

Personal Responsibility— It Has a Nice “Ring” to It

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We know from research that most of the unplanned and teen pregnancies in our nation are out-of-wedlock pregnancies that too often put moms, dads and, most importantly, children, at risk for an array of negative social, emotional, and financial outcomes. Accordingly, what could be a more powerful strategy to change these outcomes than promoting and supporting an institution, which, by design, prevents out-of-wedlock pregnancies and requires personal responsibility? The institution I am referring to is wedlock.

My father was a teen father. I was essentially a teen father, and I grew up in a father-absent home. My two sons were not and did not. My decision to marry my boys’ mother enabled me to break a pernicious cycle in my family and pass on a legacy that was better than the one that I inherited. When I got the mother of my children pregnant, there was much I did not know, but what I did know from personal experience is that “it’s difficult to be what you don’t see.” My children needed to see me doing and being what I had not seen...a married and involved father.

You see, my sons grew up during the 80s and 90s, a time when teen pregnancy, out-of-wedlock pregnancy and, more troubling, “multi-partner fertility” — having children with multiple partners

— was making historic rises. But my two sons, thankfully, did not fall into that trap because their mother and I stressed that pregnancy and sexual activity's best homes are within marriage. In short, we told them, "No ring, no thing." We also stressed that out-of-wedlock pregnancies and especially multi-partner fertility make it much more difficult for a father to be fully engaged in his children's lives — to provide for them financially and emotionally. The data are clear that non-resident fathers, many of whom have children with more than one mother, have more limited contact with their children.

Indeed, marriage is the best societal "glue" we have to connect fathers to their children — heart to heart — and to the mother of their children for the long haul. Its unique and distinctive purpose is to align the interests of fathers and mothers in the best interest of their children. It is designed to make responsibility "personal" and lasting.

So for me, personal responsibility — when it comes to what is best for children — has a nice "ring" to it.

As president of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), Roland is dedicated to NFI's mission of improving the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children that are raised with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. Through Roland's leadership, the organization has quickly become one of the nation's leading providers of fatherhood resources to communities, schools, prisons, hospitals, businesses, the military, and churches. FatherSOURCE™, a national fatherhood resource center run by NFI, now offers the most extensive assortment of specialized fatherhood resources in the world.