

THE COUNSELOR

A PUBLICATION FOR PARENTS, COUNSELORS & EDUCATORS • PROVIDED BY: CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS OF HOUSTON

VOL. 1, NO. 4

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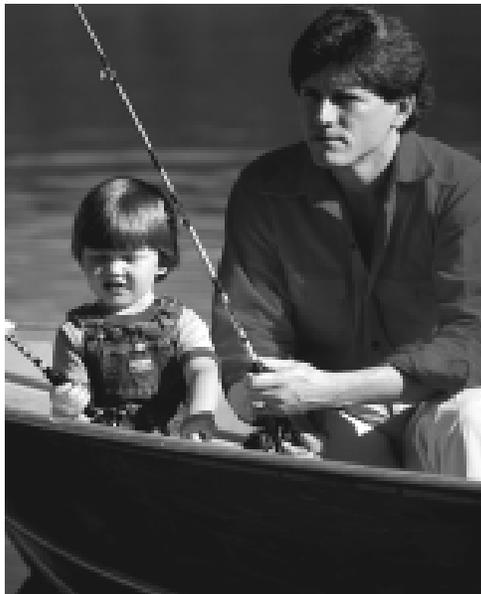
NOVEMBER 1998

SCHOOL FAILURE AND THE FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP

A father's influence on his son's life is profound. There is something very powerful and special about the father's role in shaping the person his son becomes. The father-son relationship (FSR) impacts every aspect of a boy's life.

A growing body of research reveals the tremendous influence the (FSR) exerts on academic achievement and overall psychological adjustment. I have done a substantial amount of research on the (FSR) in addition to counseling numerous fathers and sons over the past fifteen years.

Boys identified as underachievers or at risk for school failure lack the drive - the internal motivation to press forward in academics and life. They usually have the ability to succeed but they sabotage themselves by not turning in homework, skipping classes, and missing critical information. They arrange for others to take care of them. Some drop out of school while most go on to live mediocre lives plagued by underachievement and conflict. Deep down inside, these boys don't believe in themselves. They are disconnected from their fathers and are afraid to move out on their own. They are at risk for school failure and lack a healthy sense of self.



A Father's Impact:

1. The father is a central figure and decisive factor in facilitating conditions related to school failure. The FSR interacts with other variables such as the student's personality, mother-son relationship, peers, family dynamics, and his parent's marital relationship.
2. The FSR affects a boy's internal motivation to achieve in school and succeed in life. It influences the nature of the boy's identification with his father, sex role attitudes, values, beliefs, autonomy, self-concept, and identity.
3. The majority of school failures are insecure with themselves. Conflicted and/or weak FSRs inhibit their emotional development.
4. The reverse exists in achievers. They have strong connections with their fathers and mentors which enhances their self-esteem.
5. Strict adherence to traditional sex role values in fathers is frequently associated with problems in the FSR. The more rigid, dogmatic, and authoritarian the father, the greater risk for developing negative FSRs associated with school failure.
6. Poor FSRs are perpetuated from one generation of men to another.
7. Father hunger accurately describes the son's craving for emotional and physical affection from his father, and is frequently found in underachievers.
8. Proper treatment can help heal the father-son wound. There are ways to prevent this problem from being passed on generationally.

Dynamics: The Father-Son Relationship

The following FSR patterns are common in school failures.

- **Conflicted** - The FSR of school failures is conflicted. A considerable amount of tension exists between father and son.

- **Competition** - Often times fierce competition exists between father and son. The son always loses.
- **Under involved** - Fathers are usually under involved, distant, or absent. They are physically present but emotionally removed.
- **Minimal and superficial interactions.**
- **Over involved and protective** - Some fathers are over involved and protective. They continually rescue their sons from natural consequences.
- **Stuck** - Father and son are stuck, they can't let go and they can't connect with one another. They relate only around power struggles.
- **Blaming** - Father and son project blame onto one another.
- **Mixed feelings** - Father and son have mixed feelings toward each other such as anger, guilt, resentment, shame, and sadness.
- **Mutual disappointment** - The father is disappointed in his son's poor choices and lack of motivation in school and the son feels misunderstood and wishes his father would spend more time with him.
- **Father relates** - to his son more like an employee when trying to motivate him.
- **Lack emotional connection** - Most importantly, father and son lack a solid emotional connection between them. The son does not carry a strong soothing, nurturing mental image of his father in his head. This deficit blocks him from coping effectively with the demands of growing up.
- **Son acts out his feelings** - The son acts out his feelings toward his father by underachieving. Sons also act out their feelings of turmoil associated with adolescent struggles over separation. The son tries to engage his father by behaving irresponsibly and failing in school.
- **Over idealization and devaluation** - The son over idealizes or devalues his father.

Healing the Father-Son Relationship



Fathers:

Assess the quality of your relationship with your son. Acknowledge the significance of improving your relationship. Commit to changing it. Develop patience in working with your son, the process of improving your relationship takes time.

Commit to examining yourself. What was your FSR like? What are your own stresses, conflicts, anxieties and personal issues? Make a conscious effort to work on yourself.

Walk with your son emotionally. Come along side him. Guide him.

Give appropriate consequences. Be firm, consistent, supportive, compassionate, loving, and positive. Promote responsibility gradually.

Model what you want your son to learn.

Express warmth and acceptance for your son. Connect with him on a personal level all the time. Enjoy him.

Believe in him. Tell him you believe in him.

Forgive him when he hurts you. Ask for his forgiveness when you wrong him.

Give your son the blessing. Don't hold back from blessing and affirming him.

Love your son unconditionally.

Grow Strong Father-Son Relationships

1. Participate in child-rearing activities from the beginning with your son.
2. Resolve differences. Avoid harboring resentments.
3. Spend a lot of time with your son. Enjoy him exclusively. Devote special time alone doing chores, going exploring, hiking, fishing, etc.
4. Refrain from developing a relationship based solely on setting limits, directing homework, or teaching him how to be organized or successful.



5. Learn as much as you can about child development, fathering, and men's issues. Attend classes, seminars, retreats, men's accountability groups.
6. Help your son prosper emotionally. Share the joy and excitement of his interests and activities.
7. Develop openness and honesty in sharing ideas, experiences, thoughts, and feelings with your son. Connect with him in the present.
8. Accept and respect your son's unique individuality.
9. Learn to gradually let go of him as he matures. Let him become independent and form his own identity.
10. Base your relationship with your son on cooperation and support. Refrain from antagonism and fierce competition.
11. Leave preoccupations with work behind. Focus on the present moment - enjoy the process of whatever you do together.
12. Admit your mistakes. Allow your son to see your fallibility.
13. Develop a soothing, supportive, nurturing relationship with your son. Empathize with him. Relate your own similar experiences instead of always offering solutions.
14. Display affection openly both verbally and physically.
15. Tell him you love him.
16. Help your son look within himself by helping him explore his feelings rather than lecturing or refuting his excuses.
17. Touch base with him frequently in person and by phone.
18. Avoid dumping your frustration on your son.

19. Foster internal motivation for achievement by focusing on self-motivation. Share the joy of achieving - the process. Convey the excitement of mastering, accomplishing something. Focus on how you feel inside about your work. Allow him to do the same.
20. Do not pressure him to perform.
21. Connect with your son on a spiritual level. Share your faith in God. Live your faith in front of him.

The recommendations for mending or improving FSRs detailed in this newsletter are not easy to carry out considering how



most fathers were raised. We can only communicate love when we feel loved deep down in side. Men blocked from loving their children don't feel loveable themselves. Oftentimes this traces back to unresolved and unforgiven past hurts. The only way to move on is to move through the pain to resolution and restoration. Remember: connect with your son; love; bless; forgive; and believe in him. Monumental benefits lie ahead for men willing to challenge and move beyond the constraints of their upbringing. Fathers: position yourselves to raise a whole generation of healthier men and women!

MY! I do a lot of work with men, on men's issues, fathering, and father-child relationships. As a father of two sons, this subject is close to my heart. I am available to help men move forward with their lives - to live the way God called us to be; loving, courageous, nurturing, accountable leaders. These men invariably make tremendous husbands, exceptional friends, awesome fathers and extraordinary leaders: men who shape the future through their relationships. Call me with questions and feedback.

Steve Rossi with his 2 sons.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

INFO: 713.984.1314 or 713.764.7997

"Parenting in Troubled Times" 11-14-98
@ Spring Branch Church of the Nazarene

"Comforted: Receiving God's Comfort"
11-15-98 @ Second Baptist Transformers

"The Blended Family" 12-1-98
@ CCH Office 9055 Katy Fwy, # 300

"Youth Pastors Forum" 12-1-98
@ Spring Branch Church of the Nazarene