

# Fathers are important to children's development

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LANCASTER — Fathers play an important role in their children's development - a role that is different but just as important as a mother's role, psychologist Alan Babcock told a small group of parents at the Jewish Community Center last week.

Babcock's lecture was just one of several events the Lancaster Area Association for the Education of Young Children sponsored during the Week of the Young Child, April 1 through 7.

For many years mothers were thought to be the most important influence on young children, Babcock said. "Fathers were thought pretty much to be the breadwinners," he explained.

However, when families started breaking up after World War II, the father's importance became increasingly apparent, Babcock noted. Boys without fathers started having problems in school. "They also seemed to lack self-confidence," he said.

"Girls raised in homes without fathers were not quite as feminine," he continued. The girls also seemed to have a problem taking risks.

"The father-daughter relationship has a really profound effect on a woman's relationship with all the other men in her life," Babcock continued. If a woman gets the message that she is in-

dependent and can make it in this world, she will most likely become successful and independent. But if her father tells her she is helpless, that is what she will become, he explained.

"The father becomes a pivotal position in the family situation," he said. "It becomes a really tricky business."

A mother's love tends to be unconditional, "but it's incomplete," Babcock said. "Children can't make it just with that love."

They also need a father's love, which usually must be earned. Fathers represent society in the home and are the standard bearers, Babcock said.

"What we say to them is awfully important," he explained. Often a child gets the message that he is loved only when he is successful.

The father teaches the child whether the product or the process is most important. But it is important to separate love from what the child does. You must tell him, 'I love you no matter what,' Babcock said.

Children must learn that the process is important. Even when they paint a terrible picture it is important to praise them for the effort, while encouraging them to do better, Babcock said.

"We have to reward that process," he stressed.

The father of two sons aged two

and six, Babcock said he often sees his role as that of an experience giver. He said he likes to take his kids camping or to the park to give them an experience they can enjoy together.

"I'm really bummed out when I take them someplace nice and they don't like it," he confessed.

Through playing with their children, fathers teach them social skills - like how to deal with losing, Babcock said.

One father who attended the lecture said he sees his role as a backup to fill in when mom isn't around.

Babcock, who cares for his kids on his own two nights a week, said he has been doing more and more of the child care.

"I don't think there's anything harder to do than giving both my kids a bath on a night when my wife's not there," he said.

Taking over more of the child care responsibilities, Babcock said, has changed his ideas about television. He now enjoys having the kids glued to the tube for a few hours on Saturday morning, giving him a little time to himself.

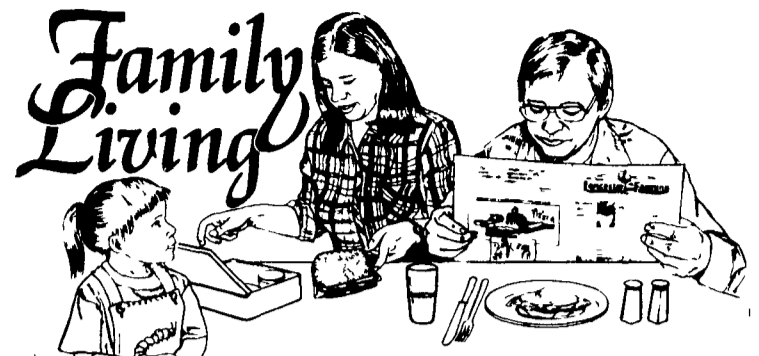
In a discussion on the man's role in the household, the fathers agreed that their wives are still handling the majority of the housework, even when their wives are working. However, the men said they have been helping out some, but expect to be complemented when they do little chores.

Work demands often keep him from being the father he would like to be, Babcock said. "I find there are a lot of things that interfere with my being the father I want to be," he said. "I think what happens is the kids get shortchanged."

To change this, fathers must decide what they want to do and take control instead of just letting things happen, Babcock said. A person must decide how often he wants to be out and then say no to some things, even if they are things he wants to do.

"The nitty gritty thing you have to do is set up a good relationship with your child," Babcock said.

Making this time commitment to children is important - even in the early days of infancy. "A lot of people play down those early years, Babcock said. "Those are the most important years."



Psychologist Alan Babcock conducts a discussion on the father's role in the family. Babcock gave a lecture at the Jewish Community Center in Lancaster as part of a series of program honoring the Week of the Young Child.

Children develop trust in the first year when they are learning, "how does the world deal with me?" Babcock said. It's a safe world if the child gets fed when hungry, warmed when cold and dried when wet.

"If we miss that stage we've missed something in that relationship," Babcock said.

When it comes to disciplining a child, education is the key, Babcock said. "It's really important to look at discipline as teaching. As dads we want to spend our time teaching kids how to function in this world."

Men often try to make a lesson out of every experience, but it is important for them to realize that

children go through different stages of development, Babcock said. In the early stages of development a child can learn what no means, but still not be able to translate that into behavior.

"Kid's know intellectually what no means but can't interpret into action," Babcock explained.

At this stage of development, redirection is a good method of discipline, Babcock said. When you use redirection, you are showing a child an option to his current behavior. He deals in concrete thinking and doesn't learn a lesson in one try, Babcock explained. While he may repeat an unacceptable behavior more than once,

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## BACK HOME



By Michelle S. Rodgers

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### "Money Matters"

The pressure was on — April 15th was looming in the not too distant future and the dining room table was littered with facts and figures — few of which were on the 1040 form! However, we always seem to get done figuring in time to get to the post office just under the wire with only a few dozen headaches and grey hairs added.

I'll be the first to admit that money management is a skill and not an innate ability. To a great extent, the level of those skills depends upon the attitudes, ideas and habits regarding money that we acquire while growing up! However, income tax procrastination cannot be traced back to either set of parents so I'm not sure where that came from.

We do know for fact that those who learn to make choices and follow a spending plan when they are young are better able to make sound financial decisions later. By receiving early training in money management, children have a head start in a task that becomes more complicated as the years go on. They will have to make decisions about credit, insurance, and, of course, income taxes!

I do remember several lessons from "back home" on money management skills. Farm chores were completed for an allowance, piano lessons were to be saved for, 4-H animals to be wisely chosen and acquired and savings accounts to be built for college years ahead. Every family situation is unique and has individual approaches.

I'm thankful for my early experiences and for the 4-H animal that was later sold to help pay for college.

There are no hard and fast rules for teaching young people the basics of money management. Child rearing as a whole is a highly personal matter requiring individual decisions. However, certain guidelines can help to create an atmosphere for learning.

Set limits and make rules. Young people feel secure in limits that are set and followed consistently. Try suggestions rather than directives. Experience is a great teacher. I learned early that farming is sometimes risky business when a 4-H heifer I had purchased died unexpectedly.

Be honest about your own finances. If you don't want your children to buy something, tell them so, rather than using the excuse that you can't afford it. On the other hand, when you actually cannot afford something, say so and don't feel guilty.

Don't expect your children to do as you say; they will more likely do as you do. Children learn a lot about your values by watching your money management.

Even as adults we continue to grow and develop in money management skills. Who knows, maybe next year I'll have my tax forms ready on February 15th.

For more information on family life education materials contact the Penn State Extension Service, an affirmative action, equal opportunity educational institution.

## What to do when a child lies or steals

"Did you steal that?" asked the mother.

"No, I didn't," replied the child.

In reality, the child had stolen the candy. Now to the guilt of stealing, he has added the guilt of lying about it.

Parents don't like to admit — or even think — that their school-age children have lied or stolen. Call it "human nature" or call it "growing up" but be aware that lying and stealing are much more common among young children than parents want to believe.

Given that these behaviors are

likely to occur, what can a parent do when confronted with the fact that a child has told a "white lie" ("I didn't do it") or left a store with something not paid for?

It's best to avoid the extremes of irrational concern ("My child is a budding criminal") or apathy ("So what?"), according to Growing Up, a child-development newsletter. Treat the occasion, instead, as a valuable opportunity to teach a lesson about moral behavior.

For example, let's say you've almost reached home after an

exhausting afternoon of shopping. You notice that your child has a bar of candy that you didn't pay for, and you know he didn't have any money to pay for it, either.

Instead of accusing him ("You stole that!") give him a chance to confess ("Where did you get that candy bar?"). Avoid asking a yes or no question that invites your child to tell a lie.

Then, even though it may be a nuisance to turn the car around and go back to the store, do so. The effort will teach the child an important lesson.

A child learns nothing about honesty from a parent who is too apathetic or embarrassed to go back to the store. He learns an entirely different lesson from a parent who takes him right back to the cashier or manager to return the ill-gotten goods and tell them the truth about what he did.

If the child doesn't have to go back to the store, he learns that, apart from a brief scolding, the consequences of lying and stealing are not very great.

The child who has to return the stolen object and tell the truth learns about personal responsibility, discovers an inner sense of satisfaction that comes from being honest, and leaves the store with the good feeling of having done the right thing.

