



BUCKS COUNTY

FACE

Fathers' & Children's Equality, Inc.

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Good Morning, Chairman Gannon, members of the Committee, gentlemen and ladies. My name is Susan Wolpin and I am the Chair of the Bucks County Chapter of FACE. Fathers' & Children's Equality is a 501 (C)(3) designated nonprofit organization founded in 1978 for the purpose of advocating children's rights to full access to both parents and the extended family, and providing a self-help support group for non-custodial and/or non-residential parents.

In February of this year, Governor Ridge spent a lot of time and energy addressing the problem of fathers who abandon their families. His initiatives are excellent. His points are right on the mark, but he has told only a part of the story. The majority of parents who do not play a role in their children's upbringing have been forced into this position by being ejected from their families by judicial rulings that place them in the role of visitor. Today, in Courtrooms across the Commonwealth, the standard of child custody is that the mother will be the residential parent, and the father will be the visitor. How many of you would tolerate being visitors to your growing children? To be

unable to take part in the daily goings-on which are part of being a child; the story reading, the tucking in bed, the chasing away of bogey men, the kissing of boo-boos. How would you feel missing this part of your child's life?

We are here today to ask you to put a halt to this practice. To disallow the ejection of any loving parent from the life of their child. It is a tragedy in society when a mother and father divorce. Must we continue to compound this tragedy by depriving their children of a parent, as well? I have a close friend who spent many bitter years as a visitor to his children. I have often heard him say "How can I bond as closely with my children in two days as she does in 12?" This is the truest tragedy our society faces. We have a generation of children who are being denied the love and nurturing of one of their parents, while the other parent is often under a great deal of emotional stress from shouldering what should be a shared burden.

"What do fathers do? Partly, of course, it is simply being a second adult in the equation. Bringing up children is demanding, stressful, and often exhausting. Two adults can support and spell each other; they can also offset each other's deficiencies and build on each other's strengths. Beyond that,

fathers--men--bring an array of unique and irreplaceable qualities that women do not ordinarily bring. Some of these are familiar, if sometimes overlooked or taken for granted. The father as protector, for example, has by no means outlived his usefulness. And he is important as a role model. Teenage boys without fathers are notoriously prone to trouble. The pathway to adulthood for daughters is somewhat easier, but they still must learn from their fathers, as they cannot from their mothers, how to relate to men. They learn from their fathers about heterosexual trust, intimacy, and difference. They learn to appreciate their own femininity from the one male who is most special in their lives (assuming that they love and respect their fathers). Most important, through loving and being loved by their fathers, they learn that they are worthy of love.”¹

Fathers and mothers are both important and special to children’s lives. You can dismiss neither role as inconsequential. Further, there are necessary differences in the way parents play with their children. Fathers play tends to have a teaching aspect to it (e.g., Let me show you how), while mothers’ play is often of longer duration, but to remain at the child’s level, rather than reaching for more.

¹ David Popenoe Life Without Father

Mother provides the child with an opportunity to direct the play, while father promotes an intellectual challenge. Kids, at least in the early years, seem to prefer to play with daddy. In one study of 2½ -year-olds who were given a choice, more than two-thirds chose to play with their fathers. According to one expert, "Children who roughhouse with their fathers . . . usually quickly learn that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable." They learn when enough is enough.

At play and in other realms, fathers tend to stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk taking, and independence. Mothers, as caretakers, stress emotional security and personal safety. On the playground, fathers will try to get the child to swing higher than the person on the next swing, while mothers will worry about an accident. It has sometimes been said that fathers express more concern for the child's long-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well-being. It is clear that children have dual needs that must be met. Becoming a mature and competent adult involves the integration of two often-contradictory human desires: for communion, or the feeling of being included, connected, and related, and for agency, which entails independence, individuality, and self-fulfillment. One without the other is a denuded and

impaired humanity, an incomplete realization of human potential.²

Society's children need the participation and impact of both of their parents, even when they live in different homes.

²David Popenoe Life Without Father

**Every
Child
Deserves
2
Parents**