Key Facts

1. **Fathers play a critical role in children’s understanding of living a healthy lifestyle** (Snethen et al., 2008). Children are more likely to eat their vegetables if they see their father eating his vegetables. In addition, a child more frequently mirrors the television-watching patterns of his or her father than any other adult.

2. **Children who live in divorced households are more likely to eat high-fat foods when they spend time with their noncustodial fathers** (Snethen et al., 2008). When children spend time with noncustodial fathers, they are more likely to eat fast- or higher-fat food. Researchers believe this is because fathers want to win over their children in the limited time they have together. Parents should not use food as a reward or bribery as it can set children up for lifelong struggles with eating (Ziviani et al., 2008). Fathers should show their children by example how to make good dietary and activity choices.

3. **A child who perceives parental rejection is more likely to show aggression as a pre-adolescent** (Lifford, Harold, and Thapar, 2008). Parents should provide an environment where their children’s emotional, behavioral, and social development can thrive (Lifford, Harold, and Thapar, 2007). To do this, parents need to make sure their children know they are available and present in the relationship. Engaging in activities together, sitting down and talking, and supporting their children in school and out-of-school activities can create a meaningful bond, especially if the children spend time in two households.

4. **Fathers play an important role in the academic success of children** (Bauman and Wasserman, 2010). When given appropriate supports, fathers played a critical part in helping their young children prepare to read (Bauman and Wasserman, 2010). When a father can help his children learn to read, he is able to better connect with them. Fathers should talk with their children’s teacher and participate actively in their children’s learning.

Implications for Parents

Parents should place special emphasis on the relationships children have with their fathers. If a father is not present in a child’s life other male mentors should be sought for that child because research has indicated the relationship children have with men leads to healthy social, emotional, academic, and physical development. By engaging in healthful eating, physical activity, and an active lifestyle, fathers can set a good example for their children. In addition, when a father takes an active role in his children’s learning, children are more likely to succeed in school. Children often mirror their father’s behavior; therefore a father should be a positive role model.

Additional Resources

**Healthy Parenting** (http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/images/DVP/Healthy_Parenting_RIB_a.pdf): This resource, provided by the Center for Disease Control, provides information for parents from minority backgrounds. This guide talks about effective parenting strategies and how to best model behavior.

**PBS Parents** (http://www.pbs.org/parents/): This website has resources for helping engage children in learning as well as guides to handle talking with children about sensitive subjects. Activities that engage parents in their children’s learning are available at no charge.

About the Author

Kate Cromwell is a master’s degree candidate at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas. She is studying recreation and youth development. Her thesis focuses on weight perception of children in diverse ethnic groups.

Works Cited


