

Why are men not 'EMOTIONAL'?

By Lara Pickford-Gordon
snrwriter.camse@catholicctt.org

'Big boys don't cry'. This may have started as a descriptor intended to form male children into 'manly' men and for men not to be seen as weak, but counselling psychologist, Original Pain Therapist, Nicholas Voisin said it has become a prohibition against a range of feelings except for anger, joy, and hatred. "We are not allowed to be disappointed. You are not allowed to be heartbroken, unless of course your football team lose, or somebody died. You're not allowed to feel depressed; you're not allowed to feel sad because your girlfriend leave you or you're struggling in a relationship..."

Voisin said the difficulty of this prohibition is men do not talk to each other about how they feel and how to deal with things. They are afraid of being judged. Alcohol use or abuse is an escape.

He also emphasised the prevalence of the use of marijuana and other drugs to numb the pain for a little while "and you end up later in the rest of the week with the same distress, hurt and whatever else."

Voisin said children fighting in schools and other things are indicative of the absence of basic social skills and inability to negotiate and resolve a conflict and resolve issues without lashing out. That interaction between father and son is especially important for the child learning how to manage and control their emotions, "providing you are dealing with a good role model".

He is concerned about the loss of kindness, forgiveness and extending grace to others. "A lot of those boundaries, a lot of those structures are really the domain of men who are now absent from homes and have been absent for about three decades," Voisin said.

He observed that social media has contributed to self-centredness, self-absorption and expectation of wants being satisfied immediately. Voisin said social skills and basic etiquette are missing in young people.

Even when the single mother asserts her authority as the parent, he notes that adolescent boys will recognise that she cannot physically compel them to do something they do not want to.

Voisin added, "That is not to say by nature we are aggressive or insolent, no, that's just adolescence again, the

boundaries and structures are to be enforced by daddy because he can make you do it."

Voisin said the role for fathers starts when the child is in the womb. He recalled a social media post of a new father whose voice and touch calmed his newborn. "He told her 'It's okay, daddy is here, you're safe, daddy loves you' and she calms down... children know and can recognise their parent's voices from as early as in the womb."

The father's presence helps the pregnant woman feel calm, reassured, and safe. This will contribute to a good pregnancy. Worries about safety, her relationship, possibilities of her future are minimised.

Voisin said when "daddy" is absent there can be anxiety about single-handedly raising the child and finances. "Raising a child is a very time-intensive task. It is very difficult for one person to do".

Studies have been done which have produced quantitative and qualitative information on the positive outcomes of the fathers' role in child-rearing. The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2016 updated its guidance for paediatricians on the role of fathers in the health and development of the child.

It noted the increased research focus on fathers was due to socioeconomic factors, the changing roles of men and women, changing social mores with working mothers and fathers taking on childcare responsibilities and single fathers as primary caregivers.

PART THREE NEXT WEEK: WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY DO WE WANT?



Counselling psychologist, Nicholas Voisin

TABLE 1
FATHER INVOLVEMENT BY STAGE OF CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Perinatal involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mothers are 1.5 times more likely to receive first-trimester prenatal care, with reductions in prematurity and infant mortality. Smoking reduction in mothers who smoke. Skin-to-skin contact with infant linked to infant crying less, becoming drowsier sooner, and less wakefulness. "Rough and tumble" play encourages exploration and independence in children.
Early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand size and variety of vocabulary and language; fathers more likely to introduce new words while mothers choose words the child already knows. Less child maladaptive behavior; decreased mental health symptomatology; enhanced social competence linked to play. Negative influence of maternal depression mitigated by father's involvement and thereby reduced the risk of problem behaviors and development in the child.
Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in adolescent risk behaviors, especially in boys. Enhanced cognitive development and reduced behavioral problems in boys. Decreased psychological problems in girls. Decreased risk of early puberty, early sexual experiences, and teenaged pregnancy in girls. Improved cognitive development, social responsiveness, independence, gender role development, particularly in girls.

Yogman M, et al.

'Fathers' influence on development and well-being of children' published in: *Contemporary PEDS Journal Vol 36 No 6*

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