Positive Messages for Young Fathers is a Sound Strategy for Social Change  
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Young fathers are a unique population that can immensely benefit from positive messages and encouragement. As many of us adults know, life can be challenging in many ways. For any adolescents, this stage in their lives can bring some additional challenges. Young parents face the typical stressors of being a teenager and additional stressors and responsibilities that come with early parenthood. For many young fathers that are involved in their children’s lives, being able to accomplish their personal goals while simultaneously taking this new role and responsibility can be overwhelming.

Often times we hear about how teen dads are irresponsible, immature and how this task may be too much for the individual. What if we were to make a shift in that dialogue and begin to offer messages of encouragement, support and hope for them? How can we help alleviate and mitigate these feelings and emotions for those young fathers around us? As a society, whether you are connected to a young father or not, you can inspire and encourage young fathers by providing positive messages. It is unbelievable how hopeful messages can go a long way for the individual which will in turn affect the loved ones around him, his closest network and most importantly his baby and the baby’s mother. The idea is to intentionally identify the good thoughts, behaviors and actions that we witness in young fathers and praise them.

Research has shown that with positive emotions, there is more prefrontal activity which enhances mental abilities such as creative thinking, cognitive flexibility and the processing of information. ¹ This type of mental and psychological stimulation will serve as a catalyst for a young person to continue doing what is right for their offspring. Such a simple act of kindness can go a very long way.

The following are some specific examples of what we can do to support, encourage and cheer young fathers for the good things that they are doing for themselves, their babies and the mother of their babies.

In 2004, the South Valley Male Involvement Project launched a bilingual male involvement campaign by creating a series of posters with positive messages. Youth from the South Valley were invited to be part of this campaign. Here are five examples and the rationale behind them.

**RESPECT THE WOMAN IN YOUR LIFE**  
Respect any woman, this could your girlfriend, wife, mother, sister, female friend, etc. The idea is to have the young man acknowledge that every woman deserves to be respected.

**NURTURE YOUR SEED**  
Encourages the young man to consider how his biological seed helped in creating this beautiful human being that requires love, attention, support and his presence to help it grow.
SHOW THEM HOW MUCH YOU LOVE THEM
Illustrates how expressing love to your children through hugs, kisses and loving words, you can show them just how much you love them. This type of bonding is very important for all children to have with their fathers.

MAKE MEMORIES FOR YOUR CHILD
This poster brings to the forefront the importance father’s presence in a child’s life and how important it is to create memories for children. Often times fathers think that by providing material and monetary goods to their children they are doing their job. The idea is to convince them that spending quality time with their children doing fun, engaging and memorable activities is much more important for them.

YOUR CHILD, YOUR PRIDE, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY
The message here is to promote pride in your manhood and fatherhood by really taking care of what matters most, your children. Children should be a top priority for fathers.

Let’s continue to be more intentional with our young fathers by identifying the good things that they are doing and providing words of love, kindness and hope. By supporting and encouraging them to be loving, caring and involved fathers, we will help enable a ripple effect that will touch many lives in a positive manner.

One of the most common values between the human race is love. We can begin to share that love with these young men that are trying to do their best by being a good father. We need to continue to promote a culture that builds on the strengths and assets that our young fathers have to offer in order to promote social change that creates a community of support, opportunities and a better future for all. Words like “Good job, dad!”, “Nice job with those pig tails!”, “Awesome job, changing that diaper!”, “You all look great together!”, “Thanks for coming to our parent meeting!”, “Thanks for joining us on this filed trip!”, etc., will directly and indirectly promote a sense of recognition, inclusivity and welcoming environments for fathers, of all ages.

References
2. Posters – New Mexico Department of Health – Family Planning Program
3. UA News the Power of Positive Communication