

Why Every Man Should Work with Children



Send him mail.



"Insight for the Young and Unrestrained" is an original column appearing every Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Gregory V. Diehl. Gregory is a writer, musician, educator, and coach for young people at EnabledYouth.com. Archived columns can be found [here](#). IYU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

By now, most thinking people know how important the influence of a caring male figure (preferably the biological father) is over the healthy physical and emotional development of children. It's an inescapable part of the way we been shaped to develop, by mimicking the influences of the older authorities in our lives. What's more rarely discussed is how, when done right, this relationship is reciprocal, and the grown men can be benefited even more than the children involved.

Unlocking the Mentoring and Fatherly Potential Present in All Men

While avoiding absolute generalizations, men are undoubtedly the more stoic sex. Many of us grow far removed from other people unless we have something to tether us to the rest of the world. These ties usually exist as any experience which catalyzes a peak emotional response within us. It can be the thrill and excitement of an action-packed movie or a sports game- or it can be the soothing influence of a women's touch. These kinds of activities unlock parts of our natural emotional capacity that we tend to have difficulty reaching on our own.

There is a unique part of the emotional range of every man that I believe can only become accessible in the presence of children. Inside every one of us is an instinct for parental support, though many people unconsciously avoid it when they have not yet learned to take care of even their own problems yet. When adult males accept the presence of young growing humans into their emotional awareness, it alters how they speak, act, and even carry themselves. In time, we grow to become more protective, watchful, and driven by a desire to teach and lead those who haven't yet learned the lessons experience has granted us.

Kids Empower Men by Making Them Vulnerable

I've interacted with a great number of men who seem almost terrified of being around children – and not just because they can be loud, messy, and generally unpredictable. These men (and some women) will automatically rigidify emotionally around kids. If they simply aren't ready to feel the new states of mind that protective influence over the young requires, they are prone to distancing themselves entirely.

In some ways, young children, especially young girls, are the polar opposites on the emotional spectrum of adult males. That can be a terrifying experience for us to encounter. There's a reason that even many of the fathers who don't physically abandon their burgeoning families still fail to interact with any degree of emotional openness. When we are around that much emotional overflow, we can't help but be affected by it.

If we aren't ready to let their unstoppable energy pervade us – breaking that defensive shell we've worked so hard to build – we will treat their unhampered approach to life as a full-frontal attack on our senses and the parts of ourselves we work so hard to keep hidden from the rest of the world. The saddest examples of this are when parents will spend the whole of their offspring's childhood and teenage years strictly as sustenance provider and disciplinarians, instead of ever becoming genuinely connected and emotionally interactive.

And it's important that we do let them break us. Buried deep within men is a special kind of emotional strength, and it's as if children, sensing this hidden power, go out of their way to shatter the shell housing it. Deep within the eyes of millions of little girls is an inherent pleading for men to show them that the world is a safe place – even if only when they are around to protect them. Just as it is our nature to embody this role for them, it is theirs to demand it of us.

Men Who Hate Children

This explains why so many modern men (unfortunately, many of them fathers or teachers) seem to absolutely abhor the existence of children. Young children are neither physically independent (in the sense that they depend on adults to keep them alive) nor emotionally independent (in the sense that their emotional capacities are still developing, and they require healthy older figures to show them how to do this). Just being near them carries an implicit request for grown men to become emotional role models.

Every man who finds himself regularly in the company of children must come to answer this request one way or another. He can follow the path of least resistance and remain emotionally apart from them. He will see them as broken creatures that need forceful molding and restructuring to learn to control their feelings as he has. Or he can change himself to meet their needs, and in doing so reach new levels of self-knowledge that would be impossible without their natural demand that he attain it. To put it simply: the natural demands of children, when willingly embraced, are capable of turning ordinary men into

superheroes.

The Forgotten Masculinity

All the things which our culture considers “manly” are those which emphasize a certain aspect of the natural advantages of masculinity. Focus, intellect, endurance, speed, strength, and emotional stability are among these. We worship these traits in the form of athletes, scientists, and business men. Usually absent from this list is the ability to watch over and mentor young people with the kind of love and support that only an emotionally developed man is capable of. Yet, it is more powerful and more needed than any other masculine strength. Like the others, it can only be developed through practice and use.

Being around children, and really allowing yourself to be with them fully will make you grow more than any other manly activity you could perform. It unlocks the most natural parts of what we are capable of if we are brave enough to make it through the transitional stages between emotional withholding and controlled outpouring. If we allow it, it does as much good for us as it does for them by forcing us to acknowledge the most sentimental and vulnerable parts of ourselves many of us have long since forgotten.

You may be man enough to wrestle a grizzly, or rescue a fair maiden from a mugger, but do you have what it takes to look a lost and lonely little girl in the eyes and communicate without words exactly what she needs to know to feel that the world is a safe place for her to live in? Can you challenge a young boy to explore his curiosity and potential, even when it gets difficult? This is the masculinity that most of the human race has forgotten, and that even the most conventionally manly men are secretly terrified of. It is also the task that we must choose to rise to for the good of men and children everywhere.

All men concerned with self-improvement and true primal masculinity should work with or spend time around children. It is a skill set whose time has come, and the long-term benefits it holds for you, them, and the rest of the world are unparalleled. Take the challenge – if you are man enough.