

Opening our Eyes, Discovering Our Children

Contributed by the dads @ fathers.com
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The book *The Invisible Gorilla* uses research on how the mind works to challenge our ideas about attention, perception and reasoning. The book's main idea is that we think we see ourselves and the world as they really are, but we're actually missing a whole lot. "Again and again," the authors write, "we think we experience and understand the world as it is, but our thoughts are beset by everyday illusions."

The title of the book, written by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons, is based on a popular psychology experiment captured in a short video. Watch the video and see if you can accurately count how many times the players wearing white pass the ball.

How did you do?

As a father, there are several different ways you might apply the eye-opening truth of this video. For example, are there key areas of your children's lives that you may be ignoring, even though they're right in front of you?

Or, during disagreements with a family member, do you ever insist that you know exactly what was said or done, when in reality your perspective might not be perfectly accurate?

And as much as we might like to gripe about our children hearing only what they want to hear from us, most of us are guilty of "selective hearing" as well. Too often, our children's voices become just like much of the other "noise" in our lives -- pressures and demands, schedules and to-do lists, hobbies, sports, the news of the day, and so on. But just like with the video, we choose what we want to give our attention to, and many of us would benefit from paying more attention to what's going on in our children's lives -- the parts that are on center stage, as well as what's on the sidelines, in the background, everything.

As fathers, we need to learn to listen as part of discovering more about our children. That's an important way we can gain insight, which helps us become better fathers. Not only will we be better informed, so we can coach them based on their developing gifts and talents, but we can also protect them from potential dangers. And our efforts to give them our undivided attention and know them better will demonstrate that they are special and fascinating to us; they are worthy of being known and understood.

ACTION POINTS

- Watch the featured video with your children and talk about how they might miss some things that are right in front of them. Ask them if they think you're missing something important.
- Check out your child's favorite TV show, music artist, website or video game. Seek to understand why it appeals to him or her.
- As you notice more about your child, you might discover some difficulty that's hard to admit or face up to. Have courage and determination to do what's best for your child, no matter what it takes.
- Ask your teenager to tell you the three best qualities of his or her best friend or a romantic interest in his/her life. Just listen and ask questions, without making value judgments.
- Check out our website for four tips on listening to young children, and more ways to enter your child's world in Jay Payleitner's article, "How to Spy on Your Kids."

Recommended Resources:

- How to Really Love Your Child by Ross Campbell, M.D.
- How to Really Love Your Teen by Ross Campbell, M.D.
- The 7 Secrets of Effective Fathers by Ken Canfield, Ph.D.