

Close relationships between father and child are not built overnight. They require time, personal growth, commitment and sacrifice on the part of fathers.

According to Randell D. Turner, PhD, former vice president of National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), fathers need to be active daily in co-parenting their children with the mother, not just when they are asked to do so. Fathers need to spend time with each child, actively listening and talking about the child's interests, including television shows, music and school activities.

Young children crave attention, love and affection. These needs do not change as the child grows older. While teenagers may act as if they don't want or need a father's attention and love, they do. Fathers need to remember that although their teens may look like adults, they lack the wisdom born of years of experience and don't always know what is best for them.

To build a strong relationship with his teen, a father needs to remember what it was like when he was a teenager - his hopes, fears, lost loves and dreams for the future. Their child faces the same feelings; only today, it comes at light speed, demanding an immediate response. Without a father that loves and accepts them unconditionally, whom they can turn to for guidance, teens will stumble, seeking out advice from anyone who will give them the love and attention they crave.

A child needs a father's daily involvement.

This could include playing or working with them, attending their activities, tending to daily routines or just spending unstructured time together. Fathers who are involved in their children's lives tend to go out of their way to interact with them. They tend to see sharing their day as an important aspect of being a good father.

A child needs a father's acceptance.

A father's acceptance helps the child to believe that he will love them no matter what. A father's acceptance teaches a child that he or she is loved for who they are rather than for what they do. When teens feel accepted by their father, they are more likely to open up greater trust between them and their father.

A child needs a father's affection.

A father can express affection in many different ways, though loving words or an appropriate touch communicates volumes to a child.

Children need their fathers to be consistent.

Consistent fathers maintain a certain level of regularity both in their personal characteristics and in their fathering habits. People around them know what to expect from them. They are diligent fathers and their interaction with their children does not vary regardless of the circumstances.

A child needs a father's availability.

When fathers make themselves available to their children, it gives them a sense of importance. When fathers are not available, it tells the child, "Yes, I love you, but other things still come ahead of you." Therefore, a father who is there when his child or teen needs him assures the child that he or she is important and it keeps the father connected with the child.

The key to a child's safety is the quality and quantity of the relationship that he or she

has with their father. This is the best prevention for keeping children from getting involved in drugs, alcohol, smoking, teen pregnancy and criminal behavior.

Source: Randell D. Turner, PhD, is former vice president of National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), whose mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the number of children growing up with involved, committed and responsible fathers. The organization accomplishes this by developing local and statewide fatherhood initiatives. Working through local leadership, they develop community-based programs and services that support, encourage, educate and challenge fathers to become positive influences in their children's lives.