

Suburban Life

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Dad's new role

He should be a guide, not a buddy

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

THE ROLE of a father conjures up a list of universal terms: provider, nurturer, disciplinarian. All readily accepted and expected out of a generation of dads.

"Suppose he doesn't work?" asked Alvin Sims to a group of puzzled fathers. "What happens then?" With a simple query the myths associated with fatherhood begin to fall like a stack of cards in front of an airplane propeller.

Seminars such as "Fathering in the 90s," presented by Sims as part of the Southfield Public School's "Parenting As a Profession" program are not designed to be a forum for a check list of how to's and easy answers. The purpose is to leave questions, leading those fathers in attendance to re-examine their own parenting methods.

For fathers and theirs before them that's been the problem: they've always had all the answers. A litany of dictatorial refrains "Do as I say, not as I do" and "I'm the man of the house and what I say goes" uttered from the mouths of dads for years only confirms this. Many mothers have traditionally bought into this father-knows-best theory. "Wait 'til your dad gets home."

INCREASINGLY WHAT fathers are finding, though, is the old answers just don't work. Society has changed.

"A lot of men in this generation don't know what to do anymore,"

said Sims, a parent educator and probation officer. "There's no clear cut rules. What men do, what women do... the roles are not clearly defined."

"We have to be better fathers than our fathers because everything is changed in the '90s, and we don't want to lose our children."

"What's going to happen to fathers is the pressure to spend time — which is increasingly becoming more difficult — that quality time is going to have to be something different," said Bill Winkler, a parent educator who conducts seminars through West Bloomfield Schools Community Education. "I think dads are going to have to be more whole. They'll have to be a guide as opposed to being a big buddy."

"To be a guide, fathers will need to take active roles in all phases of child rearing and provide consistent and effective discipline. Above all else dads need to communicate with their kids effectively — and certainly more positively (see related story)."

Experts agree poor self-esteem is what leads kids astray. A dad's role in this is imperative.

In the "Fathering in the '90s" seminar, parents were asked to break into subgroups of four. The idea was to get them to reflect on their father's impact and how they would do things differently.

MANY SPOKE of how their fathers tended to be critical, often demanding perfection out of them as children. They also found themselves detached emotionally from their dads.



"One thing that came up in comment was whether we are emotionally available for our children," said Matthew Swora of Lathrup Village and father of two children.

ages 3 and 6. "Three of us in our group agreed our fathers weren't always emotionally available to us"

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Give your children positive messages

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Sure, we've heard them. "You're just like your father, stubborn as a mule."

We've grimaced at them. "How many times do I have to tell you?"

We've vowed never to say the same things to our children.

"Look at you, you're a mess!"

Yet we do.

We've filed them away and carry them with us like an overstuffed index card box, ready for retrieval at a moment's notice when the heat of parenting is turned up.

What parents say to their children has a lasting impact.

Judith Cox, director of Wise Mothers Inc., holds an imaginary orange in front of parents during a seminar in non-critical parenting at Orchard Lake Middle School. She pretends to squeeze the orange.

"What is coming out of it? Orange juice, right," Cox said. "What's inside of us comes out when we are squeezed."

"When your children are squeezed, what comes out of them is what is inside of them. We have to speak to our children so they have a strong self-image of who they are."

REMARKS PARENTS make to their kids, however resounding or subtle, leave an unmistakable impression.

The comments made are mostly negative ones.

"I was always compared to other kids," said Pat Covert of Farmington Hills, who is a mother to two children ages 2 and 5 attending the seminar. "I was insecure as a child."

Cox cites a couple of studies. In one, a college grad followed around a 2-year-old during the course of a

day. The observer noted negative comments outnumbered positive ones 438 to 38.

The critical ones ranged from "stupid brat" to more subtle "sit up straight." When praise was rendered, it was somewhat generic like "That's a good boy." As the child got older, studies indicate the critical remarks increased to a ratio of 18 to 1.

A child on the end of a seemingly endless barrage of negative comments is more likely to grow into a person who constantly seeks approval, is filled with self-doubt, tends to be judgmental and unable to give love in return, experts say.

Also, as a result, discipline could be affected.

"A CHILD HAS two choices as they hear critical comments," Cox said. "One, they will begin to believe what you will tell them. Or, two, they can leave it out and not listen to what their parents ever say."

The University of California did an in-depth study of children between ages 9-17, trying to find the root causes of substance abuse. The study found those less likely to abuse substances had fathers who provided more praise, sought advice of moms and complied with rules.

Cox points out, though, there's praise and then there's praise.

Remarks such as "You're great" or "You're wonderful" sound nice but are generally evaluative, vague and non-productive. She recommends descriptive comments, telling the child what you see and what you feel and then summing it up in a word.

For example, Cox uses an exercise where a child has just dressed herself for the first time.

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Bookstore for women 'spiritually centered'

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

What was once a drop off spot for newspapers has become a cozy cavern for the printed word — Dancing Bear Books.

Like the name says, there are books for sale. But this quaint, cinderblock building sequestered from the traffic noise off Grand River in Farmington doesn't exactly lend itself to browsing for the latest Tom Clancy opus.

A shepherd-huskie mix named "Wool" wags his tail and sniffs as part of the greeting committee. There's a "quiet" area with a couch and a place for psychic endeavors such as tarot card readings and aromatherapy.

All of this is Sally Holliday's conception of the perfect book store for the "spiritually-centered" woman. "I want to have a space for women to come in and chat or listen to music," said Holliday, who lives in Livonia.

"Women tend to focus on everyone

"Women tend to focus on everyone else. I think it's healthier to bring that center back into yourself."

— Sally Holliday

else. I think it's healthier to bring that center back into yourself."

Holliday can only speak from experience. She is a recovering alcoholic of five years, taking perhaps the most tortuous road of all to self-awareness.

PART OF her therapy is Dancing Bear Books, which is a natural extension of two of her primary passions — reading and feminism.

Holliday, 46, has been a voracious reader all her life. She attended Michigan State University and did office work and waitressing for awhile.

She went on to work and managed several Waldenbook stores, including one on 12 Mile Road in Southfield.

Her feminism was also wrought through literature, becoming "radicalized," she said, after reading "The Dialectic of Sex" by Shulamith Firestone in 1975.

"Feminism to me is having a basic self insight about yourself," Holliday said, "and where everyone is equal. Sexism and racism are interconnected as they say."

Her belief in the connection between the body and the mind might explain the 500-hour course in massage she took at the Myomassages Center in Southfield. Since then, she's been performing massage and has done aromatherapy at psychic fairs in the area.

"HANDS ON" sessions are offered at Dancing Bear Books by appointment as are sessions with a tarot card reader who works on the weekends. On site during regular business hours (4-7 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday) are tapes, greeting cards and a wide assortment of books.

The titles cover everything from the metaphysical to astrology to self-help. Many relate to women, though Holliday said men come in to browse through the self-help books.

Her location on Grand River Avenue, off Haynes, doesn't whisk in much walk-in business. She depends on word-of-mouth or advertisements for customers.

She's placed ads in the Phenom News and passed out flyers, including some at the Women's Health Fair at the Oakland Community College Womencenter.

"I think it (the store) was needed because there was nothing there for women," she said. "There were no book stores basically for women."

On the wall nearby is a painting of bears dancing, which was inspiration for the store's name.

"Native Americans believe the bear is a healer and a very female symbol and considered a generator of rebirth because they hibernate," she said.

But dancing bears? "Life is a dance," she said. "You weave in and out and you change your rhythm."



SHARON LAMUEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dancing Bear Books owner Sally Holliday and her shepherd-huskie dog, "Wool," see eye-to-eye on what makes for a cozy atmosphere at a bookstore.

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