

*Here is an excerpt of remarks given by Representative Marian Harris, a keynote speaker at the Ohio Healthy Relationships Conference - "Matters of the Heart" – held in Columbus on April 22, 2010*

As a long time child and family advocate I was curious about the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood and asked the Speaker of the House to consider me as one of his appointments. I quickly learned that this was not just another Commission. The dedication and commitment demonstrated by members and staff were – well in a word – awesome!

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood is embarking upon a new approach in advocating for fathers and becoming a valuable resource. The purpose of the Commission is to knit the heart of the father to the heart of the child. The Commission strategically promotes father engagement on all levels. Their mission is clear: to enhance the well-being of Ohio's children by inspiring and supporting diverse groups and communities to improve the quality of fatherhood. This is a truly wonderful organization that specializes in not just helping fathers but helping Ohio's families.

Clarence Budington Kelland, a novelist and contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The American Magazine*, once said, "My father didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it." Fathers are role models for their kids whether they realize it or not and the way that they lead their life will drastically impact the lives of their children.

I've outlined a few goals that I think every father should always keep in mind and strive to fulfill. It may take a lifetime but that's ok because a father's job lasts a lifetime.

### Be There.

Children need a father. They need a father who is in their life, who pays attention to them, who is interested in them, who does things with them, and asks about them. Time without attention, like in a marriage, is going to go from good to bad in no time at all. Show them that they are important to you... give them your time AND attention. How a father spends his time tells his children what's important to him. This often means sacrificing other things, but it is essential to spend time with your children. Kids grow up so quickly. Missed opportunities are forever lost.

### Be Loving.

It's important to remind your kids that you love them. This includes telling them that you love them, but also other things, like being supportive when they need it, wiping away tears, and hugging them when they need it - no matter how old they are. Parents, especially fathers, need to feel both comfortable and willing to hug their children. Showing affection every day is the best way to let your children know that you love them.

### Be Father First, Friend Second.

It is a tremendous gift to not only be a parent, but also a friend to your child. You need to remember which one comes first, however. Kids need a Dad more than they need a friend, and you're the best option for that. But if you won't be a father to them, they'll be looking for that influence elsewhere.

### Be Respectful.

It's very important to teach your children to respect you, but it's also very important that you respect them. Take time and listen to their ideas and problems. It means respecting their decisions when you can, even if it's not what you would have done, or not what you think is best for them. Give advice, but accept that sometimes they need to make their own way. Also, one of the best things a father can do for his children is to respect their mother. If you're not married, it is still important to respect and support the mother of your children. When children see their parents respecting each other, they are more likely to feel that they are also accepted and respected.

### Be Proud.

Your kids need to know that you're proud of them and the things they do. Telling them how proud you are reinforces the behavior. If you show them that you are proud of their good grades, they will try to get good grades. If you show them that you are proud of them being a good person or good with their siblings, they will do whatever it is that made you proud again.

In closing, I would like to thank the organizers of this most important conference for the opportunity to share with you the work of the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood. I am proud to be a member, I am proud of the work they do and I encourage you all to help our children be all they can be by being a good father – or mother. Our future depends on it. Thank you.