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A Father's Workplace Conditions and Engagement With His Family

by Kalib Taylor



Fathers today have a great many responsibilities to balance, especially when it comes to providing for their family not only financially but also emotionally. Recent research shows that workplace conditions may play a large role in how fathers manage these competing demands. While a lack of balance may be a challenge for many fathers, the present coronavirus pandemic presents fathers and families with a unique opportunity to find and develop much needed solutions. These solutions, while often personal in application, can help many fathers strike a better balance between work and family responsibilities.

Much like a tightrope walker strives to balance on a thin rope, fathers tend to feel they must choose to put effort toward either excelling in providing temporally or in providing emotionally. However, according to a recent study conducted by Erin Holmes of Brigham Young University a family supportive workplace gives fathers better opportunities for engaging with their young children ages two through eight.¹ Holmes' study defined a family-supportive workplace as one where fathers felt support from coworkers and supervisors in managing work and home responsibilities. When a father feels that his supervisor and coworkers are sensitive to the ways work demands impact his personal and family life (and vice versa), he has an expanded network of help to tap into when needed.

John Cuddeback, a PhD professor of philosophy at Christendom College, has observed that the time we have during this pandemic "is an utterly unique opportunity for fathers to say 'yes' to their fatherhood, and for society to choose to reinvest in life in the home."² Finding balance between work and family is key for fathers to thrive in their responsibilities.

Another recent study led by Dr. Jeff Hill of Brigham Young University found similar patterns. This study, published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*, found that fathers who work at home and have a greater perceived flexibility in their work schedule generally experienced less work-life conflict.³ This can result in greater father involvement with children. Researchers often focus on three important components of father involvement: Engagement, warmth, and responsibility. Holmes included both engagement and warmth in her study.

In a survey, 1,020 fathers involved in the Holmes study reported engagement with children on at least 15 daily activities and indicated how often they did so. These activities included caring for children (storytelling, eating with children, or helping them get ready for bed) and actively engaging with children (playing, having a conversation, or teaching a new skill). Holmes and her colleagues assessed warmth by asking fathers about 8 warm behaviors, including things like praising the

child, hugging and kissing the child, or using affectionate nicknames.

The findings of the self-reports revealed that father engagement with children increased as they experienced more job flexibility and a family friendly workplace. As fathers were better able to meet the demands of work and childrearing, they also increased their warmth toward their children. It is worth noting that fatherly warmth and job flexibility were not associated in a significant way. Instead, job flexibility supports greater levels of father engagement.

The findings of these studies suggest the importance of fathers' experiencing both greater flexibility with their job and sensing that their workplace is conducive to helping them meet the needs of their family, including being a warm and engaged father. This pandemic can serve to bring a greater focus for fathers to engage in self-evaluation of their work lives and to see if they can improve their homelife through increased emotional availability to their children. Holmes noted that "employers, supervisors, and coworkers have a unique opportunity to shape men's engagement with their young children by creating an environment that enables . . . fathers to be involved in their young children's lives."

As fathers of young children search for employment opportunities, they can watch for indicators of work flexibility and consider how the potential

workplace might either inhibit or promote engagement with their children. Fathers engaged in jobs that don't provide these opportunities can still experience positive engagement with their children as they seek to be even more intentional with the time they do have with their children. They might also speak with their employer about their concerns and suggest

appropriate changes that could be made to help them experience a more family-supportive workplace. Greater emotional involvement in the lives of their young children will not only help fathers feel better about their work-family balance but will also provide important benefits to the development of their growing children.

Kalib Taylor is a senior at Brigham Young University studying Family Studies. He enjoys spending time in the great outdoors with friends and family, as well as helping others improve their quality of life by practicing positive principles of living.

Endnotes

- ¹ Holmes, E. K., Petts, R. J., Thomas, C. R., Robbins, N. L., & Henry, T. (2020). Do workplace characteristics moderate the effects of attitudes on father warmth and engagement? *Journal of Family Psychology, 34*(7), 867-878. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000672>
- ² Cuddeback, John. (2020, May 5). *Quarantine: A new chance to be a father*. [Institute for Family Studies](https://www.instituteforfamilystudies.org/).
- ³ Hill, E. J., Erickson, J. J., Holmes, E. K., & Ferris, M. (2010). Workplace flexibility, work hours, and work-life conflict: Finding an extra day or two. *Journal of Family Psychology, 24*(3), 349-358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019282>