

Names are changed to honor client confidentiality.

A Boy Needs His Dad

From the moment a boy separates from his mother's placenta, the journey with his father begins. It's a connection as vitally important to his growth—from an infant to a man—as the umbilical cord has been to his development. How does this bond form? Simple: love and attentiveness. He will naturally yearn for it, and remain forever receptive to it even as he grows older. Without it, a hollow spot forms in his heart, causing him to grieve ... silently.

In his book, [*Why a Son Needs a Dad*](#), Gregory E. Lang, describes how the vital father-son relationship is cultivated. Lang writes that a son needs a dad to:

- wrestle with him in the grass.
- take him to baseball games.
- go with him on imaginary adventures.

What Lang is referring to is the importance of play between father and son. A son also needs his dad to:

- listen to him when others have grown tired of listening.
- help him try again after he has stumbled.
- show him patience.
- help him learn from his mistakes.

These last three points made by Lang are best taught through example. For that reason, I suggest that fathers demonstrate patience with their own shortcomings and openly discuss how they have learned from their mistakes. And the discussion—free of any hint of lecturing—should transmit acceptance and warm understanding.

The same orientation applies to these suggestions offered by Lang. He says a son needs a dad to:

- give him the gentle pushes that help him grow.
- help him plan for his future.
- talk about the tough decisions he will face.
- pull him back when he is headed in the wrong direction.
- comfort him when he cries.
- show him how to love others, even when it is hard.
- allow him to question.
- let him be his equal now and then.

What Lang is alluding to here is crucial. Sons need to experience a sense of their budding height—in all areas. It strengthens a son's confidence to stand toe to toe with his dad.

Lang says a son needs a dad to nurture his independence and to teach him how to talk to girls. Such advice implies that a dad keep a keen ear to the challenges his son faces through every stage of his life.

A son also needs his dad to teach him:

- how things work.
- how to fix things himself.
- to be a gracious winner as well as a gracious loser.
- to apologize for reckless words.
- when to lead and when to follow.
- that strength is best expressed with restraint.
- to be accountable for his wrongdoings.
- to always give a good day's work.
- how to maintain dignity in difficult times.

A son needs a dad who will:

- protect him when he is not strong enough to protect himself.

A son needs a dad to tell him:

- often that he is loved.
- that all is not hopeless, even when it may seem that it is.
- that there is no disgrace in losing.
- that he is proud of him.

So what is the consequence—for a man—when the father-son connection is missing?

I'll leave that to the words of a 30-year-old man and his enlightening account of a weekend therapeutic workshop consisting solely of men:

“There I was, among a group of nearly 30 men; brought together by a shared unconscious need to express pain buried deep within, pain rooted in a desire we had abandoned long ago. When it was time to dig, what many of us found was not something – but nothing. A hollowness we had long since filled with cheap substitutions, as in the form of addictions. What we discovered that weekend is what we really craved: the love of our fathers!”