

## **Fathers play a critical role in family and child well-being**

Do you know that, given current trends, half of all children born today will spend at least part of their life growing up apart from one or both of their biological parents? Also, due to changes in family composition, nearly half of today's families with young children are headed by parents who are unmarried, most likely a stepfamily arrangement. For children in these situations, the odds are even greater (nearly 75%) that they will go through their parent's splitting apart.

Unfortunately, whenever parents do split, most often, but not always, the parent who leaves the child's everyday life is their father. Evidence showing the importance of fathers and the effects of uninvolved or absent fathers on their child(ren)'s life and development is very clear: children absolutely need a positive and responsible father. When their father is not available, they need a strong, stable and consistent male presence.

Father absence costs one billion dollars to taxpayers each year in America and is strongly correlated with negative outcomes for their children. This is especially true for children who have never known a father or whose fathers exit their lives before the age of 6 years. New information from research shows that those children are *much more likely* to experience greater problems in the following areas.

They include:

- Greater poverty and poverty-related conditions
- Increased family stress
- Greater levels of depression
- Increased delinquent behaviors and general behavior problems
- Lower school performance and achievement
- Stronger likelihood of early sexual activity, especially for girls

While levels of father involvement are affected by many factors, mothers and fathers, as well as other close adults should make every effort to provide and protect this very important relationship. To learn more about ways to help fathers become or stay more involved with their children, especially through difficult situations, please contact your local UW-Extension Office at 715-672-5214 or 608-685-6256