

# A Solution for Safer School: Fathers

by [Hogan Hilling](#) and [Tom Konecny](#) (March 2020)



**While guns and school safety** are a hot topic surrounding school shootings, part of the blame has also been placed on dads. Whether you agree or not, guns are lawful. But while some people, politicians, and organizations like the NRA defend the legal right to bear arms, no one has spoken up on behalf of fathers.

There is no doubt that parental absence is a social issue that our culture needs to address. However, I have evidence to prove that fatherhood researchers and organizations have misinformed the public about father absence with incorrect data and exaggerated numbers. Furthermore, researchers have not studied the effect of mother absence to the degree they have father absence. Pew Research staff members and fatherhood experts I spoke with admitted that one important detail about father absence studies had been overlooked. Nobody has taken time to study what causes father absence. Unfortunately, the failure to do so resulted in the gathering of incorrect data and more importantly gave the public the false impression that fathers are the sole cause of fatherlessness families. There are plenty of facts to show that there are many other factors, which cause the absence of fathers in families.

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As the debate continues on the cause, like guns and fatherlessness, of the school shootings, nobody has offered a specific solution or detailed plan to solve the shootings in schools.

The truth is that fathers are the solution.

The majority of responsible, active dads, who desire to be involved in their children's lives far out number the irresponsible, absent dads. Therefore, we shouldn't question why dads aren't more involved but rather ask what needs to happen to make elementary, middle, and high schools more welcoming to the good dads?

Before I offer my short list of suggestions, I'd like to share the most important benefit of a father's presence during school hours. It's what every parent desires—a safer environment for their children.

If fatherhood researchers and experts claim father absence increases the chances of young boys to lead a life of crime, then I believe the presence of more good father role models will help boys avoid crime but more importantly also deter people from committing a crime.

In 1981, sociologists Betty Grayson and Morris I. Stein conducted a now famous study that shed new light on how assailants picked would-be targets.

Two striking factors stood out.

First, there was a consensus about who would be easy to overpower and control. Every inmate chose exactly the same person. Second, and unexpectedly, the choices were not solely based on gender, race or age, as you would expect. Older, petite females were not automatically singled out. There were other criteria that influenced the decisions. Basic movements made by the pedestrians, such as the length of their stride, how they moved their feet, the way they shifted their body weight, and whether their arms swung while walking, came into play and were interpreted for signs of vulnerability.

Much like a wild animal, a human predator wants an easy prey, which means they will seek out someone they perceive as weak, submissive, and unlikely to fight back. Because of this, any sign of strength or defiance the criminal perceives when approaching their chosen victim can in many instances be enough to turn around and look for a more suitable victim.

The same is true for how a criminal chooses the place where he plans to commit a crime. Most make time to stake out the location. They choose the most vulnerable bank, museum, house, or neighborhood. As the shootings in schools have demonstrated, school is a very vulnerable place and the shooters know it.

I believe father presence is one of the most efficient preventative measures to stop school shootings for two important reasons.



First, students tend to follow the rules from the command of a dad's stern voice more than they will a mom's voice. An example of this occurred during another shooting six years ago at Chardon High, 30 miles outside Cleveland. After Frank Hall, a coach, saw a 17-year-old holding a Ruger .22 semiautomatic pistol in one hand and a knife in the other. Hall's reaction ran counter to the school's active shooter training, as well as human instinct: Rather than take cover, the 350-pound assistant football coach and former all-state tackle charged at the shooter, roaring, "Stop! Stop!"

Dodging a bullet, Hall pursued him down a hallway and out to the parking lot. When the policemen finally caught the shooter, a mile away in the woods, the young man told them he'd run, "because Coach Hall was chasing me."

Second, more dads in attendance during school hours provide an increase in great role models for the students, especially for boys who struggle with life's challenges during their teenage years. More good dads also means a student with challenging life issues is less likely to consider engaging in a violent act at home, in his neighborhood, community, or school.

Although there is a population of dads who participate in the Parent Teachers Association, Dads Clubs, and events like Dad Breakfast and Daddy Daughter Dance their presence is minimal and the time they spend is mostly during off school hours. In addition, the majority of dads at each respective school are overlooked or left out.

Dads Clubs act more as a fundraising organization. They

sponsor golf and poker tournaments. Not every dad plays golf or poker.

Not every dad can attend an early breakfast before school starts due to their profession and schedule, but may be able to attend school during the school's morning, lunch or afternoon session.

Not every dad has a daughter.

The reality is that there are a variety of dads with different interests, schedules, and professions who desire to volunteer their time during school hours. However, the biggest obstacle dads face is lack of support from corporate America.

Most dads I know don't volunteer at school because it threatens their role as the financial provider and their ability to advance their professional career. Companies tend to view a dad's absence from work to volunteer at school as a lack of commitment to their job and a drawback to his performance at work. It is, in fact, an asset for the employer. A dad who is committed to his family translates into a more productive worker and loyal employee. And it also improves the image of a company because supporting a dad's presence at school strengthens families and communities.

Here is a short list of simple suggestions I feel school administrators; Parent Teachers Association and corporate America can practice immediately to create a friendlier environment that will encourage dads to be more present and

active during school hours.

## **Words Matter**

How one invites and markets to dads is different than the strategies used for moms. There is a science to the way businesses and advertisers market to moms. In fact, they have invested millions of dollars in researching how moms choose which products to buy but have minimally done so with dads.

Kristina Dove, a mom at Billy Earle Dade Middle School in Texas, got it right. After she posted a notice on Facebook seeking volunteers to help with a “Breakfast with Dads,” 600 men showed up.

Dads are parents too! Excluding the word dads from any general written material is not welcoming to dads. To avoid this mistake, use the word “parent.” An exception is a gender specific event like Dads Breakfast, Dads and Daughters Dance, or Mother and Daughter Brunch, or Mom and Son Bowling.

## **Demonstrate the Value of Dads as Equal Parents**

A mom recently shared a story about a dad who was asked to be a “room mom.” A dad is not a replacement for a mom. A better use of words is “room parent.”



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Each year the Parent Teachers Association presents a Parent of the Year Award. In the history of this award it is usually given to a mom and very rarely a dad. Why not award a mom and dad together? After all, as the father absence researchers and organizations claim, it takes a mother *and* dad to properly raise a child.

### **Let Dad Be Dad and Trust Him**

Give dad the same trust and free reign as you would a mom. Just because dads parent, treat, and interact with children different than moms doesn't mean it's wrong, just different.

Often time's dads are given instructions on what they can and can't do. A dad's number one priority is to spend time with their child, their friends, and other students and have fun with them. This is difficult for a dad to accomplish when he has to constantly look over his shoulder.

### **Solicit Support from Corporate America**

Moms are great influencers for change. As women advocate for gender equality in the work place, they should simultaneously create gender equality for dads in schools and the parenting

community.

The PTA, which is predominately led and managed by moms, is a well-established organization with the ability and potential to convince corporate America to see the value of a dad's presence during school hours and to solicit more support from companies.

I believe if the PTA Mom Board Members speak up on behalf of dads that companies would be more apt to change their attitude about dad taking time off of work to volunteer during school hours without dad feeling threatened that he might lose his job or a shot at a promotion.

Companies could offer a dad an opportunity to take a two-hour lunch once a month or every other week. Or negotiate a work schedule that allows a dad to volunteer an hour or two at a time that is convenient for him during school hours. Instead of arriving to work one day at 8:00 am, a company could allow the dad to clock in at 10:00 am and make-up the two hours at the end of the day.

### **Tap into the At-Home Dad Community**

Millions of dads have chosen to be the primary caregiver for their families. It has been a growing trend since 1991 when I first became an at-home dad. Today, there is a [National At-Home Dad Network](#) which manages dad playgroups across the country and has hosted an Annual At-Home Dad Convention for the past 22 consecutive years.

An effective way to make good use of an at-home dad, as well as working dad, value is to hire him to serve as a recess and lunch supervisor. This is a win-win for everyone. Schools increase a father's presence, students receive a good father role model, dad earns a paycheck to supplement his family's income and parents acquire a great sense of relief and peace of mind knowing that a dad is there to help and protect the children.

This is a short list of simple solutions but there is so much more that our culture can do to encourage more attendance of dads during school hours.

Let's shift away from blame of dads to focusing on real solutions. One great place to start is by inviting dads to build a stronger father presence in schools.

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