

Dads – Consider Good Health as a Gift and Protection for Your Kids

I was at my office in February of 2004 when I got the call from my stepfather. “Your mom died last night in her sleep.” This was the most stunning, shocking, horrible phone call I’d ever received. While my mom had high blood pressure, this news was unexpected, as she was in decent health and relatively young – 64 years old.

Just ten years earlier, I’d gained *a lot* of weight. When I visited two friends I hadn’t seen in a year, they were shocked by my appearance. Their reaction was the wakeup call that motivated me to focus on fitness and weight loss. I’d always been fairly active, but I’d really slipped. My mom’s death – and having three young boys by that time, I was even more incentivized to re-focus on my health. I concluded that I needed to make some immediate lifestyle changes, with both my diet and physical activity.

- I thought about how my health was directly tied to my being alive longer, which in turn would provide longer-term financial, emotional, and other kinds of support for my kids.
- I felt that if I could work out regularly and eat a healthy diet, it would serve as positive role modeling to my kids
- I realized I could get at some of my new fitness goals through family and kid activities:
 - My wife and I took the kids ice skating at the Penn State rink, rock climbing at the YMCA wall, and any other activities we thought would be fun and engage them – perhaps sparking a lifetime interest.
 - When traveling, we incorporated these kinds of activities with our boys – like kayaking, biking, and hiking on family trips close and far.
 - My oldest son and I took a sailing course at Stone Valley, and we both earned Sunfish certifications.
 - I served as a head or assistant coach for many of my sons’ teams, even when I didn’t feel completely competent! Whether it was Little League, soccer, or basketball, coaching them naturally incorporated our spending quantity and quality time together at games, in practices, and beyond.
 - Choosing a race or an event to complete together gave us something to train for and look forward to. For example, my middle son and I ran four consecutive New Year’s Resolution 5K Runs in State College.

I was able to lose the weight I’d gained, and have managed to keep it off. My three boys are adults now, and in hindsight, many of my favorite fathering memories include the sports and activities we did together. Whatever your kids age, and wherever your skill level may be, consider getting involved in physical activity with them. Maybe it’s starting with a short neighborhood walk or bike ride, or perhaps something a little more outside your comfort zone like boating or coaching their sport or activity.

Marc McCann is an Internship Coordinator at Penn State who has been involved in human services and the local fathering effort in Centre County for 25 years. In cooperation with the National Center for Fathering, we aim to provide monthly Action Ideas to stimulate

conversation among families. To comment on this article, for more information, or to join local conversations, contact Marc at marc.mccann88@gmail.com. To read more, visit <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61571382497388>