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## Role of dads continues to evolve

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By: Evamarie Socha

SUNBURY — Happy Father's Day, dad. Chances are good that these days, you and your wife work, you do more around the house, you try hard to spend time with your children but it's a challenge with your job, and you might be in the growing minority of fathers who stay at home with the kids.

Those are five facts about today's American father, according to a study the Pew Research Center released in time for Father's Day.

For sure, today's dads are much different from their dads.

"The role of fathers has certainly changed over the years," said Dr. Anthony Butto, a psychologist with the Courtyard Counseling Center in Shamokin Dam, "perhaps even more than the role of mothers."

For instance, a greater number of mothers today work out of the home, and more fathers provide hands-on care of their children, he said. "There has certainly been a convergence of roles for mothers and fathers," Butto said.

Mothers still are more likely to carry a heavier load, "but at the rate mothers and fathers are sharing parenting roles today, it may not be that way for long," Butto said. "The days of dad simply being the married breadwinner and likely disciplinarian are fading."

Children learn impressionable lessons about adult relationships from watching their parents, Butto said. "If their parents have a close and respectful relationship, children will seek that from their partners when they grow up."

That makes sense, because another study, done by The New York Times, shows that 49 percent of Pennsylvania's children live with their married, biological parents.

That makes the Keystone State slightly better than the national average, according to Pew, which found in 2013 that 46 percent of U.S. kids live in a home with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage.

It's not like when you were a kid, this study found. In 1960, 73 percent of children fit the description, and in 1980, 61 percent did.

But the trends described in the Pew study are good: Boys who have an involved father are more likely to grow up and have greater involvement with their own kids, Butto said, and learn that stricter gender roles of the past don't necessarily work for them.

"This is especially true if their fathers are affectionate and able to express positive emotions. Their sons grow up to have a much richer emotional life, and they are more likely to be a better spouse and parent," he said.

Unfortunately, many men also are better at expressing negative or angry emotions, "and if this is the case, their sons will mimic this as well," Butto said.

Girls benefit even more from having a father who is involved in their lives. A close and respectful relationship with their dads teaches girls to be self-protective, he said.

"Girls will learn of the emotional life of men — how they think, how they problem-solve — and will be much less likely to marry a man who will mistreat them. Men will not be such a mystery," he added.

Girls with involved fathers also are likely to seek relationships with men who respect them, "and she will understand how to have real friendships with men," Butto said, "much the same way that most mothers have always taught their sons about women."

Your kids also learn a lot from seeing you as a regular human, dad.

"It's very important for dads to let their kids in on their emotional world and teach them men don't always have to be strong and silent," Butto said. "They can also be gentle and loving."

And as hard as it may be finding the time to spend with your kids, just do it. Play with your children, teach them what you know, share your passions.

"Fathers who must work a great deal may not have as much time to spend with their children, but these dads need to find ways to live in the moment with their children and remember that this time with them is very short-lived," Butto said. "It enriches our lives to really be with and involved with our children."