □ Other ___________
Name of School: ____________________________ Grade: ____________
Teacher’s Name: ____________________________
Emergency Contact Name (Other than Parent/Guardian):
__________________________________________________________________________
Phone Number: ________________________________________________________________

Please list all the members of your household:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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Time Availability:
How many days a week are you available? _______________
How many hours a day are you available? _______________
How much advance notice do you need? _______________
Can you commit to an agreed-upon fixed schedule (check one)? ________ Yes ________ No
Can your child meet weekly with a mentor, for at least eight hours per month, for a minimum of
one year? ________ Yes ________ No

Miscellaneous Information:
Name of church that you attend: __________________________________________________
Pastor’s name: _________________________________________________________________
Remarks: ______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Parent/Guardian: ____________________________ Date: ___ / ___ / ___
Name (Please Print): ________________________________________________
Appendix I

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Your son or daughter ________________________________ has been accepted to participate in the Father Presence Matters Program. The program follows a 12-12-12 track, which includes a 12-week teaching sessions, a 12-day Twelve-Step component that covers a span of three months; and a 12-month mentoring component. Your child will participate in the program under the supervision of program staff.

Permission:

My son/daughter ________________________________ may participate in the Father Presence Matters Program mentoring experience that will take place at:

__________________________________________

between the time frame of _________________ and during the hours of _________________ am/pm. I understand that the volunteers that serve in this program are adults from the community, who have been carefully screened by the organization. I understand that contacts between my child and mentor may occur on and off site. These contacts are scheduled and monitored by the program coordinator.

I have read the program objectives, policies and procedures and therefore understand the structure of the program. I have met with the program coordinator and have agreed to attend an orientation session and provide ongoing and open communication with program staff.

I reserve the right to withdraw my child from the program at any time.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____________________________ Date: ____/____/____

Name (Please Print): _________________________________________
Appendix J

MENTOR AGREEMENT FORM

I _________________________________ agree to participate as a mentor in the ________________________________ Father Presence Matters Program. I understand that the primary objective of this program is to heal broken parental bonds and to reconnect fathers with their children.

I understand the mentoring will take place at the following location:

_______________________________________________________________________.

______ I understand that the sponsoring agency may conduct a reference investigation, which may include a criminal and previous employment background check.

I will be available for mentoring on the following days: __________________________.

I will be available for mentoring during the following hours ________________________.

______ I have been informed that the information on youth being mentored must be kept confidential, except in cases of abuse and neglect or when it appears that a youth is a danger to himself or others. In these cases I agree to inform the appropriate sponsoring agency personal

_______________________________________________________________________.

______ I agree to attend meetings related to this program and provide on-going assessments and to provide written weekly evaluations of the progress of the mentoring relationship.

Name _________________________________________________ Date: ___/___/____

Sponsoring Agency Representative ___________________________________________

Mentee’s Name __________________________________________________________

Parents Name __________________________________________________________

Contact Information ______________________________________________________
Appendix K

MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION FORM

This medical authorization form has to be completed and returned with a copy of the child’s insurance card.

I hereby give staff permission to have my child medically treated should it be deemed necessary while participating in their program. I further authorize that the medical staff selected by program staff may use the medical treatment deemed necessary and appropriate. My child’s emergency contact information may be given to the attending physician as it becomes necessary.

Child’s Name: ___________________________________________________________
Name of Parent/Guardian: ________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________________________
Home Phone Number: _______________________________________________________
Emergency Contact (Someone other than a parent/guardian): _______________________  
Name of Primary Care Physician: ____________________________________________
Office Address: ____________________________________________________________
Policy Number: _____________________________________________________________
Medical Insurance Provider: _________________________________________________

Allergies: __________________________________________________________________
Current Medications: __________________________________________________________
Dietary Constraints or Restrictions: ____________________________________________

Does your child have any physical limitations or disabilities? ______________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Is your child currently seeing a counselor?
Therapist Name: ____________________________________________________________

Is your child currently under the care of a physician? ____________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature: _________________________________________________
Date: _____/____/____

Copy of Child’s Insurance Card
(Provided at the introductory meeting)
Appendix L

MENTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Applicant Name: _______________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

Interviewer: ____________________________________________

This interview requires a number of questions that will be kept completely confidential. However, program staff members are required to report anything that indicates past abuse of a child or that indicates that you may harm yourself or others. Information such as personal qualities and interests may be shared with a prospective parent or mentee.

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. Have you ever had a mentor in your life? If so, describe your mentoring experience?
3. How would you describe your childhood?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your own father?
5. Do you have any experiences working with youth?
6. What qualities or skills do you have that would enhance a mentoring relationship?
7. What activities do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
8. How would your family, friends or co-workers describe you?
9. Can you meet with a matched mentee, once per week at least eight hours per month?
10. Can you give a one-year commitment to mentor from the time that you are matched with a youth?
11. Why do you want to become a mentor in the father-absence program.
12. What do you expect from this mentoring experience?
13. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
14. Do you currently use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco?
15. Are you under the care of a physician or taking any medications? Please explain if under the care of a physician. If taking medications, please list.
16. Have you ever been arrested or convicted of a crime? If so, when and for what reason?
17. Have you ever been treated for a mental or psychological disorder?
18. Have you ever abused or molested a child or youth?
19. What type of child would you like to be matched with?
20. What type of activities would you consider for the mentee?
21. Are you able to communicate with program staff once a month about your relationship with your mentee?
22. Do you have any questions about what is expected of you as a mentor or about the program in general?
Appendix M

MENTEE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Applicant Name: _______________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

Interviewer: _______________________________________________

This interview requires a number of questions that will be kept completely confidential and therefore the content will not be shared with your parents. However, program staff members are required to report anything that indicates past abuse of a child or that indicates that you may harm yourself or others. Information such as personal qualities and interests may be shared with a prospective mentor.

1. How would you describe your childhood?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. How do you feel about your father’s absence?
4. How do you think that you would benefit from a mentoring relationship?
5. What type of person would you like to be matched with?
6. What are your hobbies or interests?
7. What types of activities would you like to do with your mentor?
8. How do you like school?
9. What are some things that you like about your friends?
10. How would friends and family members describe you?
11. Can you meet with a matched mentor, once per week at least eight hours per month?
12. Can you give a one-year commitment to the mentoring program and experience from the time that you are matched with a mentor?
13. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
14. Do you currently use drugs, alcohol, or tobacco?
15. Have you ever been arrested or convicted of a crime? If so, when and for what reason?
16. Which of the following components can you commit to in the Father Presence Matters Program? □ 12 week training component □ 12 day, Twelve-Step component □ 12 month mentorship
17. Do you have any questions about what is expected of you as a mentee or about the program in general?
18. Are you able to communicate with program staff once a month about your relationship with your mentor?
Appendix N

MENTOR-MENTEE JOURNALING

The mentor/mentee should use this page to capture his thoughts during meetings with his mentor. These entries can be used as a reference when evaluating this program at the end of the mentorship.
Appendix O

MENTOR AND MENTEE MATCH WORKSHEET

Mentor: _________________________________________________________________

Mentee: ________________________________________________________________

Parent/Guardian: _________________________________________________________

Program Coordinator: _____________________________________________________

Match Criteria:

_____ Preferences of the mentor, mentee, and parent/guardian

_____ Shared interests between the mentor and the mentee

_____ Compatible personalities

_____ Close proximity

_____ Ethnicity (If requested in survey)

_____ Age (If requested in survey)

_____ Gender (If requested in survey)

_____ Religion (If requested in survey)

_____ Common free time

_____ Similar hobbies and interests
Appendix P

MENTOR CONTRACT

Name: ________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

I have chosen to participate in the Father Presence Matters Program and therefore agree to the following guidelines.

I agree to:

• Attend the designated mentoring and 12-Step orientations as well as review the father presence matters curriculum.
• Follow the rules and guidelines as outlined by the program coordinator and as set forth in the orientation sessions, policies and procedures and this contract.
• Commit to at least one year of service.
• Make at least weekly contact with my mentee.
• Obtain parent/guardian permission for all meetings at least three days in advance.
• Keep scheduled appointments or give at least a 24-hour notice in the event that a meeting has to be cancelled.
• Be on time for scheduled meetings.
• Submit monthly meeting times and activities to the program coordinator.
• Keep open communication with the program coordinator.
• Maintain an atmosphere of grace and encouragement throughout the mentoring relationship.
• Resolve conflict and inform the program coordinator of difficulties or areas of concern as they may arise.
• Obey the law of the land, such as traffic laws while in the presence of the mentee.
• Carry a copy of the child’s insurance card as provided by the parent or guardian during the introductory meeting.
• Respect the child’s confidentiality.
• Notify the program coordinator of changes in address or phone number
• Participate in the closure of the mentoring experience when the time comes.

____________ (please initial) I understand that when the match has been made by the Father Presence Matters Program that future contact with my mentee rest in the mutual consensus of the mentor, the mentee, and the parent/guardian.

I agree to follow the guidelines of this program, the stipulation of this contract and the instructions of the program coordinator at this time and as they evolve.

______________________________  Date: ____/____/____

Signature
Appendix Q

MENTEE CONTRACT

Name: ________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

I have chosen to participate in the Father Presence Matters Program and therefore agree to the following guidelines.
I agree to:

- Attend the 12-week father presence matters curriculum classes, the Twelve-Step classes as well as the mentee orientation sessions.
- Follow the rules and guidelines as outlined by the program coordinator and as set forth in the orientation sessions, policies and procedures and this contract.
- Make a one-year commitment to being matched with a mentor.
- Make at least weekly contact with my mentor.
- Have a positive and respectful attitude towards my mentor and the mentoring process.
- Have a teachable spirit.
- Obtain parent/guardian permission for all meetings at least three days in advance.
- Keep scheduled appointments or give at least a 24-hour notice in the event that a meeting has to be cancelled.
- Be on time for scheduled meetings.
- Discuss monthly meeting times and activities to the program coordinator and keep open communication with the program coordinator.
- Maintain an atmosphere of grace and encouragement throughout the mentoring relationship.
- Inform the program coordinator of difficulties or areas of concern as they may arise.
- Notify the program coordinator of changes in address or phone number
- Participate in the closure of the mentoring experience when the time comes.

___________ (please initial) I understand that when the match has been made by the Father Presence Matters Program that future contact with my mentee rest in the mutual consensus of the mentor, the mentee, and the parent/guardian.

I agree to follow the guidelines of this program, the stipulation of this contract and the instructions of the program coordinator at this time and as they evolve.

_______________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

Signature
Appendix R

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONTRACT

Name: ________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____

I have chosen to allow my son/daughter to participate in the Father Presence Matters Program and therefore agree to the following guidelines.

I agree to:

• Attend the Twelve-Step orientation as well as the parent/guardian orientation sessions.
• Allow my child to participate in the Father Presence Matters Program and therefore be matched with a mentor.
• Encourage my child to follow the rules and guidelines as outlined by the program coordinator and as set forth in the orientation sessions, policies and procedures and this contract.
• Support the match by allowing my child to participate in a one year commitment and allowing the mentor to meet with my child at least one a week throughout this term.
• Support my child by assuring that he keep scheduled appointments or give at least a 24-hour notice in the event that a meeting has to be cancelled.
• Encourage my child to be on time for scheduled meetings.
• Maintain open communication with the program coordinator.
• Maintain an atmosphere of grace and encouragement throughout the mentoring relationship.
• Inform the program coordinator of difficulties or areas of concern as they may arise.
• Notify the program coordinator of changes in address or phone number.
• Participate in the closure of the mentoring experience when the time comes.
• Provide the program coordinator with an updated copy of my child’s insurance information.

___________ (please initial) I understand that when the match has been made by the Father Presence Matters Program that future contact with my mentee rest in the mutual consensus of the mentor, the mentee, and the parent/guardian.

I agree to follow the guidelines of this program, the stipulation of this contract and the instructions of the program coordinator at this time and as they evolve.

_______________________________________  Date: ____/____/____

Signature
MENTOR TRAINING COMPLETION LETTER

Mentor’s Name: __________________________________________________________

Congratulations on completing your orientation and training and welcome to the mentoring component of the Father Presence Matters Program.

This letter certifies that I have completed the prescribed training and that I fully understand the responsibilities set before me and that I agree to follow the guidelines and requirements of being a mentor in this program.

_________________________________________   Date: ____/____/____
Mentor Signature

MENTEE TRAINING COMPLETION LETTER

Mentee’s Name: __________________________________________________________

Congratulations on completing your orientation, classes and training and welcome to the mentoring component of the Father Presence Matters Program.

This letter certifies that I have completed the prescribed training and that I fully understand the responsibilities set before me and that I agree to follow the guidelines and requirements of being a mentee in this program.

_________________________________________   Date: ____/____/____
Mentor Signature
Appendix T

MENTOR REPORT LOG
(One report for mentor, mentee and parent/guardian)

Name: _________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Date</th>
<th>Meeting Dates</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Comments, Insights, or Areas of Concern</th>
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MENTOR EXIT SURVEY

Thank you for participating in the mentoring component of the Father Presence Matters Program. Your commitment of time and service as a mentor in this process are greatly appreciated. The following exit survey will help identify the areas that can be improved with the program. Your feedback is important. Please complete the following assessment and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Name: _________________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____
Mentor Signature: ________________________________________________________
Name of Mentee: _________________________________________________________
Length of Match: _________________________________________________________

Why is the match ending?

How would you describe your relationship with your mentee?

Do you feel that you made a difference in the life of your mentee? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Please explain:

Did you receive adequate support and supervision from program staff?

What do you consider the strengths of the mentoring program?

What do you consider the weakness of the mentoring program?

What could have been done differently to make this experience better for you and/or your mentee?

Would you like to be matched in the future? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, in what time frame _________________________________.

Please provide any additional comments?
Appendix V

MENTEE EXIT SURVEY

Thank you for participating in the mentoring component of the Father Presence Matters Program. Prayerfully, you enjoyed being a mentee. The following exit survey will help identify the areas that can be improved with the program. Your feedback is important. Please complete the following assessment and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Name: ________________________________________________ Date: ____/____/____
Mentor Signature: ________________________________________________________
Name of Mentee: _________________________________________________________
Length of Match: ________________________________________________________

Why is the match ending?

How would you describe your relationship with your mentor?

Do you feel that your mentor made a difference in your life? □ Yes □ No
Please explain:

Was the amount of contact with your mentor adequate? Why or why not?

Was the quality of contact time with your mentor adequate? Why or why not?

What do you consider the strengths of the mentoring program?

What do you consider the weakness of the mentoring program?

What could have been done differently to make this experience better for you and/or your mentee?

Did you receive adequate support and supervision from program staff?

Would you like to be matched in the future? □ Yes □ No
If so, in what time frame ________________________________.

Please provide any additional comments?
Thank you for allowing your child to participate in the mentoring component of the Father Presence Matters Program. Prayerfully, your child benefited from having a mentor. The following exit survey will help identify the areas that can be improved with the program. Your feedback is important. Please complete the following assessment and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Name: ________________________________
Name of Mentee: _________________________________________________________
Length of Match: __________________________________________

Why did the match ending?

How would you describe your child’s relationship with his mentor?

Do you feel that your child’s mentor made a difference in his/her life?  □ Yes  □ No  Please explain:

Did you receive adequate support and supervision from program staff?

What do you consider the strengths of the mentoring program?

What do you consider the weakness of the mentoring program?

What could have been done differently to make this experience better for you or you’re your child?

Would you allow your child to be re-matched?  □ Yes  □ No

If so, in what time frame ________________________________.

Please provide any additional comments?
Appendix X

REFERENCE RECOMMENDATION FORM

The person named below is applying for a mentoring position in the Father Presence Matters Program at (agency’s name), and has listed you as someone that could be contacted as a reference. There are a number of required questions that will be kept completely confidential. This information is not accessible to and will not be shared with the applicant. Please take a few minutes and fill out this recommendation form as thoroughly as possible. When finished, please send it back to the address mentioned below.

Applicant’s Name: _____________________________________________________________________

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<th>Middle</th>
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1. How long have you known the applicant?

2. How well do you know the applicant?
   - __________ By sight/name
   - __________ Fairly well
   - __________ Casually
   - __________ Very well

3. How would you describe the applicant?
4. Does the applicant relate well to children?
5. Does the applicant have good interpersonal and relational skills in general?
6. Does the applicant normally keep his commitments?
7. Do you feel that the applicant would be a good mentor?
8. Is the applicant punctual, being on time for appointments and events?
9. As far as you know, has the applicant ever being convicted of a crime?
10. Do you know of any issues that will affect the applicant’s ability to work in a one-on-one relationship with a child?
11. How does the applicant handle, conflict, criticism and frustrations?
12. How would you rate this person in the following areas?

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<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
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<th>Cooperativeness</th>
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<th>Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
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<th>Integrity</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
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13. To your knowledge, does the applicant:

Smoke? ________  Drink? ________  Use illegal drugs? ________

Comments:
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

14. Please check the terms which in your opinion best describe the applicant’s attitude toward the church and its activities.

☐ Warmhearted  ☐ Enthusiastic  ☐ Loving

☐ Sympathetic  ☐ Respectful  ☐ Tolerant

☐ Passive  ☐ Contemptuous  ☐ Critical

15. Please share with us any information that would help us in the evaluation of the applicant.
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

16. Please fill in all of the information requested below so that we may verify or correct our records.

Name: __________________________________________________________

Occupation: ______________________________________________________

Address: _________________________________________________________

City: __________________________ State: ________ Zip Code: _____________

E-Mail: __________________________________________________________

Phone: ________________________ Fax Number: _________________________
Appendix Y

MENTOR FEEDBACK FORM

Name of Program:
______________________________________________________________

Date: ____/____/____
Mentor: ____________________________________________
Participant: _________________________________________

1. What did you find to be the most helpful in this program?

2. What did you like most about the activities or interactions with your mentor?

3. What would have made it a better experience for you?

4. What did you find to be the least helpful?

5. What was missing from this program that would have been helpful to you in developing an effective relationship with your mentor?

6. How could we improve this program?

7. List further absent topics that you would like to see as a part of this program.

Please rate the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate Scale</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>Great</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication about the program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program meeting site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please make any other comments or suggestions about this program or your mentoring experience on the reverse side.
Appendix Z

MENTOR INTEREST SURVEY

This questionnaire helps the program to better meet its goal of establishing successful mentoring relationships. This survey must accompany the application.

What gender do you prefer to mentor?
_____ A boy  _____ A girl  _____ Does not matter

Do you prefer to mentor a child from a specific religion?
_____ Christian  _____ Jewish  _____ Muslim
_____ Does not matter

Do you prefer to mentor a child from a particular ethnicity?
_____ African American  _____ Asian  _____ Caucasian
_____ Chinese  _____ Hispanic  _____ Native American
_____ Does not matter

Do you speak any languages other than English?  _____ Yes  _____ No
List _______________________________________________.

Are you willing to mentor someone with a disability?
_____ Yes  _____ No  _____ Does not matter

What was the last book that you have read? _________________________________.

What was the last movie that you have watched? _________________________________.

What is your idea of a fun day?
_______________________________________________________________________.

Please indicate any hobbies or interest that you would like for your mentee to know?
_______________________________________________________________________.
Appendix AA

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORT

Date: ____/____/____

Person making report to the Father Presence Matters Program:

______________________________________

Relationship to child: ____________________________

Reported to: ____________________________ (DCFS Staff name)

Report date: ____/____/____

______________________________________________________________________________

Child’s biographical information:

Name of child: ____________________________ Age: _______________

Parent/Guardian: ____________________________

Address: ______________________________________________________

City: ____________________________ State: ______________ Zip: ____________

Telephone: ______________________________________________________

Relationship to Child: __________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Name of person suspected of abuse or neglect: ____________________________

Relationship to child: ____________________________

Describe the suspected abuse and/or neglect; include the nature and extent of the injury to
the child in question.
MEASURING THE QUALITY OF MENTOR-YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS

YOUTH SURVEY
(For Ages 9 and above)

What is today’s date? Month __________ Day _______ Year _________
1. Are you a girl or a boy? _______ Boy _______ Girl
2. How old are you? __________
3. What is your birth date? Month ________ Day ________ Year ________
4. What grade are you in at school? ___________
5. Put an X on the line next to all that you use to describe yourself, your race, or ethnicity. Are you....
   _____ 1 Black or African American
   _____ 2 White, not Hispanic
   _____ 3 Hispanic or Latino
   _____ 4 Asian/Pacific Islander
   _____ 5 American Indian or Alaskan Native
   _____ 6 Other _______________________

On the next page are some things kids say about their mentors. Please circle one number for each statement to say how true it is for you and how you feel. For each sentence, circle if the statement is not true at all, if it’s not very true, if it’s sort of true, or if it’s very true of you.

For example, if your mentor always remembers your name, you would circle “4” (Very True) to question 0. Don't worry that the numbers in a column differ among the questions. Now start with Question 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not True At All</th>
<th>Not Very True</th>
<th>Sort of True</th>
<th>Very True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. My mentor knows my name.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My mentor makes fun of me in ways I don’t like.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My mentor almost always asks me what I want to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When I’m with my mentor, I feel special.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sometimes my mentor promises we will do something; then we don’t do it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My mentor is always interested in what I want to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When I’m with my mentor, I feel excited.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When my mentor gives me advice, it makes me feel stupid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My mentor and I like to do a lot of the same things.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When I’m with my mentor, I feel sad.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. I feel I can’t trust my mentor with secrets—my mentor would tell my parent/guardian. 1 2 3 4
11. My mentor thinks of fun and interesting things to do. 1 2 3 4
12. When I’m with my mentor, I feel important. 1 2 3 4
13. When I’m with my mentor, I feel bored. 4 3 2 1
14. I wish my mentor asked me more about what I think. 1 2 3 4
15. My mentor and I do things I really want to do. 1 2 3 4
16. When I’m with my mentor, I feel mad. 4 3 2 1
17. I wish my mentor knew me better. 1 2 3 4
18. When I’m with my mentor, I feel disappointed. 4 3 2 1
19. When I’m with my mentor, I feel happy. 1 2 3 4

WHAT QUALITIES DOES THE SURVEY MEASURE?¹

The “Youth Survey” includes 19 questions that measure three different, but related, qualities of mentor-youth relationships. The items that measure each of these qualities are deliberately mixed together on the survey. This is because you can get a better understanding of how a youth is really feeling when she or he must go anew to a similar question and again consider the response.

The three qualities are:

1. The extent to which the relationship is centered on the youth. The BBBS research demonstrated that youth who feel their mentor takes their preferences and interests into account are more likely to show improvement in their behaviors and attitudes than are youth who feel their mentor is less interested in them. This quality is measured through questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 15.

2. The youth’s emotional engagement. These items measure the degree to which the youth enjoys the relationship and is emotionally engaged in it (for example, whether the youth feels happy, special, mad, or bored). Youth who feel better about being around their mentor are more likely to show improvement in their behaviors and attitudes than are youth who feel less positive. This quality is measured through questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19.

¹ This information was taken directly from Public/Private Ventures, Mentoring the Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationships, 9.
3. *The extent to which the youth is dissatisfied with the relationship.* Youth who feel more dissatisfied with their mentor and the relationship are less likely to show improvement in their behaviors and attitudes than are youth with more favorable impressions. Thus, mentoring programs that can create more satisfying relationships are more likely to be effective than are similar mentoring programs that create less satisfying relationships. This quality is measured through questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 14, 17.
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Founder and President, Painting the Portrait of a Woman Ministries, Inc., 1997-present
Library Associate, Technical Services, Lenox Hill Hospital, 1993-2004