

Tim Wright

— Co-host of the *Wonder of Parenting* Podcast —

DAD MATTERS



Dad Matters

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Co-Host of The Wonder of Parenting Podcast



...I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill.

—President Obama, Fathers' Day, 2009

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Tim Wright hosts The Wonder of Parenting Podcast: A Brain-Science Approach to Parenting, along with Dr. Michael Gurian. He and Dr. Gurian have also created several rites of passage programs for parents to equip them to empower their sons and daughters for adulthood

Tim and his wife Jan have a daughter and son-in-law, a son and daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren. He serves as the Sr. Pastor of [Community of Grace Lutheran Church](#) in Peoria, AZ.

You can learn more at [Tim Wright Ministries](#) and on his [Facebook Page](#).

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Do Dads Matter?

Women are amazing. Think about it this way: A woman can grow a baby inside her body. Then a woman can deliver the baby through her body. Then, by some miracle, a woman can feed a baby with her body. When you compare that to the male's contribution to life, [it's kind of embarrassing, really.](#)

Jim Gaffigan

Around Father's Day, the July/August 2010 Edition of *The Atlantic* hit the stands with this blazing cover story: [**The End of Men.**](#) Among the articles in the magazine listed on the front cover was this: [*Are Father's Necessary: A paternal contribution may not be as necessary as we think.*](#)

After looking at the "lack of evidence" supporting the importance of dad, and "evidence" that suggested the opposite, the author concluded:

The bad news for Dad is that despite common perception, there's nothing objectively essential about his contribution. The good news is, we've gotten used to him.

Happy Father's Day!

(Can you imagine a similar cover story released on Mother's Day: **The Decline of Women**, with a follow up story inside entitled: *Are Mothers Necessary?*)

The article was a head scratcher, not only for being tone deaf, but for its utter disregard of actual science and research.

Interestingly, a few years later *The Atlantic* published a couple of articles affirming the importance of dads.

The first, [*The Distinct, Positive Impact of a Good Dad*](#), came out June 14, 2013.

The author began his article this way:

Are dads dispensable? A lot of scholars and writers weighing in on fatherhood these days have come to the conclusion that they are. As Jennifer Aniston, for example, once put the point in the high-profile context of a press conference: "Women are realizing it more and more knowing that they don't have to settle with a man just to have that child."

Her perspective has a lot of intuitive appeal in an era where millions of women have children outside of marriage, serve as breadwinner moms to their families, or are raising children on their own. Dads certainly seem dispensable in today's world.

What this view overlooks, however, is a growing body of research suggesting that men bring much more to the parenting enterprise than money, especially today, when many fathers are highly involved in the warp and woof of childrearing. As Yale psychiatrist Kyle Pruett put it in Salon: "fathers don't mother."

The second, [*Why Dads Matter*](#), was published February 23, 2014. One insight the author included:

"There is a great deal of evidence that children from single-parent homes have worse outcomes on both academic and economic measures than children from two-parent families," wrote scholar Elaine C. Kamarck and Third Way president Jonathan Cowan in the introduction to Wayward Sons, a report produced for Washington think tank Third Way. "There is a vast inequality of both financial resources and parental time and attention between one- and two-parent families."

The report also said absent fathers particularly impact the psychosocial and academic development of boys.

Near the end of his book, [*Do Fathers Matter? What Science is Telling Us About the Parent We've Overlooked*](#), Paul Raeburn writes this:

*Multiple studies suggest that fatherlessness is a major contributor to crime and juvenile delinquency; premature sexuality and out-of-wedlock births to teenagers; deteriorating educational achievement; depression, substance abuse, and alienation among adolescents; and the growing number of women and children in poverty. That list comes from David Popenoe of Rutgers University, who says the decline of fatherhood "**is a major source behind many of the most disturbing problems that plague American society.**" (Emphasis mine, p. 221)*

That a book with the title, *Do Fathers Matter?* has to be written at all is telling. In the beginning of the book Raeburn says that up until the 1970's almost every major scientific study done on parenting focused on moms. And the research discovered what we intuitively know: Moms are absolutely necessary. Very few studies were done on the impact of Fathers. And even though no studies were conducted to suggest that dads are irrelevant...

*The irrelevancy of fathers had become an article of faith among researchers, and why would any of them question what they knew to be **true**?* (p. 6)

Once research was done on dads, however, the science showed that not only do dads matter, *they matter a lot*.

That means, dad, that *you matter*, and that *you matter a lot*!

Why Dads Matter

...dad-deprived boys are more likely to either drown in their purpose void, or fill it with destructive senses of purpose.

Warren Farrell—[*The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling And What We Can Do About It*, p. 105](#)

Raeburn's highly readable book offers science-backed insights into why dads matter. Without going into all the details and research (I highly recommend you read the book and have your spouse/the other parent of your children read it as well) here are 9 reasons why dads matter:

1) A father's environment, behavior, and even appearance can have a substantial impact on fetal health—and on the health of his grandchildren.

- Obese fathers were associated with a 60% increase in the risk of having a child with a low birth rate. It didn't matter if mom was obese.
- Fathers involved with their partners during pregnancy reduce the risk of the child dying in the first year of life.
- Death rates for infants whose fathers are not around or not involved are nearly four times that of infants whose fathers are involved.

2) The children of fathers who embrace and support their partner's pregnancy have an easier transition into kindergarten.

3) When the father is in the delivery room, women report less pain, need less medication, and cry less...but the fathers cry more!

4) While moms tend to hold their children more than fathers, dads are more likely to play with their children when they pick them up.

- Fathers, through play, are more likely than moms to encourage infants to explore and to challenge them.
- Interactions with dad that are playful, affectionate, and engaging predict later popularity in school and among peer groups, perhaps by teaching their kids to read emotional expressions on their dad's face, and later on those of their peer group.
- Kids see mom as crucial to their wellbeing. They see Dad as a playmate on a certain level. His play, often unpredictable, helps kids learn to be brave in difficult situations or in meeting new people.

5) Fathers are not only important for children's language development, but fathers matter more than mothers.

- Moms tend to be more attuned to their children and tend to use words the kids are more familiar with. Dads aren't as attuned so they use a broader vocabulary, and their kids therefore learn new words and concepts.

Three boys were walking home arguing over who had the best dad

Boy 1: *My dad is the best because he's the president of the town bank.*

Boy 2: *Oh, yeah, well my dad is the greatest because he owns two grocery stores in town.*

Boy 3: Not to be out done: *That's nothing. My dad is a pastor and he owns hell. He told my mom last night that the church board gave it to him.*

6) Children whose fathers play with them, read to them, take them on outings, and help care for them, have fewer behavioral problems in their school years and are less likely to get caught up in delinquency or criminal behavior as adolescents.

7) Girls who have a warm relationship with dad and spend a lot of time with him in the first 5-7 years of their lives, have a reduced risk of early puberty, early initiation of sex, and teen pregnancy.

- Researchers have discovered a robust association between father absence—both physical and psychological—and accelerated development and sexual risk-taking in daughters.

8) Sons who have fond childhood memories of dad are more likely to be able to handle the day-to-day stresses of adulthood.

9) Children who were born poor and raised by both married parents had an 80 percent chance of moving to the middle class or above; conversely, children who were born into the middle class and raised without a married dad were almost four times as likely to end up considerably poorer. (Farrell: *The Boy Crisis*, p. 119)

(For you faith-based dads, here's another insight into why you matter:

Kara Powell, in her book, [*The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*](#), writes this:

...in evangelical Protestant families, 46 percent of children who feel “not close” to their fathers report that they have adopted the same faith as their parents. For children in evangelical Protestant families who feel “close” to their fathers, that rate jumps to 71 percent. That 25 percent gap in faith adoption dwarfs the 1 percent gain in the faith adoption between children who feel “close” to their mothers and those who feel “not close” to them...Children from mainline Protestant families who feel “close” to their fathers have a 17 percent gain in adopting the faith of their parents compared with those who feel “not close” to their fathers. Mainline Protestant children who feel “close” to their mothers have a 3 percent gain in following in the faith footsteps of their parents compared with those who feel “not close” to their mothers. (p. 63))

Dad, the science says what you know in your core: Fatherhood is a sacred call—a call that matters.

How Dad Matters

*Next to war, nothing calls for the presence of government more than the absence of dad.
And nothing limits the need for government more than the presence of dad.*

Farrell—*The Boy Crisis*, p. 231

Dad—This is Your Brain

In forging his football teams, the great Vince Lombardi always started with the basics:
Gentlemen: this is a football!

Being a man, being male, being masculine, means something. A man has a stance toward the world that is different from that of a woman. And your kids need it!

We're not talking stereotypes here. We're talking about how you are wired biologically, physically, emotionally, and mentally.

So here are two basics you want to know about yourself as you think about your call to matter as a dad:

*Gentlemen: This is your primary hormone—**Testosterone***

Testosterone is:

- ▶ An action hormone
- ▶ A get-it-done hormone
- ▶ A movement hormone

Testosterone essentially makes you a male. When you were in the womb you were female until you were bombarded with testosterone, which in turn shaped your brain into a distinctly male brain.

(The primary chemicals/hormones in women are oxytocin and estrogen, which are calming, bonding, and connecting hormones.)

Gentlemen: This is your brain

Your brain:

- Tends to draw on the spatial-mechanical centers in the right part of your brain
- Responds more to movement and action than words
- Moves you to bond via activity, banter, and one-upmanship (which helps activate your verbal centers)
- Gives you the ability to laser focus on one task (often to the exclusion of anything else happening around you as your brain is made up of 6.5-7 times more gray matter than that of a woman—centers for localized thinking)
- Processes life best through data and “facts”
- Stimulates you to be competitive (along with those doses of testosterone)
- Problem solves

(A woman's brain draws blood to the verbal-emotive centers on both sides of the brain, making her far more verbal. Women tend to bond via talking. They are more attuned to many things happening at once from words being said to voice inflection to body language. Women problem solve as well, but do so more in conversation with others, verbalizing the problem through to its conclusion where men internalize the process and speak the solution. With 10 times more white matter in her brain—interfacing with

multiple inputs at once—a woman is far more able to move from one task to the next than is a man.)

This unique combination of testosterone and your testosterone-shaped brain provides you with an important, compelling set of skills for forging strong, thriving kids.

Dad—You Have a Particular Set of Skills

The nurturing instincts of mom and dad are often complementary. Metaphorically, a mom tends to give a fish to someone who is hungry—even if she has less fish herself. A dad's nurturing instinct is more prone to be guided by the old adage, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

Farrell—*The Boy Crisis*, p. 178

My all time favorite movie monologue comes from that gripping scene in [*Taken*](#), where retired CIA agent Bryan Mills (Liam Neeson) hears over the phone his daughter being kidnapped. The kidnapper picks up the phone dropped by Brian's daughter, breathes heavily into it, and Brian Mays responds with the following:

I don't know who you are. I don't know what you want. If you are looking for ransom, I can tell you I don't have money. But what I do have are a very particular set of skills; skills I have acquired over a very long career...

Dad, not only are you wired with a particular set of skills, but your life experience, your life as a man, gives you a skill set that can prove invaluable in raising your kids.

Dr. Phil was a guest several years ago on [*The Late Show with David Letterman*](#). Dave talked about how challenging it was for him to be a dad to his son. Was he supposed to be his friend? Was he supposed to be tough on him?

Dr. Phil said that friends will tell their friends what they want to hear. Dave's job as dad is to tell his son what he *needs* to hear. Dave, as dad, needs to be not just any voice, but the *best* voice.

Three kids were playing basketball

Boy 1: *My dad's way faster than any of yours, he can throw a 90-mph fastball from the pitcher's mound and run and catch it just after it crosses the plate!*

Girl: *Oh yeah? Well, my dad can shoot an arrow from his bow and run to the target and hold it up to make sure the arrow hits the bullseye!*

Boy 2: *Your dads don't even come close to being faster than mine. My dad works for the government, and even though he works every day until 4:00 he gets home at 3:30!*

Dads, one of the skills you have for being that best voice is your passion for self-respect.

Moms generally excel at creating *Self-Esteem* in kids—the belief that no matter what, kids have worth and value; that they can be anything they want to be. It is a vital gift that every child needs to grow to be a healthy, productive adult.

Kids also need *Self-Respect*. Self-respect balances out self-esteem by teaching children that they will win some and they will lose some; that they will be good at some things and bad at others; that they have certain God-given gifts, talents, and skills that will enable them to succeed in certain areas but not others. Respect comes from accepting strengths and limitations. In other words, though kids have the potential to be whatever they want to be, and have worth no matter what, they don't have the skill set—nor does anyone one—to do and be everything. Dads are wired to build that self-respect in their children.

Another skill you have for being that best voice is your passion for instilling independence in your kids.

Moms, generally speaking, fueled by the bonding chemical oxytocin, among other things, want to protect their children for as long as possible. Kids need that!

Dads, on the other hand, generally speaking, tend to want to forge independence in their kids. They will tend to let kids take risks more than will moms. They want kids to get out into the real world and begin to build up calluses. Kids need that, too!

For example: Imagine you are teaching your child to ride a bike. If (when) the child falls, mom's first instinct is to run to the child and comfort her. Dad's first instinct is to quickly

assess the situation to ensure his daughter isn't hurt, then encourage her to "shake it off," get back on the bike, and try it again.

On one of the last episodes of the 2015 season of [Downton Abbey](#), (and yes, I'm man enough to admit that I watched the whole series and will see the movie!) Robert Crawley (Hugh Bonneville) was playing a board game with his little granddaughter. Grandpa chided her a bit for a move she made, but her mom stepped in and lovingly asked Grandpa to let her child do whatever she wanted. Grandpa said, "How is she ever going to learn how to win and lose?" Mom wasn't interested in that lesson. But Grandpa was. And his granddaughter needs him to teach her that lesson.

Another skill you have dad, is to let your child "work it out" him/herself.

Moms, because of their chemical makeup, lean toward a "tend and befriend" posture. If her child gets into trouble, she wants to get her or him out of it.

Dads, on the other hand, after ensuring their child isn't in danger, tend to want their child to work it out himself or herself.

Dad, one of your particular skills is to teach your kids how to live in a world of ups and downs, wins and losses, and personal giftedness while acknowledging the giftedness of others.

When Dad Doesn't Matter

Without dads as role models, boys' testosterone is not well channeled. The boy experiences a sense of purposelessness, a lack of boundary enforcement, rudderlessness, and often withdraws into video games and video porn. At worst, when boys' testosterone is not well-channeled by an involved dad, boys become among the world's most destructive forces. When boys' testosterone is well channeled by an involved dad, boys become among the world's most constructive forces.

[Warren Farrell](#)

Stuart Epperson, in his post, [What it Means to be a Father](#), lists the challenges kids face when dad is not a strong presence in their lives:

Incarceration rates: Young men are twice as likely to end up in jail as those who come from traditional two-parent families. Boys whose fathers are absent from the household are doubly at

risk of incarceration—even when other factors such as race, income, parent education and urban residence are held constant.

Suicide: 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.

Behavioral Disorders: 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.

High School Dropouts: 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.

Educational Attainment: Kids living in single-parent homes or in step families report lower educational expectations on the part of their parents, less parental monitoring of school work, and less overall social supervision than children from intact families.

Juvenile Detention Rates: 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes. Only 13 percent of juvenile delinquents come from families in which the biological mother and father are married to each other. By contrast, 33 percent have parents who are either divorced or separated and 44 percent have parents who were never married.

Confused Identities: Boys who grow up in father-absent homes are more likely than those in father-present homes to have trouble establishing appropriate sex roles and gender identity.

Aggression: In a longitudinal study of 1,197 fourth-grade students, researchers observed greater levels of aggression in boys from mother-only households than boys from mother-father households.

Achievement: Children from low-income, two-parent families outperform students from high-income, single-parent homes. Almost twice as many high achievers come from two-parent homes as one-parent homes.

Criminal Activity: The likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of single-parent families.

My dad's dad was an alcoholic. He abandoned his wife and her children (including my dad), forcing my grandma to raise 4 kids on her own...not easy in the 1930's and '40s. Occasionally he would pop back into the life of his family only to pop out again for months at a time.

When my dad was older, and now the "man" of the house, he told his dad in no uncertain terms, during one of those pop-into-the-family-moments, to leave and not come back. The exchange led to a fist fight.

My dad was a good man. He worked hard. He loved his wife. And he was a good dad, actively involved in our lives. He was to us what he never had in his own father. No small feat considering his background.

But my dad lived with a gaping hole in his life—a father wound, the wound that comes from a dad who for whatever reason chooses not to matter. An absent dad. Or an emotionally distant dad. Or an abusive dad. His life was in many ways shaped by that wound, as he constantly tried to prove to his long deceased dad that he was good enough, that he was worth staying around for.

Months before my dad died he was in a men's study I was leading at our church. During one of the break out sessions the men were asked to talk about their heroes. I happened to walk past my dad's group as he was talking and I heard him say: *My dad is my hero.*

Wait... What? Did he just say that his dad was his hero?

I had two responses:

One—How can that be?

Two—Can you hear the cry of that little boy who desperately needs his dad's approval?

My friend, Tim Madigan, shares a similar story.

Tim was a reporter for a newspaper in Forth Worth, Texas. He was writing an article on Children's Television and he was encouraged to connect with two icons of the genre, Captain Kangaroo and Mister Rogers. He was able to interview both men but it was his phone call with Mister Rogers that changed everything. Tim and Fred Rogers quickly became friends, exchanging letters, emails, and phone calls over the course of several years.

Early on in their friendship Tim was going through a rough patch. In detailing the series of crises he was facing to Mister Rogers, Tim confessed his growing belief that at the root of it all was the lack of his father's blessing.

In his book, [*I'm Proud of You! My Friendship with Mister Rogers*](#), Tim shares a compelling question he asked of Mister Rogers that day:

This is the question I have for you this morning, Fred. Will you be proud of me? It would mean a great deal to me if you would...during our brief time together you have done so much to teach me how to be a person and a man. And now I have this favor to ask you. Will you be proud of me?

Again, can you hear the heart cry of a little boy desperate for his dad's approval?

Mister Rogers reply gets to heart of what every child needs to hear from dad—boy or girl:

Dear Tim,

The answer to your question is

“YES”

a resounding YES...

I will be proud of you. I am proud of you. I have been proud of you since first we met. I'm deeply touched that you would offer so much of yourself to me, and look forward to knowing all that you would care to share in the future. Nothing you could tell me could change my YES for you. Please remember that...

YES, Tim, YES.

Love, Fred.

The Gift that Matters

Dad, there's something deep, sacred, compelling, profound, and magical about your blessing and affirmation. Your son...your daughter, needs the constant reminder that you are proud him...that you are proud of her.

Looking your children in the eyes and saying from the depths of your soul, *I'm proud of you! I love you! I'm glad you are my son/my daughter!* builds substance in them. It creates a foundation that will hold them through life. It gives them the resilience they need to thrive in life no matter what's happening in them or around them.

Dad...You matter! So live like you matter.

From one dad/grandfather to another—I'm proud to be a dad with you.

Tim

Resources

Podcast: [The Wonder of Parenting: A Brain Science Approach to Parenting](#) with Dr. Michael Gurian and Tim Wright

[Michael Gurian and Tim Wright Rites of Passage Programs](#)

Books:

Michael Gurian

[*Saving Our Sons: A New Path for Raising Healthy and Resilient Boys.*](#)

[*The Minds of Girls: A New Path for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Successful Women*](#)

[*Nurture the Nature: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Unique Core Personality*](#)

Tim Wright

[*Raising Sons in a #MeToo World*](#)

[*Raising Daughters in a #MeToo World*](#)

[*Searching for Tom Sawyer: How Parents and Congregations Can Stop the Exodus of Boys from Church*](#)

Paul Raeburn

[*Do Fathers Matter? What Science is telling us About the Parent We've Overlooked*](#)

Warren Farrell and John Gray

[*The Boy Crisis: Why Our Boys Are Struggling And What We Can Do About It*](#)

Louann Brizendine

[*The Male Brain: A Breakthrough Understanding of How Men Think*](#)

Roy F. Baumeister

[*Is there Anything Good About Men? How Culture Flourishes by Exploiting Men*](#)