

INSIGHTS

Kids need good men in their lives



While rummaging through my bookshelves at home recently I stumbled across *Romulus, My Father* by Raimond Gaita, a book that had a huge impact on me as a father.

Romulus, My Father is a lovingly told memoir of a hard-working father who remained faithful to his family and friends despite his wife's affairs, her mental illness and dealing with the hardships of earning a living in 1950s and '60s rural Australia. It's a tale of love, friendship and character.

One line in the book, "*I know what a good man is because I saw it in my father,*" struck an instant chord with me. It was a reminder that kids need to have close experiences with men who have real depth of character and strength if they are to adopt those qualities themselves and also look for them in partners.

Role models of quality

Sadly, children and young people are less likely to see these qualities in many of our current political leaders and other public figures. Self-interest and shallowness of character, at least in a public sense, seems to be standard fare at present.

Like Gaita, I had the good fortune to have a father who was also a good man. He wasn't wealthy, famous or ambitious. Rather he was kind, considerate and generous. He had experienced an unhappy and – I suspect though he never spoke of it – abusive childhood but he was determined that his children would never experience the same treatment that he received.

As a disciplinarian he was soft but that didn't mean he was a pushover. He'd stand his ground with his children over issues that really mattered, such as how we siblings treated each other, displays of dishonesty and disrespect, and taking shortcuts in our studies or with work. He was a community-minded man who, through his example, taught his children the importance of serving and giving to those who didn't have the same serving of luck that we did. He was also an involved father who, despite being busy, always had time to play cricket and football after work with my brother and me. He was never too busy for his children.

A compass and a map

Significantly, my father gave me my moral compass in the form of the value system that he lived by. His many sayings including his most popular mantra: "If you can't say a good word about anyone don't say anything at all". That still rattles around in my head today. Through his active community involvement, his devotion to family and his propensity to have a good laugh, he gave me a map to follow on how to live a good life.

I don't have a monopoly on being raised by a good man. If you were raised by a good man then count your blessings because you had a wonderful head start in life. Your task is to make sure your father's legacy lives on in your own children. You'll do that by being a man of strength and character, and by being a wise, loving presence in your children's lives whatever their age.

parenting * ideas

If, through whatever circumstance, you didn't have a good man close to you in your life as a child, then start the process with your own kids. Many men who have gone before you weren't close to their own fathers, or had fathers who were ineffectual, but they became great fathers despite their circumstances.

With public life increasingly producing male role models of dubious quality, it's up to dads and other significant males in the lives of children and young people to be good men, strong men and men of honour.

That's the legacy that we leave.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.