

Introduction

Modern fathers are reevaluating their lives. They are yearning to reconcile their relationships with everyone in their lives, especially with their own fathers. Many of them grew up never really knowing their dads, never really connecting with them emotionally. They long for a relationship that never was, a relationship based on unconditional love and support. Relationships with their fathers centered around performance. Many men have painful memories of their fathers who were negative, condescending, physically or verbally abusive. A great number of men never came to know their fathers, despite their desperate attempts to do so while their fathers were alive. Many grown men never heard their fathers say “I love you.” Some only hear them say these words on their father’s death bed. Fathers of yesterday, and an alarming number of fathers today, never connected with their sons or daughters. They were absent or psychologically removed.

A series of societal changes including the Women’s Movement led men to question their roles and identities. Men were faced with a multitude of conflicting messages on how to relate to their wives, children, and each other. The secular Men’s Movement of the late 1970’s and 1980’s emerged when a growing number of men started looking inward. These men examined their relationships with their

attempts to pay them back and get their attention. They do this knowingly and unknowingly. They do this aggressively and with passive-aggression. They sacrifice themselves to draw dad in. They engage in all kinds of inappropriate behaviors to deaden their pain. These young boys and teenagers have father issues. They have the **father hunger** described earlier, the **father wound**, and they carry around the **wounded father within**, the essence of their own father's pain handed down to them through their broken father-son relationship. They do it through underachievement and school failure. These boys and teenagers struggle with growing up. They experience great difficulty taking on more responsibility academically. They perform below their potential. They are the class clowns in school. Some are outright defiant, belligerent, and delinquent, while others withdraw passively and use a multitude of excuses for their missed assignments, non performance, and lack of follow through. The underachievement dynamic is very complex, but invariably the most critical factor is a missing dad, an uninvolved dad, a weak, poor, or conflicted father-son relationship and an over involved mother. These kids develop ways to frustrate and thwart their parents, the teachers and the whole system. They all have different personalities and they are damaged in some way. Most of the time the underachievers did not get into more serious trouble like drugs, alcohol, and sex. They are well liked and well behaved for the most part. They are passive and non-compliant toward anything that would lead to more autonomy, independence, and growing up. It is a rewarding but often times tedious process to work with these families. Most significant change comes when fathers get involved and do whatever it takes to help their sons reverse the toxic pattern of underachievement. Fathers who boldly look into their own lives, their past relationship with their own fathers, often lay the foundation for complete healing in