

insights

Leaving your fathering mark

by Michael Grose



Currently, there's a strong tendency to view successful fathering through the lens of skills and knowledge acquisition. That is, to raise kids today effective fathers, like mothers, need to keep building their skill sets (*What's the most appropriate way to manage kids today?*) and their knowledge (*What's the latest research about the impact of digital technology on children?*). Staying one step ahead can be exhausting and make a man feel inadequate if he can't keep up.

Another way to look at fathering is through the generative parenting lens. That is, fathering is an activity that's rooted in a man's biology in much the same way that mothering is an instinctive activity. If the mothering instinct is to nurture and protect children, a father's instinct is to teach and develop his children's skills and knowledge so they can thrive long after the time he's left this world.

The generative fathering notion developed by researchers Dollahite, Hawken and Brotherson explains why many men will turn a simple game they have with their children into a lesson into how to hold a ball; defeat that opponent or stand firm in the face of fear. Father-son relationships can be scuppered by this well-intentioned, but oft mistimed 'you can always get better' attitude.

Generative fathers tend to look long term when they raise their kids. Quintessentially, generative fathers work hard to be good men and good citizens. Love, availability and character become their fathering stock in trade.

Generative fathers keep pace with their children's development adjusting their role at different stages. For instance, during a child's latency (primary school years) they focus on recreational work and so they help develop children's interests and competencies through sport, hobbies and leisure activities. The task for generative fathers of early adolescents is to help their children develop strong values and inner beliefs. This spiritual work (not necessarily in a religious sense) helps young people develop the moral compasses they need to act safely and be good citizens when fathers aren't around.

For generative parents, fathering becomes a lifelong task, and doesn't stop when children become adults, leave home and start families of their own. It is in this stage that men take on mentoring work, passing on the wisdom gained from their experiences to the next generation so that they don't repeat the same mistakes that they have made. Fathering never stops. It changes with the development of your children.

This Father's Day, while enjoying the accolades and attention that will come your way consider the generational impact you are having on your kids.

Your lasting fathering legacy will be determined by the character you display; the way you live your life and how

you relate to your family. Those are attributes that you can continue to work on over the coming twelve months.

You will find more information about generative fathering in my book *A Man's guide to raising kids* at www.parentingideas.com.au



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation* and the best-selling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. His latest release *Anxious Kids*, was co-authored with Dr Jodi Richardson.