



“The Ten Commandments to Help the Absent-Father Syndrome”

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Most “*absent-fathers*” are not absent by intentional choice, but rather other life choices and priorities have combined – resulting in a lot of time away from home and/or little involvement in their kids’ lives. If you’re an “*absent-father*” you’re not alone. You can begin today to make choices which will bump your relationships with your wife and kids up a notch. Here are ten commandments to help you get started.

- 1. Thou shalt talk with your kids everyday.** Even a brief phone call – to ask your kids how their day went – when you are on the road, for example, communicates your care and concern for your kids.
- 2. Thou shalt listen to your kids everyday.** Often times, it is easier to talk to your kids than it is to listen. Listening is a key communication skill – one that can’t be overlooked! Listening is the language of love. Listening to your kids will keep you in touch with what is going on in their lives.
- 3. Thou shalt affirm your kids everyday.** Kids thrive when they receive meaningful affirmation from their parents. Paying attention to catch you kid in the act of doing something good or displaying a positive character trait can take work, but is well worth the effort.
- 4. Thou shalt offer your kids affection everyday.** Dads, if it is your desire to build a stronger relationship with your kids, affection is a must. Not the affectionate type? Learn to become affectionate. It *is* that important. Be sure to offer your kids genuine affection through loving words, affirmation, encouragement, small gifts and appropriate touch. (For ideas on physical affection, download our free tip sheet, “[Keeping in Touch with Your Kids](#)”. Click [here](#) to download this tip sheet.)
- 5. Thou shalt intentionally work at relationship building.** Chances are (if you consider yourself an *absent-father*) that you’ve already lost touch with kids. For instance, do you know the names of your son or daughter’s closest friends? Relationships with your kids, like any healthy relationship, takes work. Healthy relationships take time as well. Spend time with your kids. Find out about their lives; what they like and dislike, who their friends are, what their world is like, etc.
- 6. Thou shalt have a one-on-one outing at least once a month with each of your kids.** This builds on the last commandment of intentionally working at relationship building. Schedule a monthly appointment with your son or daughter – where relationship building

can take place. These outings don't *have* to be elaborate. Go out for some ice cream, for example.

7. Thou shalt share your life with your kids. As you interact with your kids, be sure to open the door to your life, so they can get to know you as well. Healthy relationships are a two-way street. Share your own likes and dislikes, your hopes and dreams, your goals and desires and even your struggles (appropriately, of course.)

8. Thou shalt handle conflicts. One of the temptations of an *absent-father* is to be too busy to address conflict or even run away when it occurs. Conflict can either be a path to communication blockage and unloving behavior, or it can be a path to deeper communication, greater understanding, and loving behavior. Handling conflict, in the long run is actually a way to strengthen connections with your kids. Working through the conflict takes greater emotional involvement, but it is the loving way to care for yourself as well as your kids.

9. Thou shalt talk to your kids about big life issues. For better or for worse, parents have the most influence on kids' morals and values than anyone else – unless by default – if their parents are unavailable. If you see yourself as an *absent-father*, I encourage you, don't throw your influence away! Talk to you kids about the big issues in life; let them know what you believe and *why*.

10. Thou shalt 'be there' for your kids. Fathers, one of the most valuable contributions you can make today in effort to reconnect with your kids is to simply "be there;" involved in their lives. Your presence is a powerful affirmation and sign of caring towards your kids. Your presence provides kids with a greater sense of security than almost any other quality parents can offer. Sometimes, this means being willing to make some tough choices; like choosing to be a your daughter's volleyball match instead of being at another business meeting. But, the value of being involved in your kids' lives is more valuable than a bigger paycheck.