

Six Secrets for Turning Your Husband into a Dad

OK ladies, a few years back you turned your boyfriend into a husband. You had a vision in your mind about what you wanted in a mate and hopefully he's fulfilled your expectations. Now you have children together and want that terrific partner to step up to the plate to become the dad you want for your kids. Some men rise to the occasion on their own and some don't. If you're reading this column because you'd like to see something different at home, you can influence his behavior with some guidance, encouragement, and leadership.

Before I share the secrets with you, I want to mention stepfathers separately because they are different and the rules for their behavior are not completely the same. In the February 2007 issue of *About Families*, I wrote my column on the *Six Tips for an Awesome Step Dad*. In it I pointed out that until a natural and loving bond takes place between your husband and your children, you must be the primary adult to administer discipline. Until that happens, your husband is there to love, honor, and support you. He can also participate with you in creating house rules, enforcing them, and being available to the kids when they need help or guidance. If you would like a copy of the column, write to me at my email address below.

A primary factor that influences how a man behaves as a father is oftentimes the model that was presented to him in his home growing up as a boy. If his mother took full charge of raising and disciplining the children, then he may imitate that model and sit on the side line expecting his wife to do the same. If his father only took an active role to step in to administer the punitive discipline, then he may do just that. Our childhood plays a big part in shaping our preconceived ideas of what our role should look like when we are parents. This is important information for any woman to help her understand why her husband behaves the way he does.

I knew a young couple many years ago who had a great marriage. But when the children arrived, they fought and argued too much. She believed that her husband wasn't helping her with the kids; leaving her to do all the parenting while he did other things. She would only take it for so long and then lose it, getting mad and yelling at him. He would get defensive and then contribute to the argument by yelling back at her, declaring that he works all day and brings home the paycheck. The problem was that they never talked about what they expected from each other. She had a preconceived idea about what his behavior should look like as a father. He had a preconceived idea about being a father based on the example his father set when he was growing up.

Now that I've laid some ground work for you in understanding your husband's behavior, here are six secrets for turning him into the dad you want your kids to have.

Examine his models. Take the time to understand what his parents were like when he was growing up. This isn't about faulting them but instead, getting a better understanding of the examples they offered. Talk to his mother if possible and ask her how discipline was handled in the family.

Share your expectations. In a moment that is right for conversation and talking, ask your husband what discipline was like when he was young. Ask him how he sees each of your roles and responsibilities as parents, and then share your expectations with him. In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Steven R. Covey advises that we should seek first to understand and then be understood.

Create a parenting team. Engage your husband in conversation about parenting as a team. Take opportunities to discuss and agree on discipline methods, rules, and limits when the children aren't around. Hold family meetings and support each other. When a new situation presents itself with the kids, postpone discipline until you've had a chance to discuss it with each other in private. Once you've come to an agreement, approach the kids as a united front with your decision. If your child comes to you to complain about the other parent, be a good listener. Bring the two together so they can talk it out with each other. If the other parent isn't available, tell your child that you'll discuss it when you're all together again.

Encourage him. When your husband steps up to discipline appropriately, supports you in front of the kids, or demonstrates even the smallest positive "dad" behavior, encourage him with hugs, kisses, or positive words of encouragement in private. Let him know when you've noticed him doing things well.

Too much correction creates discouragement. If you notice him making a mistake or not doing something just right, let it go. Walk away and avoid the urge to correct or scold him, especially in front of the children. Consistency is more important than perfection.

Learn to be better parents together. Finally, be sure that you are not coming across as an expert or a know-it-all. This could contribute to him feeling discouraged and less than whole as a dad. Admit to your husband that your children did not come with an instruction manual and you're both in this together trying to figure things out on your own. Read a parenting book together or take a parenting class. Consult your child's teacher for recommended books or area training events.

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