

Looking after yourself – Dads

Being a dad can be very awesome...it can also be very challenging, confusing, frustrating, tiring (insert appropriate adjective here). As such, us dads have got to look after ourselves. Why? I'm glad you asked! Answer: so we can give the best of what we have and who we are to our tamariki. How can we do this? Here are some thoughts on the matter...

So, you're a dad. Nice. No matter what else happens in your life, you've done something amazing. You have co-created another human being. Your son(s) or daughter(s) is here on this earth in no small way because of you. This is where fatherhood begins but it definitely isn't where it stops. Fatherhood may be a new undertaking for you, or you might be an old hand, either way, if you are not in a good space physically, mentally or emotionally, it's unlikely you'll be able to do kick-ass dad stuff with or for your kids.

Find the thing you love to do:

I was talking with a colleague last year about how we as males can get obsessed with stuff. Cars, surfing, Trade Me, the gym, Rubik's Cube, medieval combat – you name it and some dude has probably got obsessed with it at some point in time. When I say obsessed, I don't mean an addiction. I just mean enjoying spending time thinking of, learning about or practicing something that you're really interested in – for whatever reason. I'm not sure if many females have this same tendency but I believe it's fairly common for guys. It's kind of like going into the man-cave of your brain.

Anyway, if you are feeling a bit stressed out or your enthusiasm for life is a little on the low side, it just may be you haven't been

engaging in your chosen obsession quite enough. Not sure what I'm talking about. Here's a question for you: When you've had a long, hard day at work, you're in the bad books with your partner, or you just need a bit of time for yourself, what's the thing that you want to do? That thing is what I'm talking about. Of course you could go for a jog. Research will tell you that going for that jog will initiate the release of endorphins, giving you an instant boost. You could go for a jog, you'll probably be better off for it, but if your thing is doing Sudoku, a jog might not quite cut the mustard.

So, what's your chosen obsession, that thing that occupies your mind, allowing you to have a bit of a break and keep a sense of balance in your life? If you haven't been engaging in it much lately, perhaps it's time to get back into it or if you have been, keep doing it - it might be helping you to be the awesome dad that you want to be for your kids.

Make time to catch-up with mates:

Another thing that we as dads can do to keep us on track is to make time to catch up and do something with our mates. I am pretty bad at this to be fair but despite my general inaction, I do appreciate that spending time with others does have some real benefits. First of all, it allows us to do something we enjoy that we don't necessarily do all the time. Watching the rugby, going to a concert, playing squash, having a jam, heading to the local for a quiet one; all these things and many others are activities best done accompanied.

Try empathy on for size:

Speaking of benefits, catching up with friends and being genuinely interested in how they're going gets us out of our

own headspace and makes us think about someone else – yep, showing interest and dare I say it...empathy, is good for you, not to mention the person you're empathising with. Yes, taking the time to find out what's been happening with Brian is a win-win for both you and Brian.

Notice the small stuff and be present:

My last tip on looking after ourselves as dads is an oldie but a goodie. It's something we do all the time without thinking about, but it's something if we are more aware of, could go a long way to maintaining a positive frame of mind and even a general sense of wellbeing...it is... drumroll please...breathing.

Now, you may well scoff at this but believe it or not, a bit of deep breathing does actually help us to relax and feel calm. I'm not talking about practicing transcendental meditation or anything too serious, just taking the time, even once or twice a day to take in a few deep breaths and maybe looking around you, noticing what you see, hear and even smell at that moment. There's actually a whole ton of research into this type of practice, commonly known as mindfulness, but taking a few deep breaths every now and then is not a bad start.

By doing this you'll likely start to feel more present and I'm telling you, when you're spending time with your family, this 'being more present' won't go unnoticed. Potential results include; your kids feeling loved and valued. Potential benefits to you include; your kids feeling loved and valued...and maybe some extra hugs. Totally worth it then, right?!

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