

Fatherlessness has infiltrated our communities and is greatly affecting our students. The negative impact this has and will continue to have on society may ripple on for years to come. Involvement is one single idea that has the potential to make a huge difference in a student's life. Research shows that positive male involvement reaches past potential and achieves this impact.

180 Dads / 180 Days – Involvement That Makes a Difference

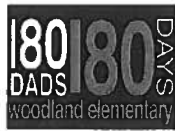


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Introduction:

According to a 2004 U.S Census, 23.6 million children live in a home that the child's biological father does not reside with them. This growing statistic is driven by the increased rate of divorce and unmarried mothers. Although society recognizes that fatherlessness in our homes is one of the greatest social problems facing our country, it does not have the answers on how to rectify this problem. (U.S Census, 2004)

Research has shown that fatherlessness is a contributing factor in many areas of a child's development. Not only does this have to do with the influence fathers have on children, but also how involved they may be with school activities. A recent study in May of 2009 by the National Center for Fathers shows the involvement with fathers in their child's school activities. Only 38% to 54% of fathers took their kids to school, 30% to 41% visited their children's class events, and 20% to 28% of fathers volunteered at their child's school. In regards to educational achievement, children who reside with only one parent will have a lower grade point average, lower college aspirations and poorer attendance in school. Many believe this is due to a lack of structure in the home and a weaker support system for the child. A fatherless child is two times more likely to drop out of school than a fathered child. (National Center for Fathers, 2009)

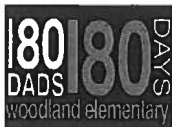
A child's emotional well-being is often a key indicator to the type of home he or she comes from. Children who have less emotional behavioral difficulties have more of a detailed relationship with a positive male role model. While mothers provide the nurturing, soft, gentle, comforting, and emotional aspects for a child, fathers provide the challenging, prodding, loud, playful, and protective aspects children need. Each child is unique in his or her needs, and each parent role model is key to a child's emotional wellbeing. Boys and girls needs in a father differ. While young boys rely on fathers for influence, character, and love values; young girls rely on fathers for protection, comfort, and awareness. (Dr. Flouri and Buchanan, 2002)

Since divorce is one of the most common reasons of fatherlessness, children from divorced homes pay the highest price. A child from a divorced home will generally be more anxious, hostile, withdrawn and less popular, which has a direct result on their overall self esteem. Adolescents are commonly defined by the decisions that they make, and fatherlessness adolescents have even greater obstacles to overcome. (Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 2007)

Many studies have proven the important effects a positive male role model has on teen's adolescent decisions. Children who have had a void with male role models are found to be involved in sexual intercourse, criminal activity, and repeated usage in drugs or alcohol. (Kotelchuk and Wiley, 1981)

Statistics paint a grim picture for children of America. The increase in the number of fatherless homes does not provide our families with much hope and promise. An additional study conducted by the National Center for Fathers in June of 2009 showed that fathers are aware of this growing problem and are making strides to correct it. More fathers are now taking their children to school, attending class events and parent conferences as well as volunteering at their child's school. In all hopes, this will decrease the negative outcomes of fatherlessness in children. (National Centers for Fathers, 2009)

We as a society will have to create new and innovative ways to get fathers involved. With these things on the line, society should embrace everything it can to ensure that each child, regardless if they have a father in their home or not, can reach higher goals academically, emotionally and socially.



Making A Difference:

One example of how this can be done was created in our own community. At Woodland Elementary School in Stockbridge, Georgia, a new program was created to give fathers a platform in which to volunteer. Traditionally, women typically held the PTO and Room Mom positions. Father's were never discouraged to participate, but they just didn't feel this job was for them. After watching a news story about a program that was created to provide an additional level of security to schools in need, the idea of inviting fathers into the schools to assist with the daily, routine jobs was born.

The 180 Days, 180 Dads program was launched by the School Council and Administration to provide a volunteer or mentoring program in which the men of the school: Dads, Uncles, Step Fathers, and Grandfathers could come out and support the school and children daily. This program allows these men to: open car doors for morning car duty, monitor hallways; provide media center support and lunchroom duty. In a very short period of time, the program proved successful, by enlisting 30 men to sign up within the first month.

By keeping the program simple, it is less intimidating for men to get involved. Given the recession and increased loss of jobs, more men are out of work for the first time in their child's life, thus giving them an opportunity to become more involved with their child's school. Tapping into the timing of this economic downfall, the 180 Days, 180 Dads program gave these men an outlet in which to still contribute to society, their community and families.

In the following pages, additional information is provided to assist other schools in developing this program in their communities.



Community Involvement:

Community partnerships have contributed to the success of coordinated school programs across the country. Communities expect schools and families to prepare students to become healthy, productive citizens, and in turn have a responsibility to join with schools and families in support of efforts that can help achieve this goal. To be successful, school and community partnerships must have clear, concise responsibilities and expectations for each participant. You should be able to obtain involvement right away but remember that partnerships require a time commitment and that initial gains may be small. The car doors portion of the Dads program is a perfect stepping-stone into these relationships.

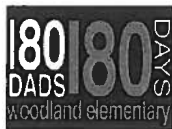
The school, the family, and the community each have its own unique resources; each can reach students in ways the others cannot; and each influences young people's behaviors in different ways. Together, as participants in a coordinated school health program, they can provide an environment in which students can learn and mature successfully. Below you will find action steps to help build a strong family and community involvement.

Actions for Community Involvement:

- Create an environment in which participants feel valued and welcome. Include school leadership to form a structured relationship and provide support.
- Enlist community volunteers such as civic groups, service clubs, religious groups, seniors' groups, and law enforcement.
- Contact local businesses to get involved. It is common for companies to already have community involvement programs in place.
- Contact local public officials. Start with your city Mayor and County officials. Being part of community growth programs is intuitive to their positions.
- Include community members to your communication links to provide notification of upcoming events and opportunities, as well as progress and news.
- Link members and parents to programs and resources within the community that provide information and resources.
- Involve community members in after school activities and events to help build the relationship and program.
- Always include handouts or power point presentations when contacting new members.
- The nature of this program sells itself, remember the kids are not only our future, but they are potential customers, employees and business owners of the same community.

Benefits:

The benefits of community involvement are instrumental. You gain the obvious support from the individual involvement but you also create a strong recruiting tool. Seeing business and public leaders from the community at your school and providing support for your kids can be a strong motivator for other Dads to get involved. When community members participate you will want to make sure there is strong exposure and recognition during their involvement. A public official such as a mayor or policeman opening a car door in the morning can send a strong message to a child as well as a parent.



180 Days/180 Dads Mentoring

ROLE OF THE MENTOR

A mentor serves as a positive role model, a friend, a listener, an instructor, a limit setter, a resource, and a facilitator. In these roles the mentor will be the one who initiates the flow of the relationship and invites the mentee to share and explore through academic skill building and open communication.

A mentor is **NOT** a: parent substitute, authority figure, disciplinarian, adoptive parent, recreational director, Santa Claus, therapist, judge and hangman, credit card, free ticket, moralist, clergy, baby-sitter, employer, probation officer, lawyer, "part" of the mentee's family, chauffeur, or consultant for the mentee's family.

SELF-ESTEEM

Research on children and adolescents has shown that self-esteem is the key to productive development. What is self-esteem? Self esteem is defined as self-respect, the belief in oneself. It is how a person feels about him/herself. It is a feeling of self-worth.

Things you can do to BUILD a relationship:

- Learn 10 facts about your mentee quickly and refer to them in conversation the next time you see him/her.
- Recognize you are being tested and walk a middle ground between being a pushover and an authoritarian.
- Demonstrate the ability to keep confidences and to do what you say you are going to do.
REMEMBER, HOWEVER, THAT IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO REPORT TO THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR ANYTHING SAID OR OBSERVED THAT YOU MIGHT SUSPECT IS HARMFUL TO YOUR STUDENT OR SOMEONE ELSE.
- Bridge the intervals between visits by letting the child know you were thinking of him or her (day of test, doctor or dentist visit, etc.).
- Avoid the use of "should" and learn alternative ways to suggest constructive behavior, "how about if..."

INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES TO VOLUNTEERS

- All mentoring sessions will be held on school grounds during school hours.
- Contact should not be in an isolated place, but should have other people around.
- Do not lend/give money. Gifts are discouraged. Rewards should be in the form of books, pencils, pens, paper, etc. to help schoolwork.
- Be a good listener, refrain from giving advice. Attempts at psychological counseling in personal problems carry legal liability. Such matters should be referred to professional school counselors.
- Refrain from threatening or intimidating your mentee. This is counter-productive.
- If the mentor-student relationship is not "working" let your coordinator know.
- Always look for the good. Your main objective is to make your mentee feel good about himself/herself.
- Always call the school and ask that your mentee be told if you cannot keep your appointment.
- Always call the school before going. Your mentee may be absent. Keep track of the dates and times of each visit with your mentee. (A form will be provided.)



HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

- Advertise, Advertise, Advertise
- Contact your PTO, Room Mom's, Staff Spouses
- Make a small display for the office & to be used at assemblies
- Create an application so you can get the Dad's contact and availability information
- Get the background check forms from your BOE and/or contact the local sheriff's office
- Have the Dad's sign up for a day and/or job
- Be sure that they know that they have to abide by all school policies and procedures
- Can create a t-shirt for the Dads to wear to help identify them when volunteering
 - We created T-shirts and sold them for \$8

The "Dad" would participate in some of the following activities as needed and requested by the administrators:

1. Morning Car/Bus Duty
2. Lunchroom Duty
3. Assist in the Media Center
4. Hall duty
5. Recess duty
6. Afternoon Car/Bus dismissal
7. Grilling for School Activities/Fall Festivals

For those interested in participating as a volunteer, they would be asked to:

Commit to volunteering at least 1 full day or partial day a school year -* you can ask for more often.
Please keep in mind that some Dads would only be able to do morning car duty, so be flexible.

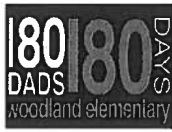
Complete a background check with the local sheriff's office at no charge to them

Wear a t-shirt when volunteering (T-shirts work as a uniform for the Dad so they can be easily identified by the students and faculty)

Be sure that they have a copy of all school policies and procedures

Be sure to tell them that as a volunteer, they will NOT be asked to:

Be a substitute in charge of a class- take away anything that would be intimidating to the Dad



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