

# WHEN A RUNAWAY DAD COMES BACK

*Dee*

These fathers should understand the impact of their actions on their children



**L**IFE can have its own dynamics – mother and father can plan a life together, but along the way go separate ways. In some of these instances one of the parents will be absent in the child's life, letting the other parent raise the child alone. No matter the circumstances though, no parent is supposed to be absent from their child's life. No divorce and no separation should make parents decide not to care or lose contact with their children, unless the children's lives are threatened.

## FLESH AND BLOOD

According to 1 Timothy 5:8: "but if anyone doesn't provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever".

This shows how bad it is for a man not to take care of his children, his own flesh and blood.

In some of these instances, sanity may prevail and the father may want to come back into the children's life and want to play an active role. If you are an absent father, we hope that you reflect on your actions and understand the impact your absence has on your children, and hopefully you can amend your ways. This also goes for absent mothers.

## WHERE TO START?

You may be scared or ashamed to call the mother of your child, but understand that you will need to take the first step. You can send a text message to the mother, write her a

letter or make a telephone call, or even arrange a face to face meeting. In all of this it is important that you manage your expectations. Remember that your absence may have caused a lot of pain so the reception may be a hostile one.

You know that you want to connect with your children, therefore you should soldier on and never give up. As you are in discussions you need to be clear about your intentions and be prepared to answer the questions she may be asking you, like why you have been absent, what you were thinking, and so on.

In some instances her family may be involved as well as they may have been assisting her while you were an absent father.

## MEETING THE CHILD

When you reach an amicable agreement with the mother, you can arrange to see the child with the mother as a start. The younger the child, the better the reception, but with older children you may be in for a lot of questioning, and even then you need to understand where they are coming from.

This child may have gone through a lot and need you to explain yourself. In their minds it may be a case of thinking if you were around they would not have been through what they went through. You may get blamed, so understand their pain.

Do not become a Father Christmas, trying to buy their love. In most cases the children need to connect with you and not with your money.



### KEEP THE PROMISE

One of the crucial steps, as you continue with the meetings, is to keep the promises you make. The child needs to see that you are in it forever and will not disappear again. Do not play with the child's feelings. If you have any challenges, communicate those challenges.

When spending time with the child try not to be distracted, like being on social networks or working on your computer – remember you are working on a bond here.

Find out what the child likes, what sports they are playing at school, what subjects and foods they like.

After the first meeting try and arrange another meeting and do not wait too long before making further contact with the child.

Tell the child how special you felt about the meeting, and how much you plan to spend more time getting to know them.

### SPENDING TIME WITH THE CHILD

Remember the key ingredient in building this relationship is spending time together, so you can take the child to a soccer game, go to the movies with the child, read them stories or find out about other interesting things to do with your child.

Ask for tips from your friends who have children.

### ACKNOWLEDGE THE MOTHER AND THE FAMILY

While you were absent the mother was the one raising the child. Thank her for that. Do not criticise her or start pointing out her weaknesses regarding the child, as she has been all alone providing for the family in your absence. Thank the mother for arranging the meeting as well. She may have persuaded the child, who did not even want to see you.

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### EXPERT ADVICE

Meshack Kekana is the founder of Dads in the Picture, an organisation that encourages fathers to play an active role in the upbringing of their children. He has worked with fathers in this situation. He mentions that there is voluntary absence and forced absence, and in both cases the approach is different.

With voluntary absence, the father needs to be prepared to explain themselves and their intention of coming back, and why they left in the first place.

They also need to take ownership and apologise to the parties they have wronged.

In forced absence, this can mean the father lacked understanding of his role and rights. If the mother chased them away they should have sought other legal or family interventions, and not just accepted the situation.

### IMPORTANCE OF MALE PRESENCE

There is still answering that needs to be done here and the returning father must plead their case.

He mentions that fathers need to understand the negative impact of their absence in the child's life.

Mothers need to understand the importance of having a male presence in the child's life, and allow the father to be active and present for the benefit of the child.

As much as they need to protect the child from harm, they can start opening the door halfway and start with small steps, until they see the full commitment from the father.

For the father who is ashamed to take the first step in connecting with the child, he suggests that they surround themselves with the right people before it is too late. He says his organisation can help make the initial contact, and give advice.

### HELPFUL CONTACTS

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[www.dadsinthepicture.co.za](http://www.dadsinthepicture.co.za) M