



W2. Promoting Positive Father-Child Interaction

Wednesday, June 5, 2019
11:30 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

Moderator:

- Patrick Patterson, Project Manager, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, Raleigh, NC

Presenters:

- John Badalament, Director of Programs, Massachusetts General Hospital, The Fatherhood Project, Boston, MA

John Badalament: This session is about practicality. All resources are available for download on the website. I call them “practicalities” because they should be used in more than one practice. These are all materials you can put to use right away, both in your work and as parents yourselves. When I started this work in 2003, there wasn’t much out there in terms of research and resources on fathering. Since then there has been an explosion of research about the importance of fathers. Prior to 2000, the research was all about the damage done by father absence. Not to diminish them, but we do a disservice to ourselves if we don’t focus on the power of father presence.

This session will focus on fathers of children ages prenatal, 0-5, and 6-8. In conducting a Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Prenatal Care Obstetrics Survey, I sat in OB visits asking to talk to fathers and ended up speaking to over 900. There were significant findings: high socio-economic status fathers exhibited higher anxiety and stress related to becoming fathers, and binge drinking. Lower socio-economic status fathers exhibited higher rates of depression, obesity, and smoking. A high rate of study participation tells us that fathers are eager to participate and get resources. Most dads were there for the 16-week OB visit because that’s when the sonograms are done. Many dads were not aware they could go to other visits.

Dads said they wanted more information about how they could be useful to the mom, and how they could be good dads. Study findings showed the mental-physical health connection. It also showed that these OB visits can serve as an opportunity for mental health screenings for dads too.

Participant: All the dads included were probably part of involved relationships, since they were at the OB visit.



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John Badalament: I agree but we didn't count the number of mothers there without partners.

A father/child connection has a fundamental impact on a child's ability to trust, feelings of self, perceptions of the world, social relationships, and brain development. A fundamental framework for father/child interaction is "serve and return," like in tennis or ping-pong. When you mimic your baby that is serve and return – baby saying goo-goo-ga-ga and dad saying it back.

Played video: [Serve and Return](#)

John Badalament: What do you see fathers doing?

Participant: Sitting in the same room as children but on the phone, not interacting with the children. *[i.e., not a good parenting interaction]*

Participant: On the floor playing and reading with children. *[good example of serve and return]*

John Badalament: [You can see], based on the child's interests and what they are expressing, that serve and return can be initiated by either party. These parent/child interactions foster the "use it or lose it" building of brain circuitry. It's really critical that you know this information as early as possible. What they serve and what they return, matters.

I'm going to show you an example of a dad that is a great way to think of it. These are micro moments, okay? These are those little moments that are the foundations of father/child interactions. An engaged and understanding father sends a powerful message to a child: "You matter."

The dad in this next video is a father who we actually filmed for the video. He was such an amazing dad that I included him in my book. He's probably 21 in this video, but he was 19 when he became a dad. He's a teen dad who intuitively understood so much. This is a great example of how just going to the supermarket, there are all these opportunities for exactly what we're talking about here.

These micro moments, these moments of connection. They're there all the time. So, when we're teaching fathers, we need to teach them that they have opportunities that they may be taking, or they may not be taking. If they are making the most of these opportunities, as you'll see with Antonio, then great. If not, they need to know more about this.





They need to know: “Hey, what you did with your son, that's really important, keep doing that. That's what we call serve and return. And by the way, when you did that, do you think that was helpful or not?” In other words, engaging them on these micro moments.

This is an example of a dad going shopping. I would like you to pay attention to the serve and return that's happening, as much as you can. Take note of all the little things; because, there are at least five or six key interactions in here that, to me, are positive. Let's see if we can get them all. I've watched this video a lot and constantly see new things that I didn't see before. The last part, and the most important thing, is what it tells the child. It's the best way to send a message that “you matter, you're important” when you respond to a child.

Video from the Children's Trust Fund: [The Treasures of Being a Dad](#)

Antonio: Twenty years from now I would love for my little boy to say, Dad was there for me. When I first found out I was going to be a father, I was happy, scared, and nervous. My mom was worried because I was only 19 and was like, that's a lot of responsibility you have to attend to. I knew it was going to change me. Once my son's mom said she was pregnant, I stopped thinking about myself; because, when you have somebody else to care for and attend to, you can't think about yourself. I grew up without a father so I knew right away I would be his friend. Seeing him smile is worth everything. It can be a rainy, bad day and he smiles; and I'll just be like, you know what? Today is a good day. I really like spending time with him. When we're together I try to go out to the stores just to go shopping with him. He's an energetic kid and loves to play. He always keeps you on your toes. It makes you not think about a lot of stuff that's going on. It just relaxes you and it's fun. Anybody can be a good parent. It just takes some time and you got to be there to be a parent.

John Badalament: Okay. So, what did you notice for serve and return?

Participant: He initiated a lot of it. He was also responding and attentive.

John Badalament: He was initiating a lot of it. Again, that was him not knowing any of these terms. Not knowing the terminology. This is just what he does. If you notice, something which we actually got in trouble for was his bed. Actually, we might have cut that frame out. His bed was close to the window. So, it was amazing the level, which was helpful, of scrutiny in the video. They didn't like that his bed was close to the window. Which hey, that was a good thing. Thankfully, we were able to cut that out. When I was interviewing him, did you notice how incredibly attentive he was to his son? He was giving me full answers and he was very aware of what was going on with his son, otherwise I would've stopped the interview, because his son could have fallen off the bed. He had such a good sense of awareness of that and what his child was doing. What else did you notice?





Participant: I found the fact that he involved his son in everything he did. At the grocery store, he paid him a lot of attention. He handled it. A lot of times I think young parents don't realize that children are children, they're not disciplined, [they need] a little room to play, he's a child and he gave him that. You have to engage kids in age-appropriate ways. He let him choose food, but then he also involved him in decision making. He had him holding the bag, but also realizing that he can't take real responsibility for carrying the bag. The dad wasn't just rushing through his grocery shopping, telling the kid to be quiet – he was really including the child in the experience.

John Badalament: That's my favorite part. He has him holding the bag. And if you notice, he then holds it and then he sort of loses interest in the bag and that's where he snickered at the end. Antonio, the dad, took the bag from him. But he gave it to him. And I love what you said, that he was realizing he's a child. He's two years old.

Participant: I like how Antonio was there. I go to the store all the time and see the children in the carts, moms getting the stuff and saying be quiet, we'll talk about it later. Here's the thing, he took his time, it didn't matter. He probably picked up 800 things that they weren't going to buy. He took time just to be with him. Not just I got to get all this stuff, I'll buy this because I have to.

John Badalament: It's true and actually there wasn't a lot. He only went for a few items, fair enough. He didn't do a full \$200 cart of groceries, but he gave the child time, which again this is all about what we teach fathers.

Teaching them to turn this experience into learning for your child, and again, turning it into very important brain development. He did initiate a lot of it, but he also, I forget who did the baba in the car, when he said baba. I actually think the dad said it first, but then you notice what happened. It became less an effort, seconds later the child goes baba. That's a perfect example of the kind of powerful teaching that goes on.

Participant: I thought it was really wonderful that there was great balance in that. The father exhibited really good balance with father-initiated and child-initiated interactions. It was child directed and parent directed just about equally. Some parents would just like bombard their child.

And that little chase game, I'm going to run and Daddy running after, that little guy had power at that moment. But it didn't turn into a negative thing, like you're saying.

John Badalament: Like get back here.

Participant: Yes. It wasn't like you're annoying me, and I can't get my job done, because your job as a child is to be a child. And so, the balance that he pulls off is just really super.





John Badalament: That's well said. It's pretty remarkable.

Participant: What I liked was, and it's not a back and forth moment, was at 19 how mature he seemed. He realized that it's not about me anymore. I don't matter anymore. It's all about him.

John Badalament: Yes. He's a pretty extraordinary person. At 19, he also changed his life radically. He got a lot of flak for it from his friends. He stopped running late. He realized pretty quickly he was headed down the path of incarceration that his father and a lot of his friends went down. He said something interesting. He said a lot of his friends who also have children think they're actually doing them a favor by not being involved, because they feel they can't be a positive influence for their kids.. That's a powerful statement. I believe him that his friends actually believe that, and we all have worked I'm sure, with dads that feel that way. I've had moments in my life where I've felt at times, in the 14 and 16 years my children have been around, where maybe it'd be better if they didn't see me in a certain way. But we're talking about not being involved at all. They genuinely feel like they're doing their child a disservice. I think that's really important. And I think Antonio is a remarkable guy. But he's also every dad. Dads that we work with are usually there. Not always. Maybe they're mandated. But once we have them in the room and we have other dads there, there's so much that needs to be taught. There's so much that they're doing that's right that just doesn't get amplified. I think that's a key word, amplification. Amplification is a key concept for our work – it's important we tell dads what they are doing RIGHT. Even if they don't have words for what they are doing – attachment, development, literacy – we have to recognize it so they will repeat it.

You can show this video and say what do you notice about this? And you'll get tons of responses. I show this to dad groups all the time. First thing they notice, and usually first thing that moms notice, is that he's not in the cart in the grocery store. Like you mentioned, he was running free. And the beauty of that is well, he did, I just noticed today he almost hit him in the head with his basket. I hadn't seen that before. But, because the child turned around to run back to do the super cool with the guy who worked there who happened to be about seven feet tall. So, it was like I wish I'd gotten a better image of that. The image of little Antonio and this huge guy who just leaned down and you saw it.

Participant: The low five.

John Badalament: Yes, the low five. He did, he rubbed his hand. And the beauty of that moment was, dad, Antonio Sr., was far away and then he looked. I forget the exact moment but, the little guy looked back to see if Dad was still there and that is at its core when we think of attachment. That's the circle of security. He wanted to know. This is an important point if you



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teach with this, is to say Dad didn't just let him go do his thing. He didn't just let him go free. He was very attentive. Dad was watching what was happening when he was interacting. So that's critical. But the beauty of it was he didn't go rescue him. He didn't go run to him. He let his son actually step out of the circle of security. When we think of attachment, that's it. That's how children, and that's what dads bring to the table. So often that doesn't get amplified enough. He let that child step out of that circle. That's how that child learns his independence, that he can be his own self. He can take risks. I think that was a great example of Dad letting him take a risk. Dad stayed there, he took the risk, and he came back and he was so proud of himself that he didn't speak, he didn't have the words for it, he just let out this like scream, like I'm so excited I just did that. He was so happy that he did that. Again, that's such an important micro moment. Anything else that you noticed that he did? Early literacy was happening there. Right?

Participant: Talking about colors. The dad supported early literacy by reading food labels and helping the child make the connection between written words and spoken words.

John Badalament: He was telling him colors. And when he was choosing, I think it was oatmeal or whatever it was, rice, he was reading it to him. He talked to him about it. Again, if we think of that first video, that's the core of reading. First you have to associate talking with the word. He says it out loud and eventually the child learns to say oh, those letters together, that's rice, or whatever it is. So that was the basis for early literacy.

Anything else you saw? There was so much, and it was only a two-minute video. That was one trip to the supermarket. Holding him. Safety was always there. The mimicking. I think it's really important that we take time to teach dads what they're doing right. Antonio is doing so much right. If he doesn't have words like attachment, early literacy; if he doesn't have language, then he's missing out. It's like when you name something. When sexual harassment became a term in the '60s and '70s, think of how important that was. Think of how life changing that was for millions of people. When you have words to describe something, literacy, development, attachment; when you get what you're doing, it's really critical. That video's available on our website I believe. If it's not there, I can get it to you.

There are three other stories to teach from in there. You might have noticed in the beginning of that video there's one that focused on literacy. This is a dad's vision statement. This is how I often start my groups, no matter if it's a group of young dads, you do a dads/children age zero or birth to five group. We do dads recovery. So, any group I start with, after we hear their stories, this is the first thing I do. Because I think one of the most important changes in the last 40 or 50 years of fatherhood, is that dads now are becoming intentional. And that's what we're teaching them to do. This is a way of saying okay, Dad, what are you trying to do as a dad? How many of





you think your own dads were asked that question? Probably none. Probably most of us did not have dads that would ask what your vision was.

Practice: Dad's Vision Statement

Wouldn't it be great to know your own father's vision for you? What was he trying to do? The way I ask that is to say all right, imagine your child 20 years from now. He's interviewed for a documentary film about his relationship with you. What do you hope he will say about you? And what do you hope he doesn't say? That's the basis. So those of you that have children, you can do this in your head. Imagine 20 years from now your children are in their 20s, 30s, or 40s. What do you hope they say about your relationship? Anyone care to share what you hope your children will say?

Participant: I hope my children will say I was there to teach them.

John Badalament: He hopes his children say he was there to teach them. I like that. Not just there, because that's my next question. A lot of the dads will say "I want them to say I was there." I try to break that down, what do you mean by "there?" You were just there? You showed up? Or you went to the games, you were there for dinner, you were there for breakfast, etc. What does that mean? You're there to teach them. You are ahead of the curve. If your dad wasn't there, you are there. What do you hope they don't say?

Participant: I don't have any children, but unreliable, inconsistent, not trustworthy, too busy.

Participant: The only thing worse than absenteeism is abuse and neglect.

Participant: I would hate for my children to say I failed them.

John Badalament: Yes. That's good. I would hate for them to say I failed them. I would hate for them to say I'm not around. I would hate for them to talk about me in the past tense. So, the point of this is based on "what are you doing as a parent?" That's where we start. That's how we break it down into goals. Have it like a handout. It's pretty straightforward goal setting. It's three steps. The way I do it in our 10-session group, I say you've got 10 weeks. I want something that we can see, that you can measure. In 10 weeks, we're going to be able to say "yes, I did this," or "no, I didn't and here's why I didn't fulfill this goal." I try to break it down to three key steps you can take toward that goal. Then three barriers, and some supports that you can look to. Kind of standard goal setting. But, here's the key, we do a check-in every week in a 10-session group. Part of our check-in is really quick. As those of you who run groups know, check-ins can take the entire group time if you let them. So, we add to the check-in a number 1-5. How are you doing, 1 terrible, 2 not so good, 3 okay, 4 pretty good, and 5 great. Give me a number and then





tell us how you are doing on your goal. We break it down. It's really critical with this vision, that we do have a long vision but that we also keep it down to the nitty gritty of week to week. Some may say I might have bitten off more than I can chew. Now I'll know that in week two, because that's better than what we used to do which was check-in at the end. How'd you do on your goal. Then we discover well, it didn't go so well. We needed to sort of tweak that goal in week two. The vision statement. I find this can be a really great source of pride, especially when they accomplish their goal. But even more importantly, I will have dads with older children share what their vision is. Just those first two things. Then I add to that a priority. I'll say, "Share with your son or daughter what you hope they say about you in 20 years; what you hope they don't say, and what your priority is today as a father." You want to talk about a powerful moment. I've done this with children as young as five and six years old. It's so powerful. I started, and when I said what do you think your dad would have said. Wouldn't it be fascinating to know what your father would say. How many of you think you have a sense of how your dad would answer a question like this? What do you think he was trying to do? Or what would you hope he would say?

I would hope my dad would say that he was really trying to do his best. That would have been enough for me to hear, because he made a lot of mistakes.

Although I didn't hear it from him, I feel like I've come to a place where I recognize that he was doing the best he could with what he had. That's not to let him off the hook. My dad did a lot of really crappy things that I held him accountable for. But still, with that said, it's important to teach dads also that you can have difficulty or anger or sadness about your own father and the legacy he left you. You can also cherish any of the good stuff. Even if that's just that they gave you life; which sometimes guys even struggle with that. But you can hold the good and the bad. I think that's an important thing, because our children are going to do this. Whether we like it or not, they are going to have an opinion about their relationship with us. That's fact. Whether they do it in an activity like this or not, each generation's job is to look back and say, "what do I want to keep, what do I want to do differently?" So, looking forward is a great way to start with dads.

Discussion of slide: Understanding your Legacy: Gifts and Liabilities from Your Father

The next step I like to do is say, "now that we're being intentional as fathers, let's look back." I've learned through a lot of experience, if you start here, sometimes you never leave here. If you start by looking back at the legacy, because so many men in programs or often that we just run into in this generation, have a lot more liabilities that they are left with; and this is the way I look at the legacy, and this is a partial list. In the activity that you can download, it has a longer list of gifts and liabilities. I'll say to dads, "what are the gifts that your dad gave you and what are the liabilities?" The liabilities could be thought of as mistakes, or a liability is something that you are now carrying forward. One of the things that you want to do differently. A lot of times dads will





circle things on that liability list, like “he was completely absent,” and say it's really a gift. And why is that a gift? It becomes a gift in that it's like I'm not going to do that.

Participant: I just want to add one thing. I think that it is not often ... you can't pick it up, what affects a lot of dads' long term is the mindset that “you can't do.” I know guys who are physically brilliant. Mentally. They can do some amazing things illegally. Their mindset is one that they just can't get out of the fact that I can shift this to a positive in my life. I've seen guys who can do all kinds of things, but their mindset that's been given to them is you're never going to be anything, and that is as crippling as any physical ailment.

John Badalament: Great point. I don't know if anyone's familiar with Chef Jeff Henderson. If you're not, I would recommend his book, *If You Can See It, You Can Be It*. If I had my slides I could show you a video clip, because I interviewed him. He said he calls that a criminal mindset. He works with a lot of incarcerated dads. He started out as a drug dealer and was incarcerated for over 10 years. He then worked his way up to being the head chef at Bellagio in Las Vegas. Now he's doing incredible work with incarcerated dads and with youth. He talks about that very same idea. The mindset. He calls it killing the criminal mindset. It's very similar to what you're saying, about a fixed mindset versus growth mindset. Fixed mindset is this is how I am, and this is how I will always be.

This is one of those things that Antonio is already teaching his son, which is a growth mindset, which says if I do this then I can be like this. Or said differently, if I read, I can actually speak more intelligently about this subject. The growth mindset was something I worked on with my children all the time. You didn't just do that. You didn't get that grade because you are smart. That's a fixed mindset. I am smart, you are not. No. You got that. I'll ask it as a question. How did you get that grade? You went up from this to that. How'd you do that? Well, I studied more. I try and help them see that's a growth mindset. When you decide to do something and you change it, that's how change happens. It's possible anyways. Thank you. That's a really important point. Anything else on the legacy? Like I said, this is an area that dads can get so stuck in. They get this fixed mindset, I am destined to repeat these mistakes. It's no small thing.

Here's a video that I show that captures, in the most concise two minutes, the most important ways of sorting through a legacy, which, let's be real here, can take a lifetime. This isn't something you do in one session and then you're good to go, you fixed that legacy. This video is from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* with Will Smith. Apparently the interview Will Smith gave after about this particular clip spoke about his own experience with his father. Let's put it this way, you can tell this doesn't feel much like acting. What I want to highlight is he goes through all the stages of what I think are critical to sorting through a legacy, in this one interaction. We





will talk about those stages later; but, I want you to be thinking about what he is talking about. He does it in a very concise way.

Video:

Uncle Phil: If you walk out of Will's life now, don't you ever come back. Sit down.

Lou: I ain't got time for a lecture.

Uncle Phil: I said sit down, Lou. You know, Will was doing just fine 'til you showed up. But now that you're back, you have responsibilities to him.

Lou: We're still going to take the trip.

Uncle Phil: Oh bull. Bull. Will is not a coat that you hang in the closet then pick it up when you're ready to wear it. His life goes on. He's not supposed to be here for you. You're supposed to be here for him.

Lou: You get off my back. You think I want this? It just happened. When Will was a baby, I was scared.

Uncle Phil: Cut the crap. Cut it. Because I been there, but I didn't run out on my family. I was there every day for them, because that's what a man does.

Lou: Fine, Phillip. You win. You the man. You a better man than me.

Uncle Phil: You happy? Now you going to tell Will or not? I'm not going to do your dirty work for you.

Lou: Fine. I'll call him from the road.

Uncle Phil: Yeah, then why don't you do that.

Lou: Yeah, I'll do that.

Will: Daddy-oh. What's up?

Lou: Will. Man, I'm glad you here. Some business came up I got to handle. So, we're going to have to put our trip on hold. You understand.





Will: Yeah. That's cool. That's cool.

Lou: Just for a couple weeks.

Will: Mm-hmm (affirmative), I understand.

Lou: Maybe a little longer.

Will: Yeah. Whatever. Whatever.

Lou: Look. I'll call you next week and we'll iron out the details, okay?

Will: Yeah, yeah.

Lou: It was great seeing you, son.

Will: You too, Lou.

Uncle Phil: I'm sorry, Will.

Will: You know, actually this works out better for me. You know? Y'know, the slimmies of summer come to class wearin' next to nothin'.

Uncle Phil: Will, it's all right to be angry.

Will: Why should I be mad? At least he said goodbye this time. I just wish I hadn't wasted my money buying this stupid present.

Uncle Phil: I'm sorry. If there was something that I could do.

Will: You know what? You ain't got to do nothing, Uncle Phil. You know, ain't like I'm still five years old, you know? Ain't like I'm going to be sitting up every night asking my mom, "When is daddy coming home?" You know? Who needs him? He wasn't there to teach me how to shoot my first basket. But I learned didn't I? And I got pretty damn good at it too, didn't I Uncle Phil?

Uncle Phil: Yeah, you did.





Will: Got through my first date without him. Right? I learned how to drive, I learned how to shave, I learned how to fight without him. I had 14 great birthdays without him. He never even sent me a damn card. To hell with him. I didn't need him then and I don't need him now.

Uncle Phil: Will.

Will: Nah. You know what, Uncle Phil? I'm going to get through college without him. I'm going to get a great job without him. I'm going to marry a beautiful honey. And I'm going to have me a whole bunch of kids. I'm gonna be a better father than he ever was. And I sure as hell don't need him for that. Because there ain't a damn thing he could ever teach me about how to love my kids. How come he don't want me, man?

John Badalament: It's amazing, two minutes, two and a half minutes or so. Lots of reaction in terms of legacy. It's really powerful. I also have dads who take a few moments usually to let that settle in. It brings up a lot of feelings. So, thoughts on the legacy? What struck you about that clip?

Participant: Very powerful. I remember watching it when that show was on. That scene still remains iconic. People still recall it. It's that kind of power.

John Badalament: I think Will Smith said that he was drawing on experience, which is why I think it doesn't feel like acting. It feels so genuine. Goes right to the heart of the matter. Any other comments, thoughts that struck you about it? It's still powerful after however many years.

Participant: I think for me, I try to look at both sides. I've heard stories similar to what you mentioned earlier about how some of them say, my father forgot all about me. And a lot of it has to do with their own fatherlessness. As a mother, I wasn't given a guide. And I wish that I had some of the tools that are out there now for parents. So, for me, it's hurtful on both sides. I'm still kind of torn up. I saw this years ago. But I can sympathize with the emotion in Will, because I've been through something similar with my father. But, I can sympathize with the father because after explanation and conversation, my father told me some of the same things. And a lot of that is fear. It's just sad all the way around.

John Badalament: Yes it is. And Lou, played by Ben Vereen, you don't get to know much about his experience with his own father, which you point to getting to know that can help. I also had some experience myself, getting to know what my dad's story was. But a lot of times, men and women don't ever know that story. You don't necessarily get to hear it. But I think it is an important thing to learn to empathize and say hey, whatever happened, something bad happened that he didn't stick it out. Usually working with dads, you can say look, you see how hard it is.





Not everybody sticks around. I think that is important to have empathy on both sides. I use this clip to show the stages I mentioned. If you think about it, as a way of taking that two minutes and expanding it over, could be a lifetime. But the first stage was Will had to face his legacy. So that's part of what we do in this work, is we help dads even just turn and look at it. Just turn to face the legacy and say who was my dad, who was my mom, who were these people, because part of the work is doing that consciously, so it doesn't come outside of us. He turns, he faces it. In this case he came bounding into the room and he faced disappointment pretty quickly. That disappointment led to a little bit of denial. Like oh, it's okay, doesn't bother me. Which quickly led to anger. He called him Lou and disconnected from him. That anger then came out with Uncle Phil. I just love the body language. If you looked at the body language, Ben Vereen was sort of bouncing all over the place, inconsistent. He wouldn't settle, whereas Uncle Phil, to me, as a father figure, his body language said it all. He was solid. He was consistent. All he did was turn when Will went bounding by him. He just turned and he stood there while Will went through that anger. Then that anger led to sadness. It broke. Again, Uncle Phil was a rock in that sense. He just held him, which is oftentimes what anyone needs, especially guys. They need somebody not to break down. They need somebody who's going to be there solid for them.

Then Will broke down into sadness. A stage I think that often gets missed when we look at this, legacy is grief. Generally speaking, men don't do grief really well. I think we do it through anger. That tends to be one way. If it doesn't come out, in my opinion, grief doesn't get addressed if there's no space for that grief. Oftentimes this is what we do in programs, in groups, is create a space for that grief. Then it comes out in the people around us, sideways. Like I said, it can come in anger or come out as abuse. It can come out as sadness, falling apart. Or it gets turned inwards. We know that there will be depression, anxiety, and suicide. Men commit suicide more often than women do. It can come out in any number of ways. That grief that can bring you into grief really quickly.

Participant: What's also important, that men don't do well, is forgive. Usually after facing a legacy, there has to be some forgiveness of that legacy. Sometimes it's also forgiving themselves because when dads see things like this, at times they realize that they repeated some of those patterns. They're hesitant to check back in or resume their roles as parents because they already feel they failed. Just like they were failed. So, forgiving what's happened to them, and also forgiving themselves, is a huge step that then allows them to be able to refocus on their role and responsibility as parents. It's not too late to repair, rebuild, and move forward.

John Badalament: Awesome, and from that was sort of that last stage, which I think that grief brings you to. But again, that has to be done consciously, which is moving toward forgiveness or acceptance, because forgiveness can look so different for so many people. I love what you said, it's forgiveness not just for the father but for the ways that we've repeated those things, and that,





to me again, is that last stage. This has all been squeezed into such a short time. These are stages and they're not necessarily linear, but I do think that there's a really critical piece there and that's grief. That in our programs, in our work with dads, if we can get to that grief we stand a much better chance of moving into forgiveness and acceptance. And that forgiveness is often the tricky part, is what I think of as sort of false forgiveness, meaning he did what he did and it's cool, I'm good. I'm just not going to do what he did. Oftentimes maybe that's true and that happens, but usually there's a lot more behind it, a little more work than just saying you're going to do it differently. Here's where I want to leave you with: a couple of very practical points and activities and practices for dads.

Developing an emotionally connected relationship. Again, one of these things, like what does that mean. I try to think of it as two things you have to connect emotionally. You have to know and be known. You've got to know the other person, in this case your child. And how do you know them? You have to listen, you have to be there, you have to be present, you have to be attentive. That's how you know anybody. You have to ask questions. Then being known is you have to let them into who you are. You have to open up. That's where vulnerability comes in. And that, again, can be challenging. One great way of doing that for dads, I think, is to help them think of stories. Stories of you at your child's age. What were you like at your child's age that you can tell them about? Those kinds of stories. **Know and be known.**

Here's a key, just a research point, which again I think is one of those that is fairly easy to grasp. The idea called parental knowledge. I think of it as knowing. But the degree to which parents know, Dad knows, what's going on with his child, makes a huge difference. Knowing what they're up to on a daily basis. Knowing who their friends are, what they're doing. What are their interests. It's not only important in building a relationship. If I know that my child has finals this week, that's helpful. I can ask them questions like "how'd you do on the science exam?" as opposed to "how was school?" In which case you get a response like good or fine. Having details to ask them is really key. But also, it's a protective factor. It's really protective because it's research that to me makes logical sense. If I know what's going on in your life, you're going to be a little less apt to perhaps do some of those things you shouldn't be doing. If I know where you are after 10:00, when not many good things happen for 14 and 16-year-olds. Knowing what's going on in their lives.

Here's the key factor. This starts young, **parental knowledge.** This is great, I have dads write it down. What are three things you should know about at all times about your child's life? Where they are, what they're doing, and who they're with. You can know those things, or you can just keep that as a daily checklist. To say where, and I do this right now with my children. I will finish this workshop and I'll say all right, what time is it. Where are they? Have they left school yet, where are they going? A way for dads to do this is to think of it as a quiz. This is a full





activity you can download. But the quiz is really fun when the children get older for dads to do this quiz with them. There's a version where children can take a quiz about their dad's life that is really interactive. Because the child can say no, you got that wrong, Dad. That's not my favorite food. I will often have dads make up questions and it's a very nice interactive way for dads to be knowledgeable about their children's lives. You should pass the quiz, and I think there's 10 questions in the longer version. You should be passing this quiz. You should ace it every day. You won't, but you should. That's how you look at it. I should be knowledgeable of what my children are doing. Then there is an interactive one for children 5-8. This is where they might even choose one or two of these questions, where the dad answers the questions and the child answers the questions. They each answer them. The dad will write two things he likes about himself, and the child will write two things they like about themselves. Then Dad will answer two things he likes about the child and then the child will do the same. It's a way that when they go back and forth, they can begin the work of the relationship. This is what's important. I call it a relationship checkup. You go to the doctor, the dentist, and get your car checked up on. Why don't we check up on our relationships? This starts early and the content is not as important as the process. Meaning, for a dad to say to his child hey, it's important to me that we talk about our relationship and we talk about you and me. That sends a huge message. That's teaching children relationship by doing relationship.

Last point. **Ritual time**, creating time. This is something for dads that I think is critical. Make sure you have one on one time with your children. Be consistent. It doesn't have to be exactly the same time every month, but that can be really helpful to have it be regular. The third whatever Saturday, we're going to do what we do. Following the child's interest, but ritualizing it, I think, is really critical because then it builds in consistency. Even if it's just once a month is what I like to say. It doesn't have to be any quality time, as they say, just time together.

There's the toolkit. That's the link where you can get the handouts. Also, Gardener's work [Gardner Wiseheart] is out there as well. Which is really important.

