

# **The Home Educating Father:**

## **A Mandate of Loving Leadership**

*(By Jeff Rockwell)*

More and more families in Ontario and throughout Canada are seizing the opportunity to bless and benefit their children through the process of home education. Although the history of home education is long and venerable, the modern initiative is still considered to be avant-garde and even radical by some. To those who have carefully assessed the philosophical direction and moral agenda in the public school system, however, it is increasingly becoming an intentional and conviction based necessity.

Regardless of the venue, pioneering is always a challenging pursuit. For those considering or beginning home education, the learning curve can seem extremely steep at first. Wondering about the legalities, curriculum and the logistics of setting up your “space” and schedule can wear on even the most enthusiastic. Later, the questions of well meaning friends and relatives, and even dissent from the children themselves can raise the tension level for parents. How can a family sustain the momentum and follow through over time with diligence and confidence that they are indeed doing “the best” for their children? I believe one of the keys to sustained excellence in home education is a father’s willingness to accept his role as a loving leader.

For most of the home educating families that I know, the primary teacher is the wife. Her task is demanding but relatively clear. She is the prime agent in the educational process, day to day, within the home. Unfortunately, many couples fail to recognize the significance of Dad’s role, and reap a harvest of confusion, frustration and even marital tension. On the surface, since home educating is a family endeavour (and Dad is a critical player in the life and health of his family) the necessity of his involvement seems almost too obvious. In reality, though, many Dads (including this one!) are initially unaware of the practical impact they must have to ensure successful home education.

I have heard it said that the greatest thing a man can do for his children is to love their mother. The essential message of this culturally provocative, but biblically sound notion is that the husband-wife relationship is the foundation of the entire family. Home educating Dads must determine as a first priority that they will husband their wives with godly tenderness and wisdom. Home education places special burdens on a wife and she needs the strong, focused attention of her loving leader to spiritually and emotionally “finance” her efforts in the teaching of their children.

Contrary to the mythology of advertising media, it has been my experience that what my wife needs most from me is not jewelry or the latest appliance, but spiritual leadership. This is extremely important for the stability of the marriage and family. All other need meeting efforts on the part of a husband grow out of his understanding of the spiritual role God has called him to play. The home educating Dad must take the time to invest in the spiritual and moral advancement of his wife and children. This begins with consistent study of life issues in the light of God’s Word through family devotions. Different families may structure their devotional according to their particular situation, but Dad must ensure that it does take place! The powerful connection between a child’s moral/spiritual growth and academic performance is a dynamic that all veteran parents understand. As well, spiritual leadership includes making regular church involvement a priority, and treating it as a privilege. Perhaps the least visible, but most powerful of a home educating Dad’s spiritual obligations is prayer. Men, your wives and children need your continual fervent intercession on their behalf. Knowing that Dad is depending on God for success propels a home educating family to genuine achievement.

Sometimes, leadership involves a willingness to exercise discipline and bring the need for respect and honour back into a child’s purview. When it comes to curbing sinful behaviours, men, your wives need to know that you will set the standard and enforce it. This does not mean that Dad must be involved in every correction. Rather, the children must know that both of their parents stand together in upholding biblical norms for attitudes and behaviour.

A very practical and important way to shepherd the home educating Mom involves creating space for her to get away from the non-stop demands of the educational and domestic routine. Even something as simple as knowing that every so often she will be free to read, walk, meditate, visit, shop or simply rest for a few hours provides an opportunity for emotional renewal. Dad should also bring leadership in the area of chores. Train your children to pull their weight around the house from an early age. Show by your example that you are also willing to contribute to a clean, orderly home. Your wife will be very pleased! Furthermore, the sense of teamwork attained will spill over into the educational process as well.

Home education is probably the most fiscally efficient method available for the academic training of children. Still, it is not free and requires faithful provision for curriculum, supplies, field trips and “staff training!” Money alone does not make for successful home education but careless or stingy funding will surely undermine the endeavour. Dads must make certain that the family budget reflects wise priorities and upholds Mom’s commitment.

Another aspect of valuable support that the home educating father can provide is encouragement. Tangible expressions of appreciation for the sacrifices made by Mom are both refreshing for her and reassuring for the kids. As well, there is disproportionate blessing accrued when Dad praises the legitimate academic, athletic, artistic and character gains of each child. The family needs to know

that Dad is 100% supportive of the home education adventure.

Men, your part in the process of teaching your children at home is of tremendous significance. Your wife needs your strength, vision and understanding in order to pour herself into the task. God has equipped you to be the “go to” guy for your family. They need your unwavering and unselfish commitment in order to experience all of the blessing that home education has to offer. May God grant you grace and joy as you lead in His strength.

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