

You've heard it said: "Big boys don't cry"; "Guys don't hug or communicate"; or, "Men don't nurture." It's a tired notion that nurturing is so-called "women's work." On the contrary, our children benefit greatly from the unique masculine approach that we guys bring to parenting. We can and must become nurturing dads through the Three A's - write 'em down - affection, affirmation, and attention.

Affection is pretty simple, but it isn't always easy. Sure, babies can fall asleep on your chest or in the crook of your arm in an instant. And at the "rugrat" stage, it's natural to rough-house on the living room carpet.

But what about those awkward teen years? Most dads are only comfortable giving a squeeze on the neck or a playful tousele of the hair. Those are meaningful, but let's not stop there. Try deliberate, loving displays that are open for all to see and feel and smile about. Have you hugged your child today?

The second A is for **Affirmation**. I'm talking here about *verbally* affirming our children. Words are a great tool for loving fathers. Unfortunately, they can also be used as weapons by dads who may not realize that children feed on our every word.

Many children grow up never hearing the words "I love you" from their fathers. All they hear are high expectations: "Son, if you work a little harder, you can turn that B into an A." How different it is for the boy who hears this from his dad: "Son, you don't have to perform for me. I love you because of who you are, not what you do."

Finally, **Attention** is being available and concerned for our children, and focusing on their needs. The best action here is *active listening*. And that's impossible when we're on the computer, buried in the newspaper, or staring at the tube.

Our children deserve our full concentration - open ears, alert eyes, and clear minds. If our children are worth nurturing -- and we know that they are -- then these basic listening skills are worth practicing.

Dad, now you know the three A's. Now, let's just do it! Let's give our children all the affection, affirmation, and attention they need.