



model MENTORS

With Father's Day approaching, what better time to reflect on the valuable resource we have in our worldly and infinitely knowledgeable fathers and grandfathers.

[Words] Meagan Jones

ON the 7th September, millions of fathers and grandfathers across Australia will celebrate the joys of parenthood. Sadly, on this same day, statistics tell us that no less than five Australian men will take their own lives. Of the two thousand suicides that occur each year, eighty per cent are male. For the most part, leading up to this distressing period in their lives when they unfortunately feel they

must suffer in silence, they were healthy men in the prime of their lives. Yet for some, the pressures of life outweigh the joy of living it. What issues are men dealing with that could cause such a huge imbalance in suicide statistics? Perhaps, among other factors, it's that they don't realise the infinite worth and invaluable knowledge they possess, particularly as they reach grandfatherhood.

In 2006, the 2.2 million grandparents with grandchildren under the age of 15 were major providers of care for their grandchildren. In a 12 month period, 83 per cent of these grandparents had been babysitters for their grandchildren, 39 per cent provided school holiday care and 28 per cent regularly looked after their grandchildren while the children's parents were at work.

Dr Elizabeth Celi, consulting psychologist and author of *Regular Joe vs. Mr Invincible – The Battle for the True Man*, says we must recognise the valuable asset we have in our older men and harness their wisdom for the sake of our younger generations.

"I can't emphasise enough the importance of masculine mentoring, particularly for young boys, in being able to show them a strong, stable, masculine influence.

"We have a generation of men who have such life experience and so much insight that they may not have shared along their journey. By the time men reach grandfatherhood, they've been through the process of raising their own children, been through the pressures of providing for the family and have developed their own identity through life experience. They now have the freedom, the space and the confidence to share what they've learnt, what mistakes they may have made and how they see things might be done a little more easily.

"Being able to draw on that life experience is such a blessing and unfortunately it seems that everyone is so busy and we have so many complexities in this day and age, that we might forget what a valuable asset we have in this person in their 60s, 70s or 80s."

In societies of old, the role of 'mentoring' boys into manhood was taken on by the wider community. The survival of a race or tribe was dependent on the competence of its young men. Today, as the availability of suitable 'outside' male mentors in the form of male teachers and employee/apprentice relationships continues to decline, the importance of male mentors within the family is increasingly important.

"Because of the way society has changed, that environment where children would have naturally been around other male mentors unfortunately isn't there for young boys as much," says Dr Celi.

"Mentoring used to be something that was a natural part of our community. Young



boys and young men would have a lot more men around them, their father being one in particular, but then also other men in the community where activities that families engaged in involved young men being around other men and by the process of osmosis, they learnt about healthy masculinity and healthy manhood, which is essential for young boys and men.

"So it's important to recognise, whether it's you as a grandfather for your own grandchildren or as an older man in your community, that you can have a positive influence on the young people around you.

"For example, if your grandchild brings a friend home from school who is part of a single mother environment, perhaps you could invite that friend to come along on a fishing trip so that he is able to hang out with the boys and older men who can guide and teach him appropriately."

Dr Celi says that through life experience, fathers and grandfathers are in a prime position to teach the younger generation about what it means to be an authentic healthy man. As the line between traditional

gender roles continues to blur, it has never been so important for young men to recognise and understand their own masculinity.

"The authentic man has the courage to be vulnerable and the strength to defend it if he needs to. He develops the ability to understand himself and be flexible and adaptable with how the generations and society have changed. That includes things like gender role identity changes, what it means to be a man in this day and age and also understanding how *he* is as a man.

"We have to recognise that with fathers, particularly if they're the primary provider for the family, the act of going to work and providing for the family is a vehicle of nurturance in itself. It's obviously different to the nurturance a mother offers, but it doesn't make it any less valuable."

Dr Celi says that throughout the fatherhood phase of life, men are really just 'in it'; they want to look after the family, they want to provide protection and stability and security, as well as meet their career aspirations.

"So throughout the earlier times of life, as a worker, as a provider and as a father, they're really doing it day to day, doing the best they can and learning and growing.

"Once they get to grandfatherhood, there's that point where they can look back and reflect on it and enjoy their grandkids as a grandfather in that primary role and really see the growing up phase, perhaps seeing how their children are now parents and being able to impart some wisdom and life experience to their own children, if not other people's children that might seek advice from them in the mentoring role.

"It's such a beauty to watch and it would be a shame to have that quietly disappear because everyone is too busy to remember it's there."

On Tuesday 11 November, Dr Celi, Max Walker and the Rotary Club of Mt Martha, Victoria will lead a panel of speakers with discussion on the True Man. It will be an entertaining evening of information surrounding men's health, manhood and fine tuning your performance psychology. To be kept informed, register your interest with Dr. Elizabeth Celi on info@qualityliving.com.au



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