



March 2016

Father Talks ... fathers connecting with their children

“Spending time with your children is much more important than how much you spend on them!”

Earnest has learned this lesson well and very well practices it. Earnest is the father of two boys, ages 24 and 7, each with a different mom. Earnest always had a father or step-father in his life as a role model. However, he freely admits that he didn't spend as much time with his first son (now 24) while he was growing up as he could have. Also, the 24 year old's mother admits that she tried to keep the son away from him as a way of “getting back” at Earnest. But Earnest mostly places the blame on himself. “I was too busy having fun, and working.” “I still have a relationship with him; and I take my hat off to his step-father for being there for him.”

Now at the age of 43 Earnest is making sure that he is a role model to his 7 year old son. Up until his son reached age 5, Earnest spent time with his son through an informal shared-parenting arrangement with the mother. Then his son's mother became ill causing her to spend a lot of time with her medical treatment, sometimes out of state. Earnest's son then started living full-time with him. “I didn't step up because I had already stepped up. I was already very involved with my son, his mother had to step away for a while.”

Due to the change in living arrangements it became necessary for Earnest to assert his parental rights by moving from an informal shared custody arrangement to a legal shared custody arrangement. He sought the help of Fame Fathers, an SCFI Partner, to help him pursue his custody rights in court.

In addition to helping with custody, Fame Fathers was also able to help Earnest in other areas such as family mediation, how to communicate with his 7 year old son's mother, and child support payment issues. Most importantly, Fame Fathers helped Earnest learn how to be a role model to his son, how to communicate with his son, how to relate to his son and how to enjoy the time he spent with his son.

Today, Earnest has taken his relationship with his son to a new level. He is teaching his son to be tactful and have respect for others even when that respect is not returned. He has helped his son develop a routine for his homework. Earnest has learned how to be firm when disciplining his son, but to not let that firmness put fear into his son. He likes to take his son grocery shopping, and he uses this activity to teach his son how to make choices, and what the consequences of those choices might be. Earnest is big on teaching follow-through. "Follow through, don't quit. Finish what you start. Whether you fail or succeed, that experience will help you when you try it, or something similar, again."

Earnest's son is now living equally with mom and dad, one-half week each. Earnest is working on his relationship with his son's mom. His son is an honor roll student who wants to be like his dad who is involved with music, cooking, and computers. Earnest also coaches his son's football and basketball teams.

Earnest is a music recording artist with 11 published albums and another one in the works. Earnest is arranging for the royalties from these albums to go to his children at some point in the future.

It appears that the quality time Earnest now spends with his son is quickly being converted into the very tangible reward of being a positive role model and father.

Did you know?

Only 39% of dads say they do a "very good job as a parent". That's compared to 51% of moms who say the same about their own parenting. Regardless of a father's status - married, divorced, remarried, single, co-parenting, custodial, non-custodial, recovering, formerly incarcerated - the Summit County Fatherhood Initiative very likely has some available, FREE support for him. Whether it's course material to help a father better connect with his children, individualized supportive services to help a father through a certain situation, or a referral to a service not provided by SCFI, a father is likely to have a need fulfilled.

Sources: Pew Research Center's study Parenting in America, National Fatherhood Initiative's website, Huffington Post, 2/18/16.

Fathers Talks are fatherhood stories brought to you by the Summit County Fatherhood Initiative (SCFI). SCFI is a collaborative, community initiative dedicated to helping men increase their fathering skills through programming, education and individualized services. SCFI was founded by three, prominent Summit County fatherhood service providers - Pastor Eugene Norris of Fame Fathers, Don Lykes of Fathers and Sons of Northeast Ohio, and Frank Williams of Man2Man. SCFI is supported by Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, United Way of Summit County, and the County of Summit - Department of Job & Family Services. Comments or questions about this publication, or about SCFI's programming and services, can be sent to Bill Macchione, william.macchione@jfs.ohio.gov

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