

DADS MATTER!™

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The Ever-Present Dad

...Helps His Children Build Colorful Wings to Fly Away

PHOENIX—Florin Daniel (Dan) Todoran says fathers have an obligation to interact meaningfully with their children—reading, teaching and above all, being present—as their lives unfold. “We have to do it, we must do it. They need our support,” he said.

“Ralph, 5, likes playing basketball and soccer with his dad who coaches in a pre-k and kindergarten league. He also enjoys paddle-boarding on Lake Pleasant with his parents Ralph, and siblings Jessie, 3, and Armand, 16.

“Jessie loves it when I ‘help’ him as he puts it—meaning help him to learn. I explain things to him when we’re reading, and I always challenge him to ask questions to make sure that he really understands,” he explained.

Jessie’s favorite book is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* says his dad. “Usually what we do is read the book all the way to the end, then we go back and re-read it slowly, and he’ll ask me questions. I’m trying to explain to him that although you are small now, you are going to transform, like the caterpillar in the book, into a beautiful butterfly, and at one point you are going to fly and be self-sufficient and independent because you’re going to use everything that you have learned,” he says.



Field Trips and Fun Times

“I take the kids to the butterfly exhibit where they can see live larva, cocoons, caterpillars, and butterflies. The kids also love the science center. There, I can explain to them—to Jessie for example—how storms are forming, and rain. “He’s asking me, ‘how do tornados form?’ and ‘what colors can tornados be?’ so we (researched) that. There are orange tornados, and blue tornadoes,” Dan said with a chuckle.

Armand has the unwavering support of a loving dad with whom he plays chess often. “I’m so proud of him,” Dan said. “He just graduated high school with honors and straight A’s. He’s a very down to earth teenager, very respectful. He also loves to play basketball, and right now he’s playing Lacrosse. He has his driver’s license, and he just got a summer job and it’s gratifying to see that it’s working.”

The ‘it’ that’s working, says Dan, is all the fathering he’s provided over the years is having a visible, positive impact on his teenage son. “I wanted so bad to have three kids and I wanted to be present in my teenagers’ lives from the very beginning, and I have done that. “But now that Armond is getting closer to being able to fly away with his life, I don’t want to push it,” he said with a laugh. Dan’s biggest fatherhood challenge is “making sure I have a good level of energy and patience because I

want to make sure that when I get home, I'm able to give them the same high level of response and energy and education," he explained.

His biggest triumph? "I see they're growing up in a healthy way; they're good kids who are healthy and civilized, and that they strive for excellence in everything. I've been trying to teach them, 'Make sure you don't just do stuff to be done; make sure you do it the best way possible,'" he said. "In sports, or in reading or in writing, I see them every day trying to be their best—not in a competition with others, but in a competition with themselves. I enjoy seeing them happy because of their own achievements."

Finish What You Started, Dads

"First, our children didn't ask to be brought into this world. So, we have a moral obligation to be present to them so that they get all the opportunities to become productive adults who are happy as much as possible—able to fly away when they grow up and live on their own," he said. "I really believe that we *should* be there for them, not *could* or *can*; it's an obligation—not just a legal obligation but a moral obligation. As a father, I need to be—or try to be—leading them as an example, as a role model, and being able to pass them every bit of information from my life experience that can improve their lives now, and in the future," he says.

"Teach them. Protect them. Be there for them in the times when they lose a little bit of their self-esteem, and to love them. We should spend as much time with our children as possible. I cherish them. I try to leave for work as late as possible and I try to leave work as early as possible to be with them (my children)," he said. "I try to be in the present moment with them."

Asked to describe his parenting philosophy, Dan said this: "Be there for your kids because they are always expecting you to look out for them, and if you're not there, your kids are going to look for someone else," Dan urges. "The satisfaction of spending quality time with your children—not only fun time, playing time—but educational time, brings huge rewards above and beyond the rewards of spending time with other adults or spending time by yourself. Your heart becomes so full just watching them progress, and watching them become beautiful adults," he said.

Blown Opportunities

"I've seen fathers just missing out and not even knowing what they are missing," Dan said. What are they missing? "That energy, that chemistry with your kids. In my case, I feel rejuvenated every time I spend time with them. I feel younger—not only that I'm not getting older, but that I'm getting younger with them," he explained.

"Second, there's so much to learn from them; children are pure soul, pure heart, pure reactions, which are things we adults have started to get away from. But some dads are missing the happiness of hearing, feeling, seeing a child satisfied and thankful for being there for them, and (feeling) peaceful after you've spent time together," he said.

"They always have a bucket that we need to fill with time and attention, and if we don't fill that bucket, it's going to grow bigger and bigger and emptier all the time, unfortunately," he said.

Dad-Mom Communication is Key

"I'm so lucky with my wife," he said of the children's mother. "Both their mom and myself are the pillars that sustain our family. It takes two. If one of the pillars is not stable enough, or has issues, the whole family is going to collapse at some point; this is the life experience for everybody," Dan said. "I need to make sure that they feel that I love their mom, that I will be there for her all the time, that I will support her in anything that she wants to go through. All of our plans seem to revolve around them—around their schedules, how we can teach them to be more loving toward other kids and animals too."

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— Dan Todoran