

EXCLUSIVE



FATHER FIGURES

A tragic story is playing out in our society. Millions of young people are growing up without a dad. Christopher Kerr, author of *New Dad Diaries* (found exclusively at sortedmag.com), explores the devastating impact on our kids and communities.

Gentlemen, if I told you that you could save the world by doing one thing, would you do it? If most of you said yes, we could put gangs out of business, substantially reduce crime, end male violence against women, prevent genocides, overcome the ever-increasing mental health crisis, turn the tide when it comes to poverty and make school shootings

a thing of the past.

But before you agree to rise to this challenge, please heed this warning. It will be hard work, time-consuming and it will require immense sacrifice on your part. At times, it will hurt – a lot. There will be hundreds of sleepless nights met by a need to jump out of bed early. You won't get any public fanfare, and I'm afraid you won't get

paid either. In fact, full disclosure, it will cost you, on average, £150,000 (paid across 18 years or so).

Still interested? Great. Here's the call to action: be a good father to your children and, where possible, find a way to mentor the kids and young adults who have no dad.

As you are about to read, the importance of doing this cannot be overstated. →

THE WOUND

When a boy or girl is born, their father can either choose to love them or reject them. The father's choice will ultimately shape the life of that child and the people around them.

As a general rule, if the father stays and is present in that child's life, he strengthens the child's heart, often helping him or her to grow into a confident, assured, empathetic adult capable of having healthy relationships, dealing with tough times and living a life of purpose.

If the father decides to reject their child, and for the sake of this article I mean that he chooses to walk or drift away entirely, he leaves them with a 'big tear in their soul', a wounded heart. John Sowers, author of *Fatherless Generation*, puts it this way: "Perhaps the worst thing about this rejection is living with the knowledge that someone has chosen to turn his back on you. They have chosen to leave you. Someone has determined your value and decided you are not worth having around – or that he would be better off someplace else, without you".

This leaves the abandoned with a profound sense of insecurity that can plague them for a lifetime. They come to believe that if their dad, who is supposed to love them unconditionally cannot bring himself to do so, why would anyone else love or respect them? They feel like their only hope is to become people they aren't, perfect human beings, even though this is an exhausting and ultimately impossible goal. The fatherless become trapped in a difficult place, more desperate than most for approval and acceptance from others, but too afraid to open up and pursue it.

For the abandoned, whether child or adult, life is much tougher than it is for their fathered peers. For example: rather than being a gateway to a dream career, academic exams can be an existential crisis ('If I don't pass, I will never be accepted by others'); asking a girl out can be too big a risk to handle ('If she rejects me, it confirms my worst fear – I am unlovable'). The difference in experience is so pronounced that David Blankenhorn, the author of *Fatherless America*, warned us that we are heading for a two-tier society – one group that benefited from the daily presence and provision of a father and another that did not.

The size of this fatherless group is already worryingly large. More than seven million fathers have abandoned their kids in the USA (according to the US Census Bureau) and more than a million UK-based minors are living without any contact from their dads (according to the Centre for Social Justice). Sadly, these numbers are expected to grow, and the prognosis for both the individuals and our wider society is worse than we dare imagine.



“For some young people, time is something they will never get from their fathers”

THE IMPACT

The vast majority of fatherless people, including those I have met, are fine men and women. They are strong, resilient, wonderful people who have acknowledged their 'father wound' and pursued healing for it. They are heroes, not victims, who have been successful both at home and at work, overcoming immense adversity in the process. Some of the best dads I know were abandoned by their own father.

That said, left unhealed, the father wound has a devastating impact on both the individual and on society. That is the overriding conclusion from many thousands of studies into paternal absence.

Take, for example, the impact of fatherlessness on a person's health. Kids without present fathers are nearly four times more likely to suffer from depression when they become adults and more than twice more likely to experience bipolar

disorders. They account for more than 63 per cent of youth suicides, 80 per cent of preschool kids admitted to psychiatric hospitals, 90 per cent of homeless and runaway kids and 75 per cent of adolescents in substance abuse centres.

Dad deprivation also has a negative impact on physical health. Medical researchers concluded that: "By age nine, kids with father loss have significantly shorter telomeres in their cells" (Paediatrics (2017)). As telomere length affects lifespan, losing dad can translate to a lower life expectancy. Father loss is also considered an 'adverse childhood experience', a major risk factor in the leading causes of disease and death. Childhood obesity, for example, is twice as common in dad-deprived kids.

Fatherlessness has a negative impact in other areas of life, too. Children from fatherless homes make up 71 per cent of all secondary school dropouts and 71 per cent of teen pregnancies. They are four times more likely to live and stay in poverty, and 20 times more likely to have a behavioural disorder. They don't perform as well at school as kids who have both parents available to them (even when measured against weaker-performing schools) and they are statistically more likely to skip school or be expelled. Sadly, children aged between ten and 17 who live without their dads are much more likely to become victims of child abuse and violence.

Kids desperately need their dads. Failing that, they need good men to invest into their lives through mentoring and other means. As it turns out, our local communities and wider society also need men to stand up and take on this responsibility.

SHARED PAIN

In 1965, the sociologist Daniel Moynihan, who served under three US presidents, raised the alarm on fatherlessness. He warned that communities in which large numbers of young men grew up without a stable father-son relationship would descend into chaos. More than 50 years on, Moynihan's prediction has become a reality.

You see, there is a worrying link between violent crime and absent dads. For example, the most common denominator behind gang activity is not race, education or social class – it's fatherlessness. That includes the estimated 200 gangs in London, and more militant groups such as the Hitler Youth, the neo-Nazis and ISIS. We also know that mass shootings in US schools are almost always carried out by young, white, troubled and – crucially – unfathered boys. Fatherless individuals are also 279 per cent more likely to carry guns and deal drugs. Some 85 per cent of youths in prison (and the vast majority of incarcerated adults) grew up without a father.

There are many complex reasons for this

link between fatherlessness and crime. In short, unhealed father wounds can make people feel a burning rage, hatred and mistrust toward their absent fathers and other male authority figures, yet at the same time feel the pain of rejection and long for approval and acceptance. If that person is fortunate, they will receive much-needed validation and guidance from a good man – perhaps a relative, a teacher or a coach. Far too often though, it will come from delinquent peers, gang members, drug dealers, or nobody at all. That's where the harm begins to show.

Sadly, we seem to be ignoring, or worse, denying there is a dad deprivation problem. Increased violent crime rates, for example, are attributed to frustration, substance abuse, access to weapons and yes, toxic masculinity. Whilst these issues may contribute to youth violence, they are not the root cause of it. So we get solutions that are limited in success at best, like harsher prison sentences, and at worst cause more harm, such as so-called treatments for masculinity. The latter completely misses the point. To improve child wellbeing and overcome violence and toxic masculinity, our kids and communities need more men, not less.

THE CURE

For the fatherless and their communities, men have usually been the problem. The good news is, we can also be the solution. The difference between the two cuts right to the very heart of masculinity: taking responsibility. If we run from it, choosing the easier wrong over the difficult right, we leave pain and destruction in our wake. If we grab hold of it, taking ownership and care of our domain, we bring order, restoration and opportunity to our kids and communities. →



FATE OF THE FATHERLESS

Kids without dads fare worse than their fathered peers in many ways. They are at a greater risk of:

- Poverty
- Teen pregnancy
- Behavioural problems
- Child abuse
- Going to prison
- Joining a gang
- Physical and mental health issues
- Suicide
- Dropping out of school
- Becoming homeless, even in their youth
- Committing violent crime
- Taking drugs
- Carrying weapons

Sources include: US Census Bureau, US Department of Health, *Criminal Justice and Behaviour* and numerous academic studies/books.

There is no greater demonstration of this than our decision to take responsibility as fathers... or not.

There are two things I would like to say about this responsibility. First, our kids need us to be present, not perfect. Even the best dads make mistakes. Just show up consistently, bringing laughter, love, protection, wisdom, and when needed, discipline. Second, whilst the buck stops with men, society needs to change its ridiculous view that fathers aren't as important as mothers when it comes to raising kids. When a culture believes this to be true, nobody wins. Governments, justice systems, health services, workplaces and the media add barriers to a role that is already full of challenges. The result is that sons and daughters end up losing what they need most from their dads: their time.

For some young people, time is something they will never get from their fathers. Should our responsibility as men extend outside our family homes and into our communities to reach these kids and young adults? That's up to you, although I strongly believe it should. Let me take you to a school in Louisiana to show you why. Many of the students in this school were fatherless and there was a real problem with violent behaviour. In fact, one week in 2021, it got so bad that the police intervened and had to arrest 23 kids. Then something happened that changed everything. That something was a group of 40 dads called, 'Dads on Duty'. Every day, these dads showed up, with the school's permission, to man the hallways, where they would joke with, encourage, coach, mentor and provide boundaries for these kids. There hasn't been a fight there since.

It's amazing what can happen when good men step into the lives of the fatherless. Most don't become violent, but they all need a male figure to take a chance on them. To coach and mentor them, and to care about them. To show that they are loved, valued and believed in. To point out what is good about them and help them build confidence, usually for the first time.

There are many ways we can do this. Perhaps a close relative or your child's friend has no dad around. Invite them along on your family adventures, and mentor them alongside your own kid. Join a youth organisation like the Scouts or Sea Cadets, or volunteer to coach your kid's sports team. Look for those without any positive male influence in their lives and spend extra time with them. Find the young people in your church or workplace with absent fathers and come alongside them in their journey. How you do that is up to you. All that matters to dad-deprived kids is your input. More often than not, it will change the course of their lives forever.

Trust me when I say that, for I was one of them once.



“It's amazing what happens when good men step into the lives of the fatherless”

A FINAL WORD

The father wound comes in all shapes and sizes. Whilst I have focused on the one left by dads who walk away, it can also come from the death of a father, an abusive father, a father who doesn't get to spend enough time with his kids due to family court restrictions, or from dads who were just not nice or available to their children. Whichever way it comes, it is deeply painful and has a profound impact.

To those who have experienced a father wound, all is not lost. You will need to be proactive in getting the healing you need, and that may involve you forgiving your father. One of the benefits of not having a dad is that you get to pick and choose who you model and learn from. That's what I did. I learned from God, from books about great men and from good men who took time out to invest in me.

Finally, please understand this: explaining why fathers matter is not to imply that

mothers do not. In fact, for many fatherless people the love of their mum was vital to them overcoming their adversity (it was for me). A child suffers greatly when either mum or dad is out of the picture. If society could recognise this fact, and adapt its behaviour accordingly, we would all be better off. [S](#)

MENTORS MATTER

Young people with mentors are:

- 46% less likely to do drugs
- 33% less likely to resort to violence
- 53% less likely to drop out of school
- 27% less likely to become a regular underage drinker
- 59% more likely to improve their academic performance
- 55% more likely to go to university

Sources include: Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and *The Future of Children* (Quinn, J).