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Giving dads a blueprint

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Fathers facing family stress may resort to domestic violence.



By Carly Ritz
Pic: **Getty Images**

'More needs to be done to educate and prepare men for fatherhood,' says Marihet Infantino who manages the Child and Family Unit (CFU) at Jo'burg Child Welfare.

'Parenting does not come with a script so fathers do not know what society expects of them or what they expect of themselves.'

A recent wave of media reports indicates that domestic violence perpetrated by fathers and close male family members involving children is as severe as ever.

This month it was reported in The Sowetan that a father allegedly killed his three children by feeding them rat poison in what seems to have been a domestic dispute or act of revenge. We see these kinds of stories in the media regularly.

According to Infantino it is not unusual for parents to kill their children out of revenge especially when the parents are estranged from each other. In these cases, 'fathers feel desperate and if they cannot have their children then no-one can.'

Infantino says it is critical to educate men and soon-to-be fathers about parenthood and their new set of responsibilities.

Paul* is a new father. He says that new dads need to be patient and bond with their babies. 'I was terrified that I would let my baby down and not be able to care for her but the minute you bond, everything becomes worth it.'

*Not his real name.

Help for fathers

Carol Bews, Assistant Director of Jo'burg Child Welfare says that in the event of a divorce or separation, fathers should approach The Family Advocate who can outline their rights and options.

You can contact: Secretary to the Chief Family Advocate on 012-357-8022 for more information.

Bridget Mogale, a social worker at Jo'burg Child Welfare says that fathers can contact the various child welfare organizations for assistance and advice.

She advises fathers to be as involved with their children as they can, even if they are no longer on good terms with the mother of the children. 'Have regular visits and celebrate occasions like birthdays and graduations, be there for them so they don't forget you.'

Mogale says that it is very important to communicate with your children about why you are absent at times. Be honest but at the same time don't slander the children's mother so they don't feel torn between the parents.

If you are concerned that a family member is a threat to your children, contact Jo'burg Child Welfare at communications@jhbchildwelfare.org.za

Are fathers in South Africa unclear about what role they should play in their children's lives?



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