



Wynnclyff Farm
Northridge Prep overnight trip for 6th grade fathers and sons

Seminar on Fatherhood TIME, LISTENING & LEADERSHIP

A. Investing Time: *Being There.*¹

Parents are rich in educative potential that no one else possesses. In a *unique* way they know their own children; they know them in their unrepeatability and by experience they possess the secrets and resources of true love. (p 7)

Your children are your most important task. They are more important than your work. Your absence from family life, perhaps due to long hours at work, can cause emotional disturbances in your children. And depriving your children of your time can seriously upset their adolescence and sometimes mark them for life. (p 51)

Parents will succeed to the extent they are able to dedicate *time* to their children and really place themselves at their level with love. Parents must find time to be with their children and take time to talk with them. (p 51)

B. Listen to and Respect Them...²

In these conversations, more and more as the years go by, parents should learn how to *listen* carefully to their children, how to make the effort to understand them and how to recognize the fragment of truth that may be present in some forms of rebellion.

¹ Excerpted and adapted from a report by the Pontifical Commission for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, 1996

² Selected and adapted from two works by Dr. Gerard W. Shepherd: *The Moral Education of Teenagers*, Scepter Booklet no. 206; and *Leading Youth into the Third Millennium*, a workshop presentation at Wespine Study Center, St. Louis.

The single most important thing young people want as they grow up is to be taken seriously and to be listened to. Of course, young people do not always make it easy... but they want our perspective. Thus, the *way* we communicate with them is critical.

It is probably no surprise that young people have a natural desire to be more grown-up and to be treated as grown-ups.

Ask and listen more than tell and talk at them. What a wonderful thing it is for a teen to teach something to an adult. Let them tell you about what they learned in history, about the current music scene, popular dances, and the NCAA playoffs.

When they were younger and would talk for hours about nothing, you figured out how to keep working while only half paying attention. With teens you must learn to listen to them seriously.

Teens need discussions of culture, past and present, to untangle examples of good and bad living.

C. Coming Down *the Homestretch!*

Fathers forming their sons, ages 11–16³

The main part of the father's job with his boys begins when they enter adolescence. A father acts in two significant ways: First, he protects his wife from his sons' tendencies toward occasional aggression and disobedience; she needs him, more than ever, to step in and keep the male children in line.

³ Excerpted from an essay by James B. Stenson, *Coming Down the Home Stretch: How Fathers Form Their Sons* (ages 11 - 16). For more, see www.parentleadership.com

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Second, he protects his sons by strengthening them – in their conscience, judgment and character – so they can later protect themselves and their own loved ones. He treats them as near-adults (in everything but experience) and teaches what they need to know in order to succeed in life as honorable, competent men, especially in the workplace. In other words, he teaches them to leave behind their childhood and enter confidently into the world of men.

Pre-teen and adolescent boys need a manly father, not a second mother or a sibling-like *pal* or a laid-back shadowy figure around the house. Experience has shown this: If boys this age do not respect their father as a manly moral leader, then they follow others instead, mostly athletes and celebrities.

D. The Father as *Hero-Leader*?⁴

Many men have difficulty being playful and openly affectionate with somewhat older children. They are usually close and comfortable with the children up to the age of two or three, but then seem to draw back considerably as the kids grow through grammar-school age. Nearly all men have an instinct to play with their infant children; but, with many, this playfulness drops off as the children grow. They love their children deeply, but they are not easily demonstrative about it.

Interestingly, most such men find that they get along very well with their children – more than ever before, in fact – as the children grow through adolescence. Since men of this temperament are more comfortable with adults

than children, they enjoy dealing with their nearly grown offspring, and they are often highly effective at it. If they take the trouble to step in and seriously give adult-level guidance to their adolescent kids, talking adult to adult – an attitude that most adolescents like – they do an excellent job in giving final finish to their children’s upbringing.

Their leadership is critical at this juncture in the kids’ lives; in fact, it turns out to be at least as important as the playfulness that might have been missing earlier.

Questions:

1. Is it true that the most effective way to achieve *quality* time is to invest in *quantity* time?
2. Is it possible for a father to be a *hero-leader* to his son, while also enjoying a close father-son friendship with him?
3. How does a man who may not be naturally demonstrative with his grammar-school age sons make the transition to being a *decisive leader* in the lives of his teenage boys?
4. What can a man do to bring his children into the adult world where he *is* comfortable... taking them to his office, talking about his work, working with them on projects around the house and yard?
5. How about finding ways to talk while doing things together or seizing opportunities to discuss issues of culture and entertainment?

⁴ Reference p. 118, UPBRINGING: A Discussion Handbook for Parents of Young Children, James B. Stenson, www.scepterpublishers.org.