
A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY VALUES

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When Adults Cannot Get Along

How much do children become creatures of their environment? While some children raised in less-than-optimal conditions rise above their circumstances and succeed, our overflowing prisons show us the dangers for an “at risk” child. We cannot change all of our environmental circumstances, however, what we can hope to achieve is to develop a set of values in our children that will guide them through their developmental years and into adulthood.

As a lawyer I have had a keen sense of awareness of how my professional life is entwined intimately with my personal life. This point was driven home during the almost four years I spent as the director of the Nevada Missing Children’s Clearinghouse with the Office of the Nevada Attorney General.

A child is uprooted from her home in Pennsylvania and moved to Indiana following a divorce with three other siblings and three step-siblings. One summer the child returns to her mother’s home in Pennsylvania for a summer visitation. Before dawn one morning she is awakened by her father and hurriedly packed into a car. She spends that day lying down out of view in the car with her sisters as her father races through the back roads of Southwest Pennsylvania and West Virginia on their indirect way back to Indiana. That child is my wife and recounts a family tragedy from the mid-60s.

My wife was a pawn in the battle between two adults. Her mother decided she was not going to return the children to the custody of her father and her father took measures into his own hand to enforce his parental rights. Today this scenario is played out thousands of times each day, without concern for the impact of the child.

My most rewarding experience as the Children’s Advocate was overseeing the development and implementation of the statewide AMBER Alert program. The AMBER alert is a cooperative effort between law enforcement and the broadcast community. Participating broadcasters interrupt programming to alert the public of an abducted or missing child that is in imminent danger. The public becomes the eyes and ears for law enforcement.

The program works, but what is sad is that today activations are triggered more often for a parental abduction than for what is termed a stranger abduction. Far too often we as a society discount the dangers to our children simply because the abductor is a parent.

Most do not realize the interference with a custodial right, which includes rights of visitation, is a crime in Nevada. It should be. The deterioration of a family through the eyes of a child is bad enough without having to deal with warring parents. Concealing a child from a parent creates emotional scars and needs to be treated as a form of abuse.

Divorce courts are filled with two people who obviously cannot get along. One wants to make the other pay so the other retaliates to get even. He is not paying enough support so she will not let him have his visitation. She feels better, but the child pays the price. The situation escalates to the point in which one parent will conceal the child from the other, depriving the child of contact with the other parent for months and in many cases for years. The child is commonly told they have been abandoned by the other parent causing further deterioration in the relationship when reunification is attempted.

The two-parent household is becoming more of a rarity every day. Staying together is rarely the best answer—but, can’t we find a way to put the needs of our children first?

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