

# Why Children Need a Male and Female Parent

## MARRIAGE MATTERS

### Why Children Need a Male and Female Parent

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- “The cooperative input and influence of a male parent and a female parent is essential for proper child development.
- “As fathering expert Dr. Kyle Pruett of Yale Medical School explains in *Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*, “fathers do not mother.” *Psychology Today* explains, “fatherhood turns out to be a complex and unique phenomenon with huge consequences for the emotional and intellectual growth of children.” A father, as a male parent, brings unique contributions to the parenting project.
- Likewise, a mother, as a female, uniquely impacts the life and development of her child, as Dr. Brenda Hunter explains in her book, *The Power of Mother Love: Transforming Both Mother and Child*. Erik Erikson, a pioneer in the world of child psychology, explained that father love and mother love are qualitatively different kinds of love. *As cited in Kyle D. Pruett, The Nurturing Father, (New York: Warner Books, 1987), p. 49.*

### **Mothers and Fathers parent Differently**

- Dr. Pruett: By 8 weeks of age, infants can tell the difference between a male or female interacting with them. This diversity, in itself, provides children with a broader, richer experience of contrasting relational interactions—more so than for children who are raised by only one gender. Whether they realize it or not, children are learning at earliest age, by sheer experience, that men and women are different and have different ways of dealing with life, other adults and children.

### **Mothers and Fathers Play Differently**

- Fathers tend to play *with*, and mothers tend to care *for*, children....Fathers encourage competition; mothers encourage equity. One style encourages independence while the other encourages security....Both provide security and confidence in their own ways by communicating love and physical intimacy.

### **Fathers Push Limits; Mothers Encourage Security**

- Either of these parenting styles by themselves can be unhealthy. One can tend toward encouraging risk without consideration of consequences. The other tends to avoid risk, which can fail to build independence, confidence and progress. Joined together, they keep each other in balance and help children remain safe while expanding their experiences and confidence.

### **Mothers and Fathers Communicate Differently**

- Father's talk tends to be more brief, directive and to the point. It also makes greater use of subtle body language. Mothers tend to be more descriptive, personal and verbally encouraging.

### **Fathers and Mothers Prepare Children for Life Differently**

- Dads tend to see their child in relation to the rest of the world. Mothers tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their child.

### **Fathers Provide a Look at the World of Men; Mothers, the World of Women**

- Girls and boys who grow up with a father are more familiar and secure with the curious world of men. Girls with involved, married fathers are more likely to have healthier relationships with boys in adolescence and men in adulthood because they learn from their fathers how proper men act toward women. They also learn from mom how to live in a woman's world. This knowledge builds emotional security and safety from the exploitation of predatory males.
- Mothers help boys understand the female world and develop a sensitivity toward women. They also help boys know how to relate and communicate with women.

### **Fathers and Mothers Teach Respect for the Opposite Sex**

- FACT: A married father is substantially less likely to abuse his wife or children than men in any other category. This means that boys and girls with married fathers in the home learn, by observation, how men should treat women.
- The *American Journal of Sociology* finds that, "Societies with father-present patterns of child socialization produce men who are less inclined to exclude women from public activities than their counterparts in father-absent societies." Scott Coltrane, "Father-Child Relationships and the Status of Women: A Cross-Cultural Study," *American Journal of Sociology*, 93 (1988) p. 1088.
- Girls and boys with married mothers learn from their mothers what a healthy, respectful female relationship with men looks like.

### **CONCLUSION**

**When we disregard the gender distinctions of parental influence as unimportant or unnecessary, we seriously diminish the proper development of children.** Kids need the active participation of a mother and a father, and both parents need to be true to their gender designs. Both bring different and equally important things to the parenting project. We impoverish children and society when we deny our kids the influence of a mother and father, because we limit their development into full, healthy adults.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead "All this evidence gives rise to an obvious conclusion: growing up in an intact two-parent family is an important source of advantage for American

children. Though far from perfect as a social institution, the intact family offers children greater security and better outcomes than its fastest growing alternatives: single-parent families and stepparent families." *"Dan Quayle Was Right," Atlantic Monthly (April 1993), p. 19.*