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Father's Day: celebrating a new role model

BY RUTHERFORD

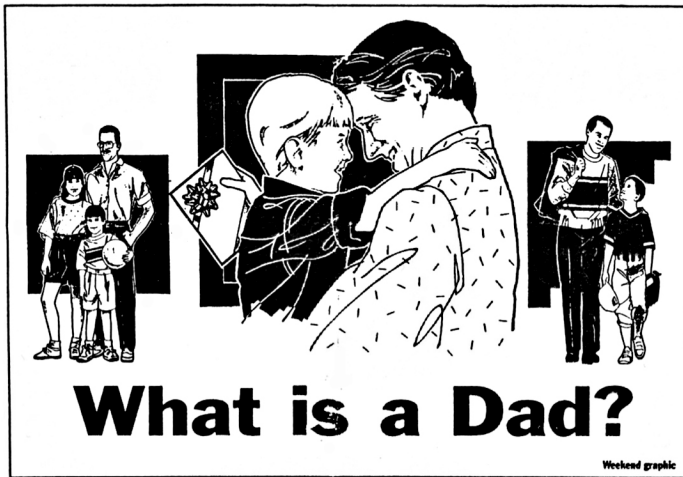
Guest Opinion

As fathers, we love our kids. They mean the world to us and we work hard to make sure that they don't have to go without.

We want to give our children everything they need. But sometimes we get stuck inside rigid ideas of manhood that promote emotional distance instead of nurturing, and that demand control instead of caring. And so it's not surprising that many men have difficulty showing compassion and tenderness towards our children.

We believe that it's time to bring new meaning to Father's Day — to make it a day for fathers to celebrate with their sons and daughters and to break free of the old stereotypes that hurt us all. And as more men discover that nurturing and caring for their children is both the most important and rewarding aspect of fatherhood, we can also expect to see a lot less violence and abuse within our families.

We teach our children through our actions. Do we reward our sons for solving problems by force while demanding passivity from our daughters? Do we teach that boys are supposed to be 'in control' of their feelings and 'in charge' of their surroundings? The roles we model for our children shape their idea of what it means to be a man — a husband and father — and it is this image of masculinity they will carry with them as they grow and



enter into relationships of their own.

In our society, we believe that to be a man means to be 'in control'. As a result, we, as men, sometimes feel our masculinity threatened whenever we don't get our way. Can you recognize that sudden feeling of powerlessness or frustration which, in far too many families, erupts into violence as an angry and confused man tries to regain control and to get 'respect for his authority'? But, even though most men never raise their

hands to their children or partners, violence is found in homes in every region in Canada regardless of economic or social class, ethnicity, religion, culture or level of education.

Tragically, the fear and suffering that women experience at the hands of men usually comes, not from the stranger in some dark alley — but from the men in their lives. Violence also has a profound effect on our children.

Researchers have found that boys who witness violence at home are

more likely to be violent as adults. But witnessing violence is 'normal' within families, and that this is how husbands and fathers behave.

Instead, as men we must find other ways to feel good about ourselves — by sharing our unique gifts with our children and with our communities. We must make it clear to any man who resorts to violence against loved ones that strong men are not violent men.

Men all across Canada are beginning to make a commitment to raising their sons and daughters

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in homes that are free of the threat of violence. Let's make Father's Day a time when, as fathers and men, we can be proud of the examples we set — and about the men who will follow us.

And if you have ever abused your partner or children, we urge you to seek help. There are many community-based programs that work specifically with abusive men who can help you to stop the violence. Do it — for yourself and for your loved ones.

□ David Rutherford is the assistant national coordinator of the White Ribbon Campaign. The White Ribbon Campaign is a national network of men working to end violence against women.