

# Fatherliness: Becoming a Father is Easy Enough, But Being One can be Rough

Just as it's possible to be a mother without being motherly, it's possible to be a father without being fatherly. Fatherliness is a set of attitudes and actions that most men find themselves inclined toward, but this inclination has to be accepted, disciplined, and put to good use. Being a good father is not something that happens automatically. It's a matter of choice.

Frankly, the present age is a tough age in which to be a father. No longer are there any social norms that tell a father what to do. Many fathers are disoriented and discouraged. And not only that, now that it's somewhat easier for a mother to survive economically without the assistance of a husband, the role of the father in a family is coming to be thought of as unessential, if not altogether undesirable.

But if it's a difficult time, that doesn't mean it's a time for complaining. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," as we like to say. We need to accept responsibility for the fact that, to a large extent, we men have created the present situation by our failures in the past, and rather than resent today's challenge, we need to rise to meet it. As painful as growth can sometimes be, whatever provokes us in that direction should be seen as a good thing, not a bad one.

Words like "responsibility" and "accountability" are of key importance. In the past, we have wanted the benefits of fatherhood without the responsibilities of fatherliness. We've checked into and out of our families' lives so often that it's no wonder our children have questioned whether we loved them dependably. In our "manly" strength, we've spoken so thoughtlessly that any objective observer might question whether we're familiar with the word "consequences."

But words and deeds do have consequences, and we need to take responsibility for them. Yes, our wives and our children are often forgiving, and they'll probably survive our carelessness. But why can't we live so that some really positive consequences are set in motion? Why can't we give our children the gift of honest-to-goodness fatherliness?

*"What a father says to his children is not heard by the world, but it will be heard by posterity." --*  
Jean Paul Richter

Wilhelm Busch