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Technology Connects Fathers and Children After Divorce

The Dalai Lama said, "If you don't love yourself, you cannot love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not able of developing compassion for others." Similarly, research finds that the father's ability to have a relationship with his child after divorce or separation is directly related to his ability to be kind to himself, cope with the many changes, and move forward in his new life.

Just as every relationship is different, every divorce is different, and every man will have his own unique experience of divorce or separation. However, research highlights some important commonalities in men's experience. For instance, they must learn to redefine their role as a father outside of their partnership. It is also important for them to establish new ways of communicating with their child, especially when they are physically separated.

"Most men experience a huge sense of loss during the divorce process. Loss of community, connection, support, money, their home, time with their children, and the years they have spent building a life with their family. When interviewed, men who have gone through a divorce describe it as '*a painful, emotional death*', '*the breaking of lives*', '*a shocking and challenging experience*', and '*the loss of a dream*'. Many report feeling sad, angry, guilty, and fearful. Fathers express being lonely and '*going stir crazy*' without the usual noise and chatter of their children," says Shelly Mahon, doctoral student in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Program Director of *Apart, Not Broken: A Place for Learning, Connecting, and Creating*.

Just because they've lost their relationship with their ex-partner does not mean they have to lose their relationship with their child. The emergence of new communication technology has changed how families interact with one another, making it easier for fathers to stay in touch and share experiences with their children on a regular basis. Whether through email, cell phone, video chat, or social networking sites, fathers have new opportunities for more frequent, quality interactions with their children.

The University of Wisconsin is conducting an evaluation to examine the effectiveness of this online intervention program. *Apart, Not Broken: Learn, Connect, & Create* gives fathers a place to learn from the real experiences of other fathers and get current information about divorce and parenting after divorce. Using videos and a variety of online tools, fathers are given creative strategies to connect with their child and manage their relationship with their ex-partner. Fathers will be asked to respond to a pre and post survey, and provide feedback about their experience using the online program.

If you are interested in getting more information, or registering for this program, please visit the homepage at www.divorceddadinstitute.com/ or contact Shelly D. Mahon at apartnotbroken@gmail.com.