



# Guide to **MENTORING FATHERLESS CHILDREN**

**National  
Fatherhood  
Initiative®**

© 2016, 2018, 2022 National Fatherhood Initiative®  
[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org) | [www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org)  
[info@fatherhood.org](mailto:info@fatherhood.org) | 301.948.0599



# About National Fatherhood Initiative®

Because every child deserves a 24:7 Dad.<sup>SM</sup>

National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) is the nation's leading non-profit organization working to end father absence. Underlying many of society's most pressing challenges is a lack of father involvement in their children's lives.

## Our Mission

NFI's mission is to increase father involvement by equipping communities and human service organizations with the father-engagement training, programs, and resources they need to be father-inclusive.

## Our Vision

NFI's vision is that all communities and human service organizations are proactively father-inclusive so that every child has an involved, responsible, and committed father in their lives.

To see more about our mission, our partners, our impact, and how we can help you engage fathers, please visit [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)

For fatherhood and family resources, including programs, resources, and other helpful materials, please visit [www.fathersource.org](http://www.fathersource.org).



# Table of Contents

About National Fatherhood Initiative®	2
About Guide to Mentoring Fatherless Children	4
Getting Started	5
Mentoring Pledge	6
Mentoring 101	7
Mentoring Activities	12
Mentoring Boys	13
Mentoring Girls	15
Mentoring Organizations	17

# About Guide to Mentoring Fatherless Children

National Fatherhood Initiative®'s Guide to Mentoring Fatherless Children encourages you, the experienced dad, to provide support for children growing up without their fathers, by mentoring a child within your “circle of influence” (i.e. your social networks).

From dads who still care for their own children to seasoned “grandpas,” fathers of all types can make a difference in the life of a child. By tapping into your reservoir of fatherhood knowledge, you can offer your time to a child in need of guidance.

It doesn't take a lot of time to make a difference either; by giving as little as a few minutes a week—mere hours per year—you can make a difference.

Whether reaching out to a child with whom you are already close to their family or by volunteering to work at a mentoring organization, you can help increase the chances of a child's success in life, and at the same time, help National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI) combat father absence.





# Getting Started

**A mentor to a fatherless child is someone who is involved, responsible, and committed.**



**INVOLVED**—he gives of his time and takes an interest in the well-being of the child he mentors.

**RESPONSIBLE**—he is a good role model (in his personal and professional life) for a child and takes care to keep those he mentors safe from physical and emotional danger.

**COMMITTED**—he is reliable and keeps his promises.

Coaches, teachers, neighbors, coworkers, and lots of other people informally mentor children and adults within their personal and professional networks. You can be a mentor for a child in your personal (social) network—someone you already know or to whom you connected through a family member, friend, acquaintance, or organization.

As a mentor to a fatherless child, NFI asks you to give a minimum of 12 volunteer hours in a year—as little as 15 minutes a day—to...

- help a child in your circle of influence and who is in need of your guidance
- help a child that you know who is growing up—either permanently or temporarily—without their father

To get started, sign the pledge on the following page and start thinking about the context in which you might most enjoy serving as a mentor to a fatherless child.

**Can you think of a child in your family, neighborhood, faith community, or elsewhere in your circle of influence who might be in need?**

# Mentoring Pledge

Sign this pledge to commit to yourself that you will mentor in the best way that you can, or sign it and share it with the child you will mentor and their family.

I, \_\_\_\_\_,  
have committed to being a mentor to a fatherless child.

As a mentor, I will do my best to protect, nurture, and guide the child I choose to mentor. This pledge includes looking out for the child's safety and well-being.

I will model involved, responsible, and committed fatherhood. I will lead by example and avoid activities or behaviors that would not set a good precedent for a child I choose to mentor.

I will keep my commitment to the child I choose to mentor, and I will strive to mentor with integrity.

I desire to never stop growing and learning how to be a better father, mentor, and friend.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Mentoring 101



## Find Children in Your Circle of Influence

Do you know a child who is fatherless—either permanently or temporarily—due to their father’s military service, business travel, incarceration, or other situations that have separated a child from their father for an extended amount of time?

Think about a child who is a member of your family, a member of a family that lives in your neighborhood, or a member of a family in your broader community.

If you still have a child at home, think about your child’s classmates and teammates.

Can you identify one or more children who are growing up without a father (permanently or temporarily)? If you can’t think of a child right now, be intentional over the next week or two and look around for children in need of your guidance.

After you identify some children, make a list of up to five children who will benefit having you as a mentor and list them below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have your list, decide how much time you have to commit to being a mentor this year. Choose one of the children on this list with whom you can realistically spend at least 12 hours this year.

Even if a child on your list lives far away, explore ways that you could start building a relationship over the phone or through letters or email. If possible, plan a visit for later in the year. Use the steps that follow to get started!



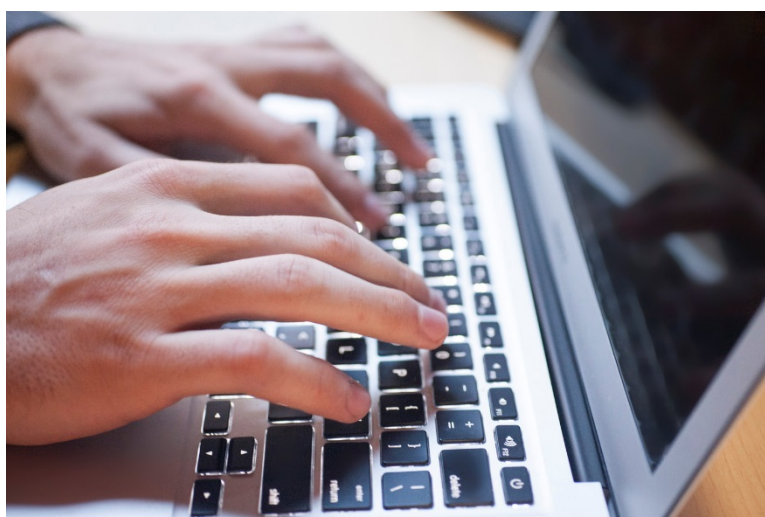
## Get Permission

After you identify the child you want to mentor, the first step is to get consent from the child's mother or guardian.

Be very clear with the parent or guardian about the types of activities you would like to do with the child. It is very important to remember that even though you are an “experienced” dad that this is someone else's child growing up with someone else's rules.

Families have their own standards—which may differ from your own—including the kind of behaviors in children that they tolerate, the types of food that are appropriate to eat, what is appropriate to view on television and at the movies, and how much time they're allowed to be on social media. Have a candid conversation with the child's parent or guardian about the guidelines that apply to your time together.

The second step is to plan what you will do with the child before every visit. Talk with the child or the child's parent or guardian about the kinds of activities that the child is interested in.





## Plan Ahead

Remember that some of the activities that you and your children might have enjoyed might not be what today's children enjoy. Sure, there is value to opening a child up to new experiences (i.e. a child who's never been fishing might learn to appreciate and enjoy the sport), but there is also value, especially at the start of a mentoring relationship, to meet the child on their own "turf" and to show them you care enough to learn about the child's likes and dislikes. Sometimes, children just want and need someone to listen to them.

Before the first and every subsequent visit, tell the child's parent or guardian how much time you plan to spend with the child.

Remember, a child in a father-absent home might believe that their father never had enough time for them. This child might have been let down many times from one or more men to whom the child has looked to as a father figure.

**As a mentor, you want your role to be positive.** So, as they say in the business world, it might be better to under-promise and over-deliver when it comes to how much time you can spend with the child. It is vital that you keep your promises to the child and their parent or guardian. Do everything in your power to make your scheduled visits.

If you must cancel, give the child and the parent or guardian as much advance notice as possible, and reschedule the visit as soon as possible, so that you don't evoke feelings of abandonment in the child. Explain why you can't make the visit and that it is not the child's fault. The further out you can plan your time, the easier it will be for you to keep your commitments.





## **Save Your Advice for Later**

Building a solid mentoring relationship takes time. In fact, research shows that the most effective mentoring relationships last at least one year. Your first and most vital job is to build trust between you and the child, and between you and the child's parent or guardian.

**Children don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.** So don't rush to be the father the child never had, or rarely sees, by offering advice and guidance right off the bat. You'll know when you've reached a healthy level of trust with the child to start offering advice and guidance about life's small and big challenges. A good signal that the child is ready for your wisdom is when the child seeks you out for advice or asks you questions about the challenges that they are facing.

## **Be Safe and Smart**

Protect yourself and the child you mentor. Practice "high touch" (touching only the child's shoulders or mid to upper back). Meet in public places so that there is never a question of impropriety. Consider having the child join you and your wife or partner, or you and your other children, on outings or for dinner at your home. Be wise so that everyone feels safe.







## **Encourage, Encourage, Encourage**

Every child needs encouragement! Encourage the child to keep trying in school, sports, music—whatever they want to pursue. If the child shares a dream that you think is a bit unrealistic (e.g. visions of being a pro football player or movie star), encourage them to pursue the dream by staying in school, going to college, and getting work experience. Children need to feel like someone believes in them.

## **Sharpen Your Skills**

Even the most seasoned major leaguers still take a few practice swings before heading to the batter's box. Has it been a while since you spent time with a child as young as the one you want to mentor?

NFI has several free resources that can help you in your role as a mentor. Browse for free resources in our [Learning Center](#) by resource type to find resources to use. One of our most popular resources is [5 Questions Every 24:7 Dad Asks](#), a free guide you can download.

**Children don't care how much you know,  
until they know how much you care.**

# Mentoring Activities

Here are a number helpful activities that can provide the context in which to mentor a child.

Even though you might already have some idea about the activities you want to do with the child, consider doing these activities together:

- Attend sporting events, or play sports
- Visit a zoo, aquarium, or museum
- Go out for ice cream
- Make a phone call to ask about the child's day
- Research something of interest together
- Help the child with homework
- Make a meal together, or have lunch
- Read
- Go horseback riding
- Go to a worship service
- Play miniature golf
- Go to the circus
- Attend a local carnival or festival
- Invite the child to family dinner
- Go holiday gift shopping
- Go fishing or boating
- Attend a school play, recital, or sporting event
- Get a book of magic tricks and learn them
- Teach the child a skill or sport
- Go to a new restaurant to try new foods
- Visit an amusement park



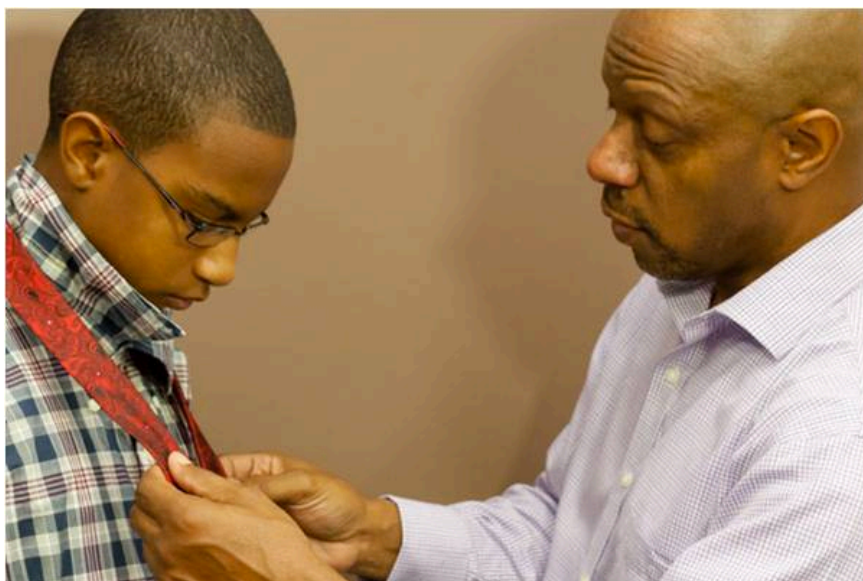


# Mentoring Boys

Many mentors will want to help boys. Here are some tips for mentoring a boy.

## Tips for Mentoring Boys

1. Provide a safe place, free of danger—where he doesn't need to be afraid.
2. Don't stifle a boy's imagination.
3. Help him build an emotional vocabulary (angry, sad, frustrated, etc.) and to connect the dots between how he feels and real or potential actions. Help him to become self-aware.
4. Teach healthy masculinity (e.g. that strong men are comfortable showing and sharing their emotions and confide interested others when they have problems).
5. Teach him healthy habits like the importance of physical activity (e.g. sports, exercise, etc.), eating right, and good hygiene.
6. Teach and encourage him to learn a skill (e.g. chess, basketball, music, etc.) that will help him feel good about himself and earn respect from others.
7. Set high academic standards for a boy and help him reach them.



## Mentoring Boys, continued

8. Boys are deeply susceptible to being shamed. Avoid shaming him. Be compassionate if you see the need to address a challenge he faces (e.g. not handling his emotions well).
9. Use his negative behavior to help him explore his emotions, feelings, intentions, and consequences of his actions.
10. If he is a teenager, teach him that marriage is desirable and beneficial for adult men. (Use NFI's brochure ["The Seven Benefits of Marriage for Men"](#) for data points.) Teach involved, responsible, and committed fathering. Encourage him to delay fatherhood until marriage. (Research proves that marriage is the best, safest, and healthiest environment for a child to be born into and raised.)
11. Help him understand that money comes from work. Help him find opportunities to earn money (e.g., chores inside and outside the home, part-time jobs, etc.). This advice will help him learn the value of work and a healthy appreciation for its rewards. Teach him how important it is to be responsible with money by showing him how to budget for the things he wants or needs, and how to save for the future.
12. Emphasize the importance of spirituality, morals, and service to others. Remind him that the world is larger than his world of interests. Show him his service to family, friends, community, and the world is a valuable use of his time, talents, and resources.



# Mentoring Girls

You may choose to mentor a girl. You may be her uncle, grandfather, or a close family friend. Keep in mind the general advice in this guide for mentoring all children, including the suggested activities.

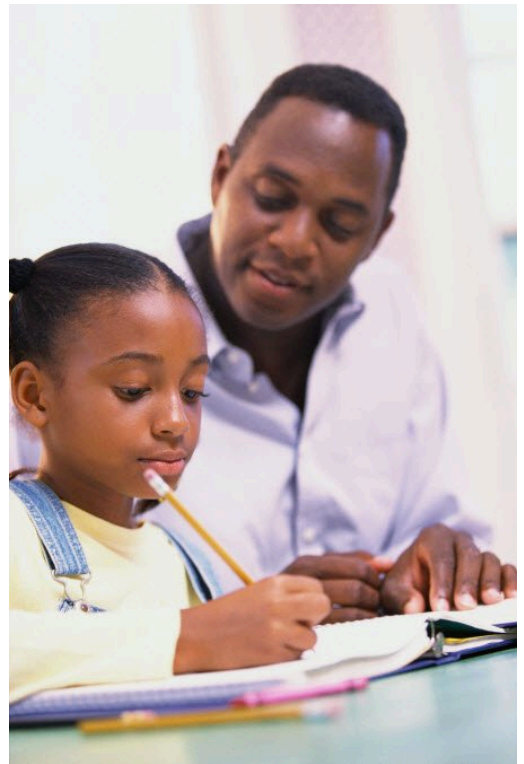
## Tips for Mentoring Girls

1. Provide a safe place, free of danger—a place where a girl doesn't need to be afraid.
2. Help her focus on inner beauty and strength of character what is on the inside, not the outside, is the most important aspect of her beauty and self-worth. She has probably been bombarded with images from the media that a girl must look, act, and dress in a certain way to be accepted by others. Help her to find and appreciate her internal beauty and self-worth.
3. Many girls like (and need) to communicate, so listen without giving advice. When you listen to her, she will feel appreciated, respected, and cared for.
4. Help a girl to understand the value and importance of a healthy marriage as the basis for a mature long-term relationship. Help her to understand that boys who care about her should seek a long-term relationship with her and not pressure her to have sex.
5. Teach a girl to be physically active and involved in sports. Play catch, basketball, softball, soccer, etc. Physically active girls are less likely to experience obesity, drop out of school, get pregnant outside of marriage, or put up with abuse.



# Mentoring Girls, continued

6. Teach her that eating is healthy and that she is beautiful just the way she is. Pay close attention to whether she's buying advertisers' messages to lose weight and be thin and whether she is reacting to these messages in an unhealthy way.
7. Encourage her to develop skills and areas of knowledge (e.g., music, sports, science, etc.) that will help her to become more self-confident and will earn respect from others.
8. Emphasize the value of education and academic achievement. Encourage a girl to finish school and help her plan for college and career goals.
9. Help a girl to understand the relationship between work and money. Help her find opportunities to earn money (e.g. chores, inside and outside the home, part-time jobs, etc.). Teach her how important it is to be responsible with money by showing her how to budget for the things she wants or needs, and how to save for the future.
10. Emphasize the importance of spirituality, morals, and service to others. Let a girl know the world is larger than her interests, and she can make a meaningful contribution through service to family, friends, and her community.



Getty Images

# Mentoring Organizations & Resources

If you want to become a mentor, there are many great organizations that match volunteer mentors with children (often called “mentees”). Each organization has their own way of doing things including the way they screen potential mentors, train volunteers, assign duties to mentors, monitor mentor- mentee relationships, etc.

NFI encourages you to research the mentoring opportunities available in your community through a formal, well-established mentoring organization or program. Here are some of those opportunities and resources that can help you find one.

## **Mentor®: The National Mentoring Partnership ([www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org))**

Considered a one-stop shop for information on formal mentoring programs, this organization “helps children by providing a public voice, developing and delivering resources to mentoring programs nationwide and promoting quality for mentoring through standards, cutting-edge research and state of the art tools.” The organization collaborates with thousands of local mentoring programs across the country. Visit their website to connect to a formal-mentoring program in your community.

## **Big Brothers Big Sisters International (BBBS) ([www.bbbsa.org](http://www.bbbsa.org))**

BBBS is the oldest and largest formal youth-mentoring organization in the United States. BBBS matches caring adults with children, ages five-to-18 years old, in one-to-one relationships.

## **Amachi ([www.amachimentoring.org](http://www.amachimentoring.org))**

Amachi involves “People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise” who have one or both parents under some form of state or federal supervision. Through Amachi, the strengths of mentoring and congregational volunteers are brought together.



# Mentoring Organizations & Resources

## **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) ([www.casaforchildren.org](http://www.casaforchildren.org))**

CASA describes its court-appointed volunteers' objective as "to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to make sure they don't get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in inappropriate group or foster homes. Volunteers stay with each case until it is closed and the child is placed in a safe, permanent home." Furthermore, "for many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives."

## **Boys and Girls Clubs of America ([www.bgca.org](http://www.bgca.org))**

Boys and Girls Clubs offer recreation, companionship, supervision, and more to kids on the streets. Club programs and services promote and enhance the development of boys and girls by caring about them and instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and influence.

## **America's Promise Alliance ([www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org))**

The database contains examples of innovative programs, projects, and initiatives that are being implemented to serve children and youth in communities nationwide.

## **National Mentoring Resource Center**

([www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org](http://www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org))

A resource center for strengthening mentoring programs for youth.

## **The Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA) ([www.asymca.org](http://www.asymca.org))**

A national member of the YMCA of the USA, ASYMCA works with the Department of Defense to offer essential programs such as childcare, hospital assistance, spouse support services, food services, computer training classes, health and wellness services, and holiday meals.

## **Harvard Mentoring Project**

([www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/harvard-mentoring-project/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/harvard-mentoring-project/))

Harvard Mentoring Project promotes the growth of the mentoring movement with the goal of linking large numbers of young people with adult mentors.

# Mentoring Organizations & Resources

**Other groups and resources to consider that might provide assistance in identifying formal mentoring opportunities:**

- Leadership groups
- Community colleges
- Corporate Volunteer councils
- Fraternal organizations (e.g., Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, etc.)
- Corporate retiree volunteer programs or senior centers
- Area agencies on aging and programs
- Places of worship

**A DADDY isn't only defined as the man who makes the child, but rather the man who extends his hand, time, and love to help raise the child.**

**BLOOD doesn't always make you a DADDY. But your heart can.**