

## ***From the Beginning...***

Early Childhood Development and The Role of Fathers  
Strong Families Commission Annual Convening  
September 18<sup>TH</sup> AND 19<sup>TH</sup> 2019

Reflections

Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, Ph.D.

***POWERFUL - BOLD - TRANSFORMATIVE***

Good evening and thank you for the kind introduction. My husband and I are so pleased to have the opportunity to be here in support of the transformational work of the Strong Families Commission.

Also, as the Commission's Inaugural Chair of Education, I am particularly honored to bring reflections tonight.

Being new to the region, I look forward to meeting many of you throughout this convening and to building extensive collaborations and partnerships across the Commonwealth, as Pittsburgh Technical College is positioned as an Educator of Choice for Technical Education, through the expansion of educational access.

The work of the Strong Families Commission is truly transformative with its focus on strategically and structurally engaging fathers in the lives of families.

As I thought about my reflections for tonight, three words came immediately to mind. These words were, Powerful, Bold, and Transformative. Say it with me...Powerful, Say...Bold, Say... Transformative.

The Commission's vision ***is powerful*** because it encompasses a state and national commitment for children and youth to benefit from and grow up with the emotional, social, physical, intellectual, spiritual, and financial support of both parents in a healthy and supportive environment.

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Equally as powerful, is its bold and transformative mission to strengthen families and improve the well-being of children through the integration of responsible fatherhood programming;

Its advocacy for eliminating policy and program barriers that affect the successful reunification of children and families.

And its call for leveraging resources that contribute to the well-being of children and families; while also encouraging collaboration among Philadelphia organizations and beyond, that are family-focused and inclusive of Fathers.

I often speak about strategic visioning to generate ideas that can change the world, and without hesitation, I am confident that the ***powerful, bold and transformative*** work of the Commission represents world changing ideas.

And here is how I know:

The benefits of having strong positive fathers constructively engaged in the lives of their families are significant; however, the risks when this does not occur are equally as significant.

Here are five data points proven to occur when fathers are absent from the lives of their children:

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**We Know:**

1. That there is diminished self-concept and compromised physical and emotional security as children consistently report feeling abandoned when their fathers are not involved in their lives.

**We Know:**

2. That children without fathers in the home or engaged positively in their lives have more difficulties with social adjustment, and are more likely to report problems with friendships and manifest behavioral problems.

**We Know:**

3. 71 percent of high school dropouts do not have fathers in the home and experience higher levels of academic difficulty.

**We Know:**

4. 85 percent of youth in prison report not having a father in the home and are more likely to re-offend and go to jail as adults.

Lastly,

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### **We Know:**

5. 90 percent of runaway children do not have a father in the home.

Of course, I could go on, but I won't, about the significant mental and physical health challenges, as well as, concerns with life choices, relationships and even mortality.

These and other social problems correlate more strongly with the absence of fathers in the lives of children than any other factor—surpassing race, social class, and poverty.

It is clear that the absence of fathers in the lives of children, is one of the most pressing social issues of our time.

In *Fatherless America*, David Blankenhorn calls the crisis of fatherless children, “the most destructive trend of our generation.”

A report from the University of Birmingham, entitled, "Dad and Me," confirms Blankenhorn's claim, concluding that the need for fathers is on an epidemic scale, and should be treated as a public health issue. Colleagues, we ignore this issue at our peril.

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I started my reflections by stating that the work of the Strong Families Commission is transformative.

It is, because the Commission recognizes that the whole is greater than the part, and the role of fathers, is an important part of making families whole.

In fact, the absence of fathers leaves a hole in the family that is rarely, if ever filled. Therefore, the inclusion of fathers cannot be an after-thought but should be in the forefront of the creation of policies and systems that purport to serve children. Those of us participating in this convening, know this.

I am confident that this convening will further amplify the importance of father inclusivity, *not because it's a nice thing to do; but because, it is the right thing to do!*

You Are There.....Always There

Even when I can't see you

Father

You are Powerful

Bold

And

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Transformative

A part of each action..... before it happens!

You are part of me and I am a part of you

When I can't see you

I know you are there

Certainly there ... Always there

I need you there

You are

The essence of me - from the very beginning

A part of who I am

And a part of who I am becoming

A component of my DNA

I can see it in my eyes

Or the shape of my hands

My smile

Your laugh

There you are

You are

The shine in your daughter's eyes

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The rhythm in your son's steps  
Pushing her forward – holding him up  
The strength needed to forge ahead  
The courage to try again  
Shelter from the raging storm  
The patriarch to the ancestral tree  
The root  
The source  
Generating proud legacies  
Stability on shaky ground  
Standing firm in the midst of adversity  
Teaching your daughter how to be loved  
Teaching your son manhood  
You are there  
Even when I can't see you  
A part of each action..... before it happens!  
You are part of me and I am a part of you  
When I can't see you  
I know you are there

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You are

Powerful

Bold

And

Transformative

When you are there...

Beautifully there

We need you there.

Fathers...

Thank You and Have A Wonderful Evening.