

Tips On Becoming The Most Valuable Player In Your Children's Lives

By Barry Sanders

(NAPSA)—The 10 years I spent on the field with the Detroit Lions were some of the most rewarding years of my life. While football was a high point in my life, nothing has been as rewarding or as fulfilling as being a father. My wife Lauren and I have three sons, ranging in age from one to 11. I know first-hand that being a parent is a tough job and it's ongoing.

Many of the parents I meet struggle with the same issues my wife and I face with our kids. How do you instill positive values in your kids? How do you steer them away from negative behaviors? How do you help them grow up successfully? How can you be both a parent and a coach?

Earlier this year, I became involved in MVPParents.com, a campaign that gives parents tools to be the most valuable players, or MVPs, in their kids' lives. I have an interest in family causes and I really liked the idea of becoming an MVP Dad. An emphasis of MVPParents.com is to help parents reduce underage drinking, but it's so much more. The Parenting Playbook on MVPParents.com gives moms and dads a "personal coach" in the parenting process and specific "plays" for helping kids be more successful in school, get involved in the community, reduce other risky behaviors, and make positive choices now and throughout their lives.

As the "coach" of my family, I have to live my own advice daily.



The parenting playbook gives parents specific "plays" for helping their kids reduce risky behaviors.

So do other parents striving to be MVPs.

Give Your Kids The Gift Of Your Time

One of the most important things you can give your children is your time—and it's easier to do than you may realize. What you do together is less important than doing it together. Simple actions like going to the park or running errands together gives you time to be a positive role model, teaching through actions, not just words.

When I look back on my childhood in Kansas, I'm amazed by my parents. There were 11 kids in our family. Like parents today, my parents clearly had their hands full! Yet, they always found ways to involve us in their everyday lives. For example, my Mom spent hours just talking to me or taking me to

choir practice and during the summer when my Dad was a roofer, he sometimes took me along to work with him. These were positive experiences that have lasted a lifetime.

Communication Is Key

Open and honest conversations are important. As kids get older, they often ask about the things you did when you were their age. If you did things that you don't want them to do, it's important you're honest with them. That may be uncomfortable, but you can turn it into a learning experience by explaining why your choices were wrong and why you don't want them to make the same mistakes.

It's important to remember that communication is a two-way street. As much as you expect your kids to listen to you, you also need to listen to your kids to be able to help them become the best they can be.

Address Tough Issues Early

As much as you may be a positive role model for your kids, there are difficult issues you need to talk to them about. Sex, drugs and drinking are a few of the things you need to talk about early—and often. It's important to talk about what you consider inappropriate and why. For many teenagers, "why" is an important part of the discussion.

Barry Sanders spent his 10 year NFL career as running back for the Detroit Lions from 1989-1998. Sanders was named the league's MVP in 1997, and he was the third youngest player inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2004. In 1988, Sanders won the Heisman trophy at Oklahoma State University.