

NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION

WORKFORCE & FAMILY PROGRAM

VALUING FATHERS

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Today is Father's Day. As we think about what to get our fathers, let us suggest that our dads could use three things: rest, recognition, and resources.

First, give Dad a break and some rest. Our fathers work hard. Fathers would like to be successful at being both good parents and good breadwinners, and feel increasingly stressed in doing so.

Fatherhood has changed over the past years and decades. While the changing roles of mothers has been one of the most pronounced social trends in the last half of the 20th century, the changing roles of fathers is emerging as one of the most significant trends of our new century. In addition to their role as breadwinner, fathers are now taking on much more responsibility at home in caring for children and in doing the work of managing the home. A generation ago, nearly 70 percent of families had only one parent in the workforce—usually Dad. So with Mom typically at home, dads could work without worrying about the well-being of their children as much. Today, more than 60 percent of families have two working parents. Dad is now more likely to be called upon for care-giving during the day. There is more pressure on dads now to be engaged at home as well as at work. Over the past generation, dads have doubled the amount of time they spend caring for children and have significantly increased the amount of time on household chores. Added to this is the fact that many Americans generally are working harder than ever at their jobs. Take extreme hours—the number of people working more than 60 hours per week is increasing as is the number of people working more than 80 hours per work.

Our fathers deserve some rest. Dads want to be involved in the lives of their children. They know that children benefit from role models and mentoring, from teaching and tutoring, from playing and practicing. Research shows that children with involved fathers have an advantage in nearly every social indicator—from school performance and academic development, to confidence

and making choices, to keeping out of trouble and away from crime.

Because of the demographic changes of the past generation, dads need more flexibility in their work. Businesses are recognizing that more fathers need flexibility in the workplace and many are giving it. Businesses should be applauded for that and encouraged to do more in providing workplace flexibility. Many more industries and companies could offer workplace flexibility than are doing so today.

Secondly, dads deserve recognition. Just as moms deserve credit for their hard work, dads deserve credit for the work, balancing and the sacrifices that they make. Fathers deserve credit for the choices they make to focus their time on children. They deserve recognition for taking responsibility for their lives and for their families, and credit for making choices to be role models and mentors.

Third, dads need resources to help them be even better fathers. Fathers want to be successful in their careers and to climb the ladders of success as well as being involved in their families. Technology is helping. Technology is making it easier for fathers to balance these challenges. Government should do more to provide incentives for workers to be productive from home. Technology is making it possible for many workers to work remotely. The Dad who is able to be home at 3:30 when his child returns from school, because he used his home computer to write a memo he emailed to the office or the architect who uses his hand-held Blackberry to review a proposal from home and then is able to attend his son's baseball game, because he doesn't have to commute 45 minutes to get the memo to the office are examples of how technology can allow workers in many occupations to better balance their obligations. However, if we aren't careful we can allow technology to add work. Technology and telecommuting provide critical solutions, but these solutions only work if Americans have the discipline to put down their Blackberries and turn off their computers

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during family time. Otherwise, the 24/7 technologies make it more difficult for dads to get away.

There are also community resources that fathers can use. The National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) seeks to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. NFI supports local programs throughout the nation to help the dads gain the resources and skills they need.

NFI resources help improve Dad's childcare practices, help dads create a safe home, help them form positive relationships with their children, and teach them basic medical knowledge, so that they can care for their children right from the start.

Our fathers have done a lot for us. This Father's Day, let's provide them with the rest, recognition, and resources that they need to continue to be successful. And this year, don't forget to say "thank you" to your Dad.