

UPDATE: 1999 NCF Poll

"FATHERING IN AMERICA"

Over the past fifty years, **the face of fatherhood has changed dramatically.** Expectations for fathers have shifted, and dads have received varying degrees of appreciation for the role that they fulfill.

Historically, we can place American fathers in the following general categories: In the 50's and 60's, men were considered good dads if they were breadwinners and disciplinarians. In the 70's, involved fathers participated in their child's birth and helped shoulder domestic chores. In the 80's, earnest fathers began to get in touch with their feelings and the feelings of their kids. In the 90's, fathers were expected to balance work and family, while their roles became more diverse and challenging: stay-at-homes dads, step-dads, single custodial caretaking fathers, surrogate fathers and more.

Fathers of the next millennium will contend with many of these changes as they answer the question, ***What does a good dad do?***

The National Center for Fathering has followed fathering trends through three national random opinion polls in the 90's—joint polls with the Gallup organization in 1992 and 1996, and a repeat of the same poll on their own in 1999.

The following data highlights seven captivating facts from the 1999 poll:

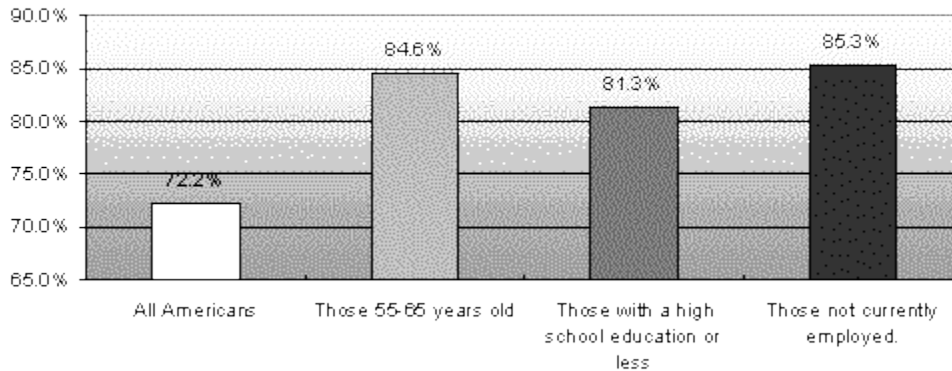
1. The Extent of Father-Deprived Children

These are the best of times and the worst of times for America's children. Although fathers are emerging as vital contributors in their homes and communities, there are more father-deprived children than ever. According to commonly cited figures, over 25 million children under the age of 18 are growing up in a home without their dad. More and more, Americans are recognizing the impact of this. In response to the statement, "The physical absence of the father from the home is the most significant family problem facing America," 72.2% agreed in our 1999 poll. In 1992, 69.9% were in agreement.

As demonstrated in the graph below, demographic analyses of the responses to this question reveal even higher percentages among certain groups. Interestingly, only 52.1% of those between the ages of 18 and 24 agreed, and only 55.8% of college graduates agreed.

Nearly eighty-one percent of those who earn less than \$25,000 annually agree, contrasted to 65.5% of those who earn more than \$50,000.

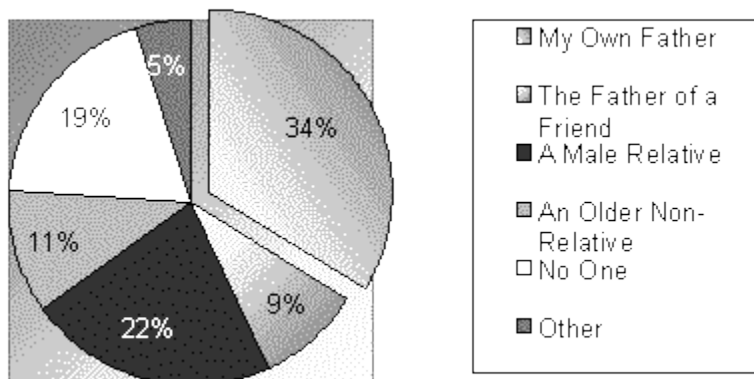
Question: The physical absence of the father from the home is the most significant problem facing America today.



Americans who are older, who completed a lower level of education, and who earn a lower annual income are in strong agreement on the impact of father absence in America.

It isn't surprising, then, that in a society characterized by fatherlessness, only 34% of people grew up with their own father as their primary male role model. Almost a fifth of those responding had no male role model at all.

Question: Who was your male role model when growing up?

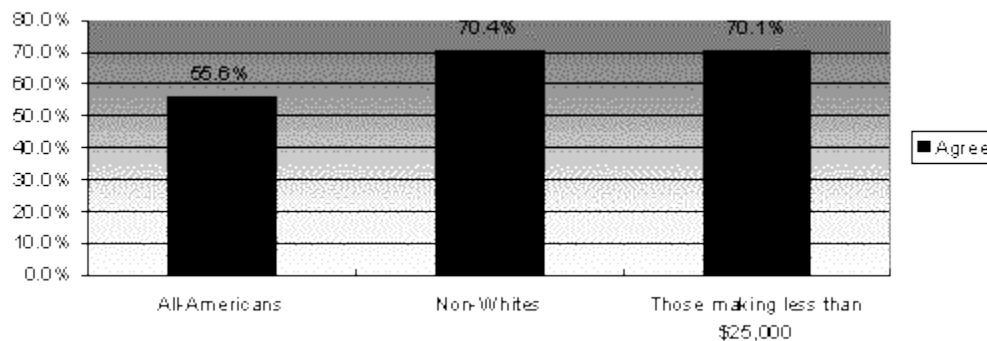


2. Unresolved Father Problems

Over half of Americans agree that most people have unresolved problems with their fathers. Cumulatively, 55.6% agreed with this statement, up from 54.1% in our 1996 poll. More non-whites (70.4%) than whites (51.3%) were in agreement. Interestingly, the generation who has experienced more father absence, 18- to 24-year-olds, displayed the highest level of agreement (67.2%). Income was also a differentiating factor: of the respondents making \$25,000 or less, 70.1% agreed, compared to only 48.0% among those who make more than \$50,000.

Whether one has experienced father loss or is learning to live with a less-than-satisfying relationship with his father, resolving these issues is a critical step toward healing.

Question: I have unresolved problems with my father.



3. Our Awareness of Our Children's Lives

When asked, *Do fathers know what is going on in their children's lives?* only 44.2% of Americans agreed. Fathers' lack of awareness regarding children and their world contributes to functional, emotional fatherlessness. It can also lead to long-term unresolved issues between a father and his children. Building better awareness requires time and effort to learn about a child's characteristics, growth needs, and daily experiences.

4. The Positive Impact of Father-Time

When asked, *Do fathers today spend less time with their children than their fathers did with them?* 56.5% agreed, up from 50.9% in 1996. Many studies confirm the positive impact of fathers who spend time with their children. Children with involved fathers are:

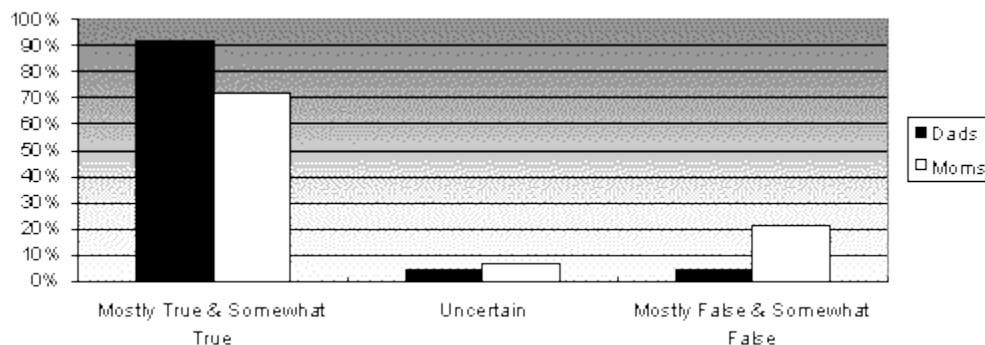
- more confident and less anxious in unfamiliar settings.
- better able to deal with frustration.
- better able to gain a sense of independence and an identity outside the mother-child relationship.
- more likely to mature into compassionate adults.
- more likely to have higher self-esteem and grade point averages.
- more sociable.

5. Mother's Views on Fathers' Performance

The previous two items—gaining awareness and investing time—are vital components of effective fathering. And our poll suggests that we fathers may be overrating ourselves in these areas.

Consistently, moms see fathers as understanding less about the children's needs than what fathers believe. This contrast also showed up in the category of time spent with children. When dads with children under 18 responded to the statement, "You and your child often do things together," 71% answered "mostly true"; when moms responded to the same statement about fathers, only 55% answered "mostly true."

Question: I have a good handle on my child's needs change as he/she grows up.

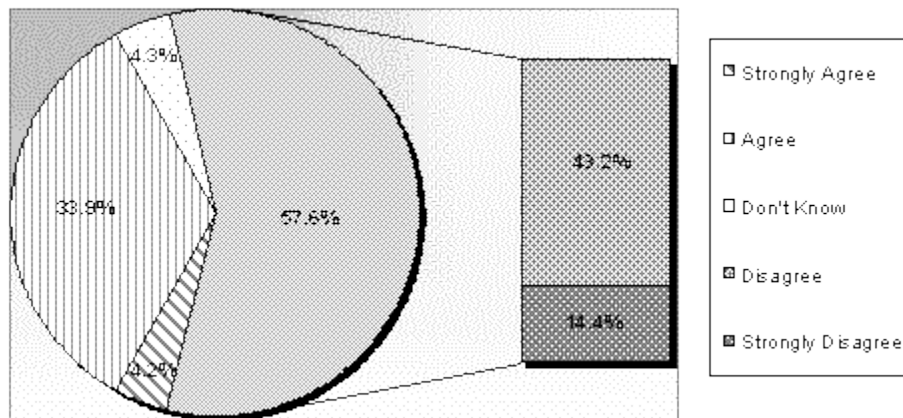


Fathers and mothers have different and complementary approaches to parenting. We would do well to see these differences as assets—even when our children's mother has a different opinion of how we're doing as fathers. We need their input.

6. Tension Faced by Working Fathers

Work/family issues are another major concern for today's fathers. Tension between work and family will continue to be a major issue for both employers and employees. Success and productivity in both the workplace and family relationships will require fathers to make sacrifices and companies to develop strategies to address the tension.

Polling data reveals that more than half of all Americans (57.6%) believe employers don't recognize the strain fathers face when trying to balance the demands of family and the demands of work. This is up significantly from the 1996 poll, where only 27.7% gave that response.



Those in the 45-54 age group supported this finding more strongly (69.3%), contrasted to only 40.6% of those in the 18-24 age bracket, where it's likely that fewer of those responding are fathers. Respondents who make \$50,000 are also convinced about the strain faced by working fathers (68.3%), but those making \$15,000-\$25,000 are significantly less concerned about it (46.2%).

7. The Power of Being Involved in Your Child's Life

Finally, there is overwhelming support for fathers to be more involved in their children's education. Our polling data notes that 96.8% of all Americans believe fathers need to be more involved in their child's education. Department of Education research clearly shows how father involvement positively impacts a child's success and opportunities in school. Being involved has immediate benefits. Through parent/teacher meetings, helping with

homework, and involvement at school functions, a father's presence contributes to his child's performance and a more positive attitude in the school setting.

Dr. Ken Canfield, founder and former president of the National Center for Fathering, believes these trends and facts must lead us to a new resolution. "There is a great cause in which all of us—women and men, young and old—need to be engaged: encouraging men to be effective fathers, and connecting all fathers with their children. It is a quiet struggle against an invisible foe—fathering deprivation. But it is every bit as crucial and intense as any war our nation has known. It's no exaggeration to say that every future generation depends upon how we respond to this opportunity."

Being a committed dad may be your most important social, physical and spiritual contribution to the future of America. Be wise about it. Invest yourself in children, and you won't be disappointed. That's a guarantee. As always, keep up the good work, Dad.

Summary of Questions and Responses

INTRODUCTION: Hello, I'm _____, calling from _____.

May I please speak with the oldest male/youngest female 18 years of age and over who is at home now?

(see next page)

1. The Status of Fathers

I am going to read you some statements about the role of fathers. For each, please tell me whether you Strongly agree (SA) agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD). Don't Know = (DK), Refused/No Answer (R/NA).

% of Respondents

	SA	A	D	SD	DK	R/NA
A. Most people have unresolved problems with their fathers.	9.7	45.9	35.7	3.2	5.2	.2
B. Fathers today spend less time with their children than their fathers did.	17.0	39.5	33.6	6.9	2.7	.3
C. Most fathers know what is going on in their children's lives.	6.5	37.6	46.2	7.2	2.1	.2
D. The most significant family or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home.	28.0	44.2	22.2	4.0	1.6	0
E. Most fathers are doing a good job in providing for their families financially.	13.3	66.7	15.0	2.7	2.0	.3
F. Most fathers are doing a good job in providing a safe environment for their children to grow up in.	11.5	67.4	14.6	3.9	2.3	.3
G. Most fathers feel comfortable discussing spiritual matters with their children.	10.0	41.6	36.8	5.7	5.8	.2
H. Fathers do care enough about children's feelings.	17.0	58.9	19.3	2.5	1.9	.4
I. Most men have a good picture of what it requires to be a good father.	7.1	55.8	29.5	5.3	2.1	.2
J. Employers recognize the strain fathers face between the demands of family and the demands of work.	4.2	33.9	43.2	14.4	3.9	.4

2. The Behavior of Fathers

Now I am going to read you some statements about the behavior of fathers. Please indicate how often the stated activities occur: Frequently (F), Occasionally (O), Seldom (S), or Rarely (R). Not Applicable (NA), Don't Know = (DK), Refused/No Answer (R/NA).

% of Respondents

	F	O	S	R	NA	DK	R/NA
A. How often do fathers discuss their role as a father with their child's mother?	20.9	35.1	22.9	15.0	2.1	3.8	.1
B. On the average, how often do fathers encourage their children each week?	35.0	40.7	13.2	6.8	1.0	3.2	.2
C. Do most fathers keep their promises to their children?	43.9	37.7	9.9	5.3	.4	2.6	.2
D. When you were growing up, would you say your father listened to your concerns?	41.2	19.7	16.7	16.7	4.7	.7	.3
	Less than One	At Least One	At Least Two	Don't Know	R/NA		
E. On average, how many meals do fathers eat with their family each day?	31.7	53.4	12.7	2.0	.2		

3. Fathering Satisfaction of Fathers

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your role as a father. Extremely Satisfied (ES), Very Satisfied (VS), Somewhat Satisfied (SS), Mixed (M), Somewhat Dissatisfied (SD), Very Dissatisfied (VD), Extremely Dissatisfied (ED), Don't Know (DK), Refused/No Answer (R/NA).

% of Respondents

	ES	VS	SS	M	SD	VD	ED	DK	R/NA
A. How satisfied are you with yourself as a father?	26.9	39.4	25.8	1.6	4.7	1.2	.2	.2	0
B. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your children?	34.8	38.7	19.0	1.4	4.2	1.3	.6	0	0
C. How satisfied are you with your ability to talk with your children?	33.4	34.4	22.2	2.6	3.3	1.2	1.4	1.1	.3

(see next page)

4. Satisfaction with own Father

Please indicate your level of satisfaction with your father. Extremely Satisfied (ES), Very Satisfied (VS), Somewhat Satisfied (SS), Mixed (M), Somewhat Dissatisfied (SD), Very Dissatisfied (VD), Extremely Dissatisfied (ED), Not Applicable (NA), Don't Know (DK), Refused/No Answer (R/NA).

% of Respondents

	ES	VS	SS	M	SD	VD	ED	NA	DK	R/NA
A. How satisfied were you with your father's ability to provide for you?	25.5	29.1	15.6	2.6	4.4	2.3	4.9	14.7	.4	.5
B. How satisfied were you with your relationship with your father?	21.8	27.0	15.9	2.1	8.0	4.2	5.4	14.4	.7	.2
C. How satisfied were you with your father's ability to talk with you?	16.3	21.0	20.1	4.4	10.0	5.8	7.1	14.7	.4	.2

The survey results are based on telephone interviews with national samples in 1992 (n=1,010), 1996 (n=793) and 1999 (n=928). For results based on sample size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and random effects could be plus or minus three points.