

STRONG FATHERS

STRONG KIDS





You Are Important.

You brought this amazing little child into the world.

A child that looks up to you more than you know.

You are their hero. Children who grow up with an involved father are much more likely to be successful in school and they are twice as likely to go to college or find a good job after high school.

This booklet explores the core qualities of a strong father who really makes a difference. **By being a strong father, you can put your child on the path to change the world.**





Strong Fathers Are Self-Aware.

We all want our children to grow up to be good people.

It is important to identify things about yourself that you want to pass on, and maybe some things you don't.

Be the person that you want your child to admire.

THINK ABOUT:

What makes a good dad?

What are my best traits?

What do I want to work on most?



Work on Bad Habits

We all have bad habits. But if bad habits are hurting your family life, they need to be addressed. For example, your natural reaction to frustration or stress might be to yell or overreact. Being aware of this is the first step. Instead, think of a plan to calm yourself.

Try “Box Breathing.” Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds and hold for 4 seconds. Do this 1-3 times before you address the situation.

Anticipate Stressors

If you know that after work you’re tired and more likely to be annoyed, schedule a few moments to be calm and ready before engaging with your family. It’s also OK to say, *“Daddy needs a few minutes of alone time. I will play with you in ten minutes.”* And set the timer.

Apologize When You’re Wrong

It can be tempting to beat yourself up when you say something hurtful. Instead, just apologize. This can be as simple as saying, *“I am sorry for what happened earlier. I wasn’t being the kind of father I want to be.”* Or *“I’m sorry. Can we start over?”*

If we beat ourselves up for a mistake, our kids will too. It is very powerful to apologize to your child. It shows that you aren’t perfect. But more importantly, it teaches your child that they don’t have to be perfect to be loved by their dad.

Your Partner is Your Teammate

Sometimes we tend to blame others, make excuses, start a fight, or check out when we are challenged. But this will just create a wedge with your partner. If something has been bothering you or has been repeated throughout the week, find a time to communicate without distractions. This could be Saturday mornings over coffee, or Friday night after the kids go to sleep. Ask questions and try to genuinely understand your partner’s perspective.



Strong Fathers Set the Example.

Kids are like sponges, absorbing everything you say. With children, so much is “caught” not “taught.” They see everything. Like how you treat their mother and when you do the opposite of what you say. They learn more by observing you than by being told what to do. Children have never been very good at listening to their parents, but they never fail to imitate them.

Avoid Bad Labels

Think about how you talk about others. If you describe someone as “idiot”, “stupid”, “lazy” or worse, your child will as well. Swearing will also be imitated. And how you talk to someone is just as important as the words you use. If you speak to your partner and others with respect, your kids will too.

Model Good Manners

Do you say “*please*” and “*thank you*”? Do you give others eye contact when you speak with them? Do you put away your phone at the dinner table? Your children can grow up to be ladies and gentlemen by imitating you.



Do the Right Thing

Have your young children help you unload the dishwasher.
Give a few dollars to the homeless man or give of your time.
If you value your faith, make church a priority. Be focused and attentive. If you set an example of integrity, your children will follow.

Live Healthy

You might be surprised to learn that some children actually like vegetables. But not if their father says, "*Broccoli is gross!*" You really have the power to put your child on a path to lifelong health by adopting some healthy habits of your own. Start eating your vegetables. Work out. Watch less television. Spend time outside. When you adopt a healthier lifestyle, it will not only improve your life, but it will have a ripple effect in your family.

Be Positive

Life can be hard and it's easy to focus on the negative. But work to be positive. Try to see the silver lining in your own setbacks. It will help your children when they have a tough challenge. And sometimes the best reaction to small misfortunes (*like spilling milk on the kitchen floor*) is just to laugh.





Strong Fathers Find Time.

Making your child feel important really builds their confidence. And the best way to do this is with one-on-one time. Devote time to just that child!

Spend time listening and talking with your child with eye contact. These moments of individual time all add up to a very loved child. One day, before you know it, your child will be grown up and be your best friend. Your child will be kind and loving, have good social skills, and be respectful. You will see confidence in your child because of the time that you took to be with them, to learn about them, to talk to them, to love them.

It's the simple act of individual time that shows your child that you care.



Quality vs. Quantity Time

We all have such busy lives, so make the most of the few minutes that you do have every day. No distractions. And just do something that your child wants to do. It might be reading, coloring, exploring outdoors or playing with them. Find your own way.

Identify some favorite ways to be with your child:

When/If Commitments

Think ahead to your week and make some specific plans your child can look forward to. Use the word “when” for plans you can stick with and “if” for conditional plans.

EXAMPLES:

“WHEN I get home from work on Monday, we will play catch.”

“IF I have the day off on Saturday, I will go to the baseball game with you.”

For all **WHEN** commitments, always follow through.

For **IF** commitments, *should the condition happen*, always follow through.

Family Dinners

Ditch the phones and have family time or family dinner together. Talk about your day and listen to each other. Learn to be the family who gives loving, undivided attention. Try some conversation starters:

“If you could have dinner with any famous person, who would it be?”

“If you could have any superpower, what would you choose?”

“What was the best part of your day today? The worst?”

Bedtime Routines

One way to carve out one-on-one time with your child in a busy day is to have a special bedtime routine. You can cuddle with your child for a few minutes, read a book or just discuss their day. Give your child a hug and tell them that you will always love them through good and bad.

And if you’re not home at bedtime, you can create other routines, like Saturday routines and breakfast routines.





Strong Fathers Nurture Communication.

You are your child's hero. They want to tell you everything. And they want you to be proud. Working on positive communication skills with your child will lead to a relationship where they are able to discuss everything with you. Anything from the difficulty of a bully at school to the excitement of hitting a home run.

Listen

It really does start with listening. Dads are notorious for listening for a few minutes and then going into "fix it" mode. Resist the temptation to always be giving advice. Starting at an early age, practice just listening to your child without judgment and without always trying to correct or fix things.

EXAMPLE:

Your daughter says, *"Jessica wouldn't let me sit with her at lunch."* Instead of giving her advice on how to navigate her relationship at school, just empathize with your daughter and tell her you love her.

Be Patient

With younger kids, dads can feel exhausted by the number of questions they get asked every day. Be careful not to respond in ways that shut down the conversation, like *“How many times have I told you?”* or *“I don’t know!”*

If you sometimes feel like you’re on the firing line of your child’s questions, it is important to be patient and continue to show interest. Try asking a question of your own.

EXAMPLE:

Child: *“Do snakes have ears?”*

Father: *“That’s an interesting question. What do you think?”*

Don’t Interrogate

Older kids tend to clam up when asked a lot of questions, especially if they sense the questions are coming from a place of judgment. Unless it’s a matter of safety, there is nothing you need to know this exact second. Give your child space to share when he’s ready.

EXAMPLE:

Instead of: *“How was school today?”*

Try: *“I sure do miss you when I’m at work!*

My favorite part of the day is when I come home!”

Let Your Child Speak for Himself

We’ve all done it. We answer questions for our children.

This, unfortunately, sends the message that their opinions don’t matter and holds them back from developing skills they need for the future. Instead of jumping in to do things for your kids or answer for them — let them answer, struggle, and think for themselves. And if it’s awkward, don’t make a big deal out of it.





Strong Fathers Discipline Positively.

As a dad, you are vitally important to help your child learn about consequences and taking responsibility for their actions. But this does not mean losing your temper, yelling or being heavy-handed. When correcting your child, always be calm and speak in a measured tone of voice.

Acknowledge Their Feelings

Even a baby or toddler feels better when you say, *"I understand you are upset. You really wanted to stay longer at the park, didn't you?"* This can be challenging, especially in the heat of the moment. But it sends a powerful, affirming message to your child and eases the correction you are making.

Catch Them Being Good

Look for an example of your child doing something good — *telling the truth, being kind, helping others, etc.* — however small. When you find it, hold your child and thank him for being honest, kind or considerate. Tell your child how proud it makes you. This will make them want to do it again.

Teaching Lessons in a Fun Way

Sometimes a little “reverse psychology,” making a game out of it or humor can help. You can say, *“Okay, I don’t want anyone to get ready for bed. Just sit there and don’t put your pj’s on.”* Or try the “fooler” approach. *“I bet nobody here knows how to brush their teeth by themselves.”* Kids love this game because they get to tell dad he’s wrong.

Use “I Statements”

Too often, fathers rely on “you” statements like: *“you should...”, “you shouldn’t...”, “why do you always...”*

Too many “you” statements can feel critical and make a child become defensive or shut down.

Help your child understand the problem by using **“I STATEMENTS”** instead.

EXAMPLE:

“I get nervous (what you feel) when I see you waving your toy close to the baby (what you see), because the baby could get hurt (why you feel it) and I know you wouldn’t like that to happen (reassurance of trust).”

Deal with Disrespect Calmly

Children make mistakes. We all do. And dealing with disrespect is stressful. If you feel anger boiling up, take a few minutes to regroup. Children respond best to a calm, reasonable approach.

Support Your Child’s Mother

If your child can run to you for permission after his mom says “no,” he is learning to play his parents against each other. When there is a disagreement with your partner, address it at a time when the two of you can be alone.





Strong Fathers Are Respectful.

Respect is about seeing how special other people are and acting out of love. As fathers, it is easy to fall into a trap of communicating with a lot of ordering and directing. But when you treat your children with respect, they learn to be respectful as well. And children who respect others ultimately earn the respect of those around them.

Appreciate Your Child's Uniqueness

Teaching your child respect starts with embracing their special qualities. No child is a clone or "mini-me". What are your child's unique talents and interests? **Share your answers with your child.**

One way my child is special is:

Something I really love about my child is:

Speak Well of Your Kids

A child who knows his worth is more likely to see the good in others. Reflect your child's goodness back to him by looking for opportunities to praise good behavior. Try not to vent about your child to others.

EXAMPLE:

Instead of saying: *"He never listens to me!"* or
"She always fights with her brother!"

Focus on the positive: *"He put the whole puzzle together."*
"She did something so kind for me."

Give Your Full Attention

You can't be there all the time, but when you are there

MAKE IT COUNT! Put down your phone or your work.

Get down to your child's eye level and look them in the eye.

Genuinely listen and respond in a meaningful way, not just with vague comments that are a dead give-away that your mind is somewhere else.

Speak Well of Your Partner

Negative words can build huge resentments in the family. Treat your partner as patiently and lovingly as you do your children.

Do not criticize or complain about her. And show her honest and sincere appreciation as often as you can.

Don't Be Overly Critical of Yourself

In addition to respecting others, avoid being overly critical or negative about yourself. Even if you are positive with your children, any negativity will eventually rub off and impact them.

Love yourself like you love your kids!

Respect Your Child's "Readiness"

Don't force your child to do something they don't feel comfortable doing. For example, imagine that you've planned a pool day with your entire family. But your toddler says, *"I don't want to go in the water."* What was supposed to be a fun day has now become a power struggle.

Instead of saying, *"Come on! It's going to be so much fun!"* say, *"No worries. When you decide, you'll get in the water."*

Show respect and let your child take the leap on his terms.





Your child looks up to you more than you know.

You are their hero. You may not realize how important you are to your child's confidence and development. But you are.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START BEING A STRONG FATHER.

So cut yourself some slack for not implementing what you didn't know. Children are impressionable at every age. Your investment in your child at any age will change the world.

Start today.