

Fastbreak For Fathers

a monthly e-mail to help you be the kind of dad your child needs you to be.

by Rich Batten, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Douglas County
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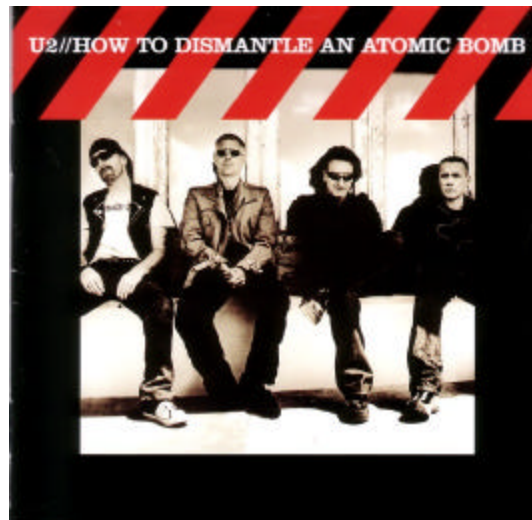
In this issue: Turning Toward Your Family

OBSERVATIONS

“How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb’ is an odd title for an album,” U2 front man Bono said during his Album of the Year acceptance speech. “We accept that. Actually, I was talking about my [late] father Bob. He was the atomic bomb in question. I wanna thank my father Bob for giving me the voice and a bit of attitude to use it.”

Bono's primary parental relationship was with his father. His mother died when he was 14. He has described the home he and his brother grew up in as a house of men, numbed by grief, and unable to share their feelings. He speaks with great affection about his father, who died of cancer in 2001, but admits that their relationship was complex, distant, and one in which he continually yearned for a deeper connection.

In a 2003 interview with the *Telegraph* Bono related: “I had an amazing moment with my old man the first time he came to America. It was in Texas, and at sound-check I organized with the lighting people to put a spotlight on him during the encore. I said, ‘This is the man who gave me my voice. This is Bob Hewson!’ The light came on, 20,000 Texans hooting at him, and he stood up and he just waved a fist at me!”



“After the show, I heard these footsteps behind me, and I looked around and it was my dad. His eyes were watering, and I thought, ‘This is it. This is a moment I’ve waited all my life for. My father was going to tell me he loved me. And he walked up, he put his hand out, a little shaky, a little unsteady - he’d had a few drinks - looked me in the eye and he said, ‘Son - you’re very professional.’”

In his Grammy acceptance speech Bono related, in so many words, that it was time to put the angst of his relationship with his father to rest. Perhaps this album and Grammy was key to verbalizing that commitment, but Bono had already demonstrated that decision through the relationship he has sought to nurture by turning toward and being emotional available to his own children.

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RESEARCH

When it comes to learning about men's communication of affection Kory Floyd, associate professor of Human Communication Studies at Arizona State University, is the person to tap into.

In a study published in 2000 Floyd and Mark Morman, considered the amount of affectionate communication fathers give their own sons by examining the amount of affection men received from their own fathers. Their prediction, that **men are most affectionate with their sons when they had fathers who were either highly affectionate or highly unaffectionate**, rang true. Men with affectionate fathers were more likely to model their fathers' behaviors than men with unaffectionate fathers are to compensate for it.

Yet as Bono and others demonstrate emotionally distant, **unaffectionate patterns of paternal communication is not destined to be repeated in succeeding generations**, but are, at least with respect to affection, often compensated for as men attempt to create stronger and more positive relationships with their sons than they had with their own fathers.

www.asu.edu/clas/communication/people/faculty/floyd/

Floyd, K., & Morman, M. T., (2000) Affection Received From Fathers as a Predictor of Men's Affection with their Own Sons: Tests of the Modeling and Compensation Hypotheses. *Communication Monographs*, 67, 347-361.

ACTION Plan

One of the best ways I have found to nurture a strong, positive relationship with my kids is to mindfully be aware of turning toward them rather than away or against them during our normal and often mundane interactions through the day. This is because the mundane and often fleeting moments we experience as a family contributes significantly to the positive affect of our relationships.

In any given day, we each express verbal or nonverbal bids to connect with people. Most are seemingly inconsequently – “Dad, did you hear about the Nuggets game last night?” . . . “Is it okay if I change the radio station?” etc. How you respond to another's seemingly insignificant “bid” helps to set the tone of your relationship. **Turning toward your child's bids makes a deposit into your child's Emotional Bank Account.**

The importance of relational bids was discovered by the work of **Dr. John Gottman** at the University of Washington. In the early 90's, Gottman and others set up an apartment lab to observe couples in a homelike setting in order to learn more about what makes relationships succeed or fail. One of their surprises came in the form of how powerful just paying attention to one another is to the long-term health of a relationship.

Gottman's research revealed that as a listener **we basically have one of three ways to respond to another's bid for connection.** We can:

Turn Against – Respond to a bid for connection in a crabby, irritable or critical way. This is one way to lose points from the *Emotional Bank Account*. - “Why do you waste your time on the Nuggets, you have more important things to pay attention to, like your homework!”

Turn Away – Ignore a bid for connection and fail to connect with your child. This is usually non-hostile, but



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is a way to lose points from the *Emotional Bank Account* – pretend you don't hear the request.

Turn Towards – Respond to a bid for connection in a responsive, interested and loving way. This adds points to the *Emotional Bank Account* – “No I didn't hear about the game. What happened?” or “I'm really interested, but I have to get ready for my meeting this morning. I'd love to talk about it over dinner this evening.”

Gottman and associates discovered that **successful relationships were characterized by a 20:1 ratio of positive bids and turning toward their partner for every one negative bid or turning against or away from their partner.** The insight here is that turning toward instead of away during the small everyday interactions of the day adds up and will eventually have a significant impact on our relationships. It is important to add that Gottman's research focused on couples, and I am not making a research-based application to kids, but my personal experience is that when I mindfully turn toward my children, rather than against or away, we develop a far better connection over time.

Having a satisfied relationship is all about connecting with your child and choosing to turn toward them instead of turning away or against them. When done on a regular basis (think 20:1), I believe you will soon discover that you and your child are growing closer emotionally and are experiencing less conflict.

Connections & Classes (Metro Denver & Beyond)

Denver's WB2 Work and Family Segment – The WB's Morning Anchor, Natalie Tysdal discusses work and family issues with Rich Batten at approximately 6:40 AM every other Tuesday. Additional information on each segment is available at www.douglascountyextension.org (click on the WB2 logo).



Fathers and Families Certificate Program – Red Rocks

Community College in Lakewood, Colorado is offering a Certificate Program for professionals who work with fathers. Educator, author and activist Doug Gertner will teach the fatherhood courses. Other classes that are a part of the certification include courses on child development and working with parents, families and community systems. For more information contact Kathleen DeVries at 303.914.6326 or Kathleen.devries@rrcc.edu or visit www.rrcc.edu/ece/fathercert.html

You can't be the kind of dad that you want to be. You can't be the kind of dad that you wanted to have. You've got to be the kind of dad that your child needs you to be.

Roland Warren, The National Fatherhood Initiative

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