



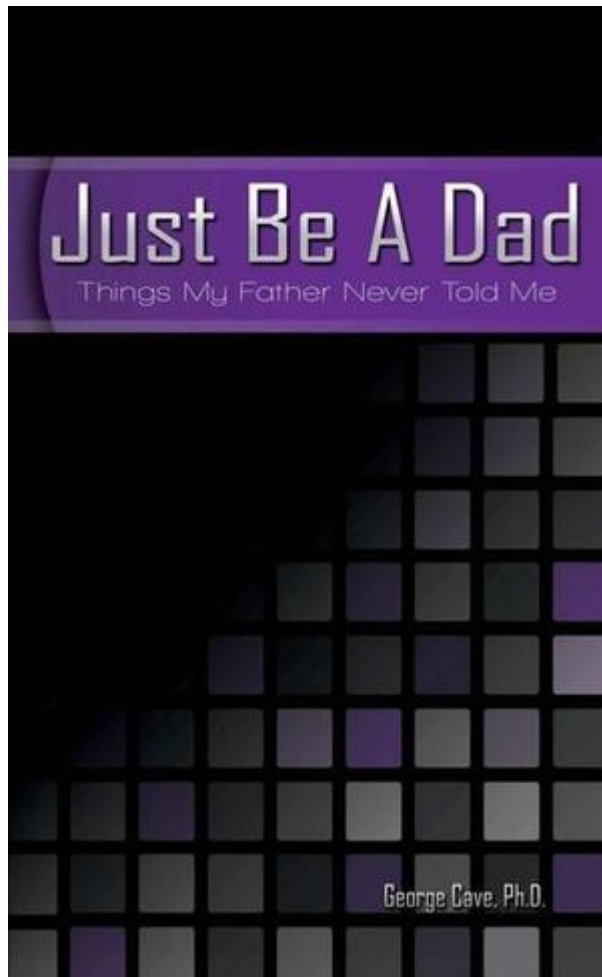
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# DAILY NEWS

## 'Just Be a Dad' gives time for reflection

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*"Just Be a Dad: Things My Father Never Told Me" by George Cave. Simi Valley, CA: Tignor Publishing, 2014, 310 pages, \$28.*



"Being a good father can be the most challenging thing a man will ever do," George Cave asserts near the beginning of "Just Be a Dad: Things My Father Never Told Me," his refreshing primer on the art and science of successful fatherhood. "His actions and reactions can have life-altering consequences for himself and those around him. The influence of a father can determine whether a child will become an engineer or be homeless, a doctor or a drug addict, an attorney or a criminal."

"His influence could determine whether a child grows up to be a caring, loving, polite and law-abiding adult or remains a self-centered, impulsive and immature child for the rest of his life," the author adds. "When done properly, being a dad will be the most rewarding endeavor a man can ever do. Yet it means putting the family's needs, all they hold true and cling to, ahead of one's own needs."

Probably like many readers, I have noticed an increasing desire as I have grown older to understand and re-evaluate my parents' influence on the person I eventually became. With the passage of time and the acquisition of a more mature perspective, I have come to see

things very differently than I did when I was younger and less savvy to the ways of the world. As such, I was able to relate to much of what Cave is saying in a way that would not have been possible at an earlier point in my life.

Take disagreements as an example. Who does not have scars, some of them brutal, from the way certain conflicts were handled during our formative years? In chapter eight, "A Discussion of Arguing," Cave provides useful insights into the dynamics that often occur when differences of opinion inevitably arise between a father and the rest of the family.

"Dads are often confronted with deciding which behaviors are acceptable and which ones are not," Cave explains. "This can certainly lead to disagreements. When dad is secure in who he is, he does not have to be right all the time. He does not need to have his point of view constantly validated, nor does he feel that being right makes him any better than anyone else. We want to teach our children to discuss things calmly and reasonably."

As I was reading Cave's explanation of the motives behind a communication pattern all too common in many families, I found myself reflecting upon my own upbringing. My father embodied the individual who had to be right in every situation and circumstance. Growing up, I did not recognize this for what it really was: A manifestation of his own insecurity projected onto those around him. And being his son only made things more excruciating at times. Whereas dad couldn't force those outside the family to comply with his inclinations, he did have somewhat more control when it came to those who lived in the same house. If I had been privy to Cave's insights at an earlier point in my development, I might have been able to respond more compassionately and effectively to many of my father's seemingly irrational outbursts.

"Just Be a Dad" is moderately well-researched with eight pages of references after the introduction and 18 chapters that form the main narrative. The author approaches his subject matter from a variety of different perspectives; his prose is an appropriate balance of theory and application. Although much of the book is based on scientific studies and empirical research, I found the personal stories he integrates throughout the text to be the most appealing feature.

A chapter I found especially instructive was 15, "Interventions, Discipline & Punishment." For most of us who have the awesome responsibility that comes with being a father, the only strategies we have at our disposal for attempting to regulate the behavior of our children have usually been derived from the experience we had with our own parents. Moreover, as many of us can attest, this can be either good or bad, depending on the level of expertise employed by those who administered discipline to us when we engaged in improper conduct during our formative years. For instance, I wish my father had utilized the following approach in dealing with me as opposed to what I typically encountered:

"Talking to a young child is invaluable," Cave notes. "It teaches a child the things that he needs to know. Young children (1 to 3 years old) understand words that are spoken by others before they learn to use them. Regardless of whether a child can cognitively understand what is being said, children need to be spoken to in a calm, confirming, validating way. For a non-verbal child, the tone the father uses is often more telling and convincing than what is being said. A key way to help a child understand what is acceptable and what is not is through consistency. Allowing a child to engage in a behavior that is improper for any length of time is reinforcing that behavior. The longer a behavior is reinforced, the longer and more difficult it will be for the child, as well as the parent, to extinguish that behavior." Most of us know this, but also tend to ignore it in the heat of the moment when short-term expediency seems more important than long-term effectiveness.

In addition to his private practice, Cave is the clinical director of both the Prominence Treatment Center in Calabasas, Calif., as well as the Balance treatment Center in Malibu, Calif. He has a bachelor's degree in psychology from California State University in addition to his master's degree and doctorate from Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, Calif. This is his first book.

I found "Just Be a Dad" to be an exceptionally good read, despite Cave's extensive and somewhat distracting use of masculine pronouns throughout the entire book. If you are a relatively new father, it might be a good investment. If you are a more seasoned dad, it might help you better understand your successes and failures as a parent. I recommend it highly.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.