



Today's Dads

Newsletter of
Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families
(<http://www.wisconsinfathers.org>)

February 2002

Governor McCallum affirms importance of Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative



By Governor Scott
McCallum

Active, involved
fathers make a
positive difference
in the lives of their
children.

The Wisconsin Fa-
therhood Initiative
was created to edu-
cate people about
the important role a
Father plays in the
life of a child as
well as help fathers

get more involved in the lives of their children.

As a father of three, I can attest to some of the trials of parenting, but I can also speak to the many rewards being an involved father has brought. From the moment our eldest child was born to seeing my youngest play with her school band at my inauguration, my life as a father has been filled with countless moments of pride and joy.

Every father should want to be involved in his child's life. He should want to experience every high and every low. Being there to be supportive is not only beneficial to the child; it helps us grow as parents and as people.

Fathers play so many important roles in the life of a child – teacher, coach, mentor, counselor, doctor, and others. It is through these various roles that an involved

father impacts a child's life in numerous positive ways.

Children with involved fathers do better in school, are better adjusted socially, and have higher levels of self-esteem. They are less likely to take drugs, become a teen parent, or get in trouble with the law.

The Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative is very important to me. One of the first projects I worked on as Governor was a public service announcement for the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative.

Through efforts like this as well as the Fatherhood web-site <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/wifatherhood>, I believe Wisconsin can continue to lead the nation in educating everyone on the valuable difference fathers make in the lives of their children.

Shakespeare once said, "It is a wise father that knows his own child." I find a great deal of truth and wisdom in these words.

A wise father knows his children, and he knows them because he has taken the time to get involved and participate in their lives.

There is no more valuable time than the time you spend with your child. Whether it's to solve a problem or to discuss their goals in life. Your time is critically important to them and their future success in life.

It is my hope that through the Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative more people will come to see and understand the valuable role fathers play in the lives of their children, and together, we will be able to help more dads become "wise fathers."

Distraught father's courthouse suicide highlight America's male suicide epidemic

By Glenn Sacks

San Diego Union-Tribune January 11, 2002

A distraught father struggling with overdue child support obligations and adverse family court decisions committed suicide on the steps of the downtown San Diego courthouse Monday. Angrily waving court documents, 43 year-old Derrick Miller walked up to court personnel at the entrance, said "You did this to me," and shot himself in the head.

Miller is one of 300,000 Americans who have taken their own lives over the past decade--as many Americans as were killed in combat in World War II. America is in the throes of a largely unrecognized suicide epidemic, as suicide has become the eighth leading cause of death in the United States today, and the third leading cause of death among adolescents. All Americans recognize that our country is rife with violent crime, but few know that 50% more Americans kill themselves than are murdered.

Who is committing suicide?

For the most part, men. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, males commit suicide four times as often as females do, and have higher suicide rates in every age group. There are many risk factors for suicide, including substance abuse and mental illness, but the two situations in which men are most likely to kill themselves are after the loss of a job, and after a divorce.

Because our society strongly defines manhood as the ability to work and provide for one's loved ones, unemployed men often see themselves as failures and as burdens to their families. Thus it is not surprising that while there is no difference in the suicide rate of employed and unemployed women, the suicide rate of unemployed men is twice that of employed men.

It is for this reason that economic crises generally lead to male suicide epidemics. During the Midwest farm crisis of the 1980s, for example, the suicide rate of male

farmers tripled. A sharp increase in male suicide occurred after the destruction of Flint, Michigan's 70 year-old auto industry, as documented in the disturbing 1989 film "Roger and Me." Some suicide experts fear a rise in suicide related to our current economic downturn.

The other most common suicide victims are divorced and/or estranged fathers like Derrick Miller. In fact, a divorced father is ten times more likely to commit suicide than a divorced mother, and three times more likely to commit suicide than a married father. According to Los Angeles divorce consultant Jayne Major:

"Divorced men are often devastated by the loss of their children. It's a little known fact that in the United States men initiate only a small number of the divorces involving children. Most of the men I deal with never saw their divorces coming, and they are often treated very unfairly by the family courts."

According to Sociology Professor Augustine Kposow of the University of California at Riverside, "The link between men and their children is often severed because the woman is usually awarded custody. A man may not get to see his children, even with visitation rights. As far as the man is concerned, he has lost his marriage and lost his children and that can lead to depression and suicide."

There have been a rash of father suicides directly related to divorce and mistreatment by the family courts over the past few years. For example, New York City Police Officer Martin Romanchick, a Medal of Honor recipient, hung himself after being denied access to his children and being arrested 15 times on charges brought by his ex-wife, charges the courts deemed frivolous.

Massachusetts father Steven Cook, prevented from seeing his daughter by a protection order based upon unfounded allegations, committed suicide after he was jailed for calling his four-year-old daughter on the wrong day of the week.

Darrin White, a Canadian father who was stripped of the right to see his children and was about to be jailed after failing to pay a child support award tantamount to twice his take home pay, hung himself. His 14 year-old daughter Ashlee later wrote to her nation's Prime Minister, saying, "this country's justice system has robbed me of one of the most precious gifts in my life, my father."

We'll never know exactly why Derrick Miller took his life and if his suicide could have been prevented. What we do

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know is that male suicide is one of America's most serious public health issues, and it is time to address it.

Today's Dads

Today's Dads, published monthly, is a moderate voice for children whose parents aren't married. Seeking fairness, equality and justice in divorce and paternity actions.

Advocating diminished use of sole custody and the preservation of family ties. Promoting shared parenting and a child's right to equal access to both parents. Reminding courts that both parents have a responsibility to provide child support.

Opposing false allegations of battering or abuse to gain the upper hand in custody or visitation disputes.

Today's Dads is distributed to all paid members of Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families. In addition copies of each issue are distributed, without charge, to all Wisconsin legislators, judges and court commissioners as an educational outreach.

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Pay attention to things that really matter

A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, rocks about 2" in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full? They agreed that it was.

So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The students laughed. The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. "Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognize that this is your life.

The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else. The small stuff."

"If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your partner out dancing. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal." "Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."

**Don't forget Valentine's day
is February 14th.**

Letters and e-mail:

Here is an sample e-mail received from our web site at help@wisconsinfathers.org

I am trying to help my boyfriend with his custody case. He has three children with his ex-girlfriend. He acknowledged paternity voluntarily and a child support order was set in place in 1998. There was joint custody but no placement order, only a verbal agreement between them. He has been paying child support of \$1200 per month and has had his children 50% of the time for the past three and a half years.

In September when his child support order came up for review, the mother filed a motion for more child support. He hired a lawyer to appear in court with him. All he wanted was a court order saying that he can have placement of the children like he has for the last three and a half years. All she wanted was to get \$600 more a month from him. Before this court date he had told her that he was willing to continue paying her the current child support amount if he got a court order for the 50/50 placement he was currently having with the children. She said no!

In November before the Family Court Commissioner it had seemed like things went good. The FCC ordered mediation and reduced his child support, effective December 1, in light of the fact that he was taking care of the children 50% of the time. The mother stormed out of the courtroom saying "Your not taking my money away!"

After the hearing, he went to pick up the kids like usual but she and the children were not there. He called the police and they said this was a court matter and did nothing to help him. When he finally got a hold of her the next day by showing up at the house to get the kids she said that he was not getting them and she was going to get a lawyer to get her money back.

Since the beginning of January when she got the lawyer, things got bad again. Her attorney filed a de novo review before a judge. She moved 28 miles away to live with her new boyfriend of six months, and pulled the kids out of school without his permission. She also listed her boyfriend as the father of the children at the new school for registration.

On January 30th there was a hearing before a judge. My boyfriend wanted to stop her from changing the kids

school during the middle of the year. Everything seemed to have backfired on him. The judge allowed her to move the children 28 miles away from the father, change their school and she got her original child support reinstated. Although he came prepared with witness, police reports and copies from the school, the judge just seemed like he didn't want to get involved and refused to listen to anything. The judge stated that she, being the mother, will have full custody until this matter is resolved. He now only has the kids on every other weekend if she allows it. Mediation and GAL are suppose to happen in the next couple of weeks.

I found your web site on Friday and we went to get James Novaks' book. My boyfriend is so depressed and has lost his faith. I have not been impressed with his lawyer and after today he really seemed to have no ideal of what to do. He is a great father.

I am also a single mother and I have to beg my son's father to see him. Fathers like my boyfriend, impress me and I want to help him, but we are lost on what to do now. I thought that maybe you could help us. I have also thought about writing the Washington County Newspapers to help make public awareness of how fathers are being cheated. What are your ideals?

Please Help, he is a wonderful father and I don't like to see caring fathers like him lose the most important things in his life, his children.

Sincerely, Sherry Will New Holstein, WI



Do you want your children to have two parents?

Maybe you or your partner would like to emerge from court flashing a victory sign, but what about your children? If you believe that kids need both parents, I can help. I can teach you how the family law system works, how to develop a winning strategy and how to choose and direct a lawyer for maximum effectiveness.

2-hour private session (by appointment only): \$110.00

Jim Novak - (608) 255-1100

New policy for shared parenting becomes effective in the state of Oklahoma

Today's Dads readers may be interested in the following statutory provisions that became effective on Effective November 1, 2001 in the State of Oklahoma.

§43-110.1. Shared parenting - Policy.

It is the policy of this state to assure that minor children have frequent and continuing contact with parents who have shown the ability to act in the best interests of their children and to encourage parents to share in the rights and responsibilities of rearing their children after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage. To effectuate this policy, if requested by a parent, the court shall provide substantially equal access to the minor children to both parents at a temporary order hearing, unless the court finds that such shared parenting would be detrimental to such child. The burden of proof that such shared parenting would be detrimental to such child shall be upon the parent requesting sole custody and the reason for such determination shall be documented in the court record.



"Father and Child Reunion"

A book by Warren Farrell

The book is filled with information on the important role that fathers play in their children's lives, including the effects on children's health.

These are some of the findings that can be found in this excellent resource (references to the original research in parentheses):

1. Effects of Father Visits on the Health of Premature Infants:

- * An Israeli study found that the more frequently a father visited the hospital of an infant who is prematurely born, the more rapidly the infant gained weight and the more quickly the infant was able to leave the hospital, and the better was the infant's social development and its ability to adapt. (Levy-Shiff R, Hoffman MA, Mogilner S et al. Fathers' hospital visits to their pre-term infants as a predictor of father-infant relationship and infant development. *Pediatrics* 1990; 86: 291-292.)

2. Effects of Father Absence on Child Health Compared to children who live with both parents, children who live with their mother only are :

- * Three times as likely to need treatment for emotional or behavioral problems.
- * One-half more likely to have frequent headaches or chronic asthma.
- * One-third more likely to have one or more indicators of hyperactivity, or to stammer or have other speech defect.
- * One-fourth more likely to have chronic bed-wetting, or to have one or more indicators of anxiety or depression. (National Center for Health Statistics: Family Structure and Children's Health, United States, 1988. Vital and Health Statistics. Hyattsville, MD: NCHS, 1991, Series 10, No. 178)

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3. Effects of the Father-Child Relationship on Drug Use among Youth

- * Positive father sentiment (closeness) accounted for 10% of variance in predicting drug use among youth. Only age accounted for more variance (17%). (Coombs RH, Landsverk J. Parenting styles and substance use during childhood and adolescence. J Marr Fam 1988; 50: 479)

4. Effects of Father Absence on Childrens' Psychiatric Hospitalizations

- * 80% of pre-school children admitted as psychiatric patients in two New Orleans hospitals came from homes without fathers. (Dalton R et al. Psychiatric hospitalization of pre-school children: Admission factors and discharge implications. J Am Acad Child Adoles Psychiatr 1987; 26: 308-312)

5. Effects of Father Absence on Childrens' Suicide Rates

- * Father absence is associated with higher suicide rates in children. (Warren LW, Tomlinson-Keasey C. The context of suicide. Am J Orthopsychiatr 1987; 57: 42; Velez CN, Cohen P. Suicidal behavior and ideation in a community sample of children: Maternal and child health reports. J Am Acad Child Adoles Psychiatr 1988; 273: 349-356)

WisconsinFathers.org

The best parent is both parents

bumper stickers, banners

In an effort to bring greater awareness of our group and resources to the public, WFCF has initiated a promotional effort including billboards, banners, signs and bumper stickers. Available are; 3 1/2"x 11" bumper stickers, 12" by 48" Plexiglas mounted stickers, and 2"x 8' banners. If you have a good public place to display these, contact Joe at 608 882-2412.

Fathers night out

Tuesday, March 5th, 2001 6-9PM
(First Tuesday of every month)

At: The Vientiane Restaurant

1126 South.Park St, Madison,

Social function for WFCF members and friends

Contact Joe at 608-882-2412

Wisconsin Fathers for Children and Families

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