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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Fatherhood Is a Community Value

“Goodnight room. Goodnight moon. Goodnight cow jumping over the moon.”

This sentence, said over and over again: night, after night. These words, the halfway mark in Margaret Wise Brown’s very famous children’s story, were among the last words my daughters heard every night at bedtime when they were little, shortly before “good night” and “I love you.” This sentence represents for me many aspects of what it means to be a dad, to show love as a father. Dads can provide warmth, routine, and consistency. Dads can help their children discover a love of reading and the joy of books. Dads can nurture connection, curiosity, and a sense of security. This is fatherhood.

This Father’s Day I was reminded that for many of us, fatherhood can come in many forms — anytime we strive to provide for young people in our lives, spiritually, emotionally, in times of need, and in times of triumph, this is fatherhood. Although my father passed away when I was young, I have been blessed with other father figures in my own life, and I would like to think I have played that role too in the lives of others,



sometimes without even realizing it. There are the teachers who never give up on us, the coaches who never let us forget how much they believe we can succeed, the uncles and grandfathers who step in to provide advice and guidance when dad isn’t there, and the moms who are mom, dad, and everybody else. Fatherhood is about consistently stepping up and taking the time to reach out to and support a young person even when that young person does not know how in-need he

or she is.

In many communities, this need to reach our youth and be there consistently for those who need guidance and mentoring is vast. So vast, in fact, that President Obama has charged all of us to stand up, reach out and remove barriers that too often prevent boys and young men of color and other young people from realizing their potential. The *My Brother's Keeper* initiative has inspired communities across the country who have stepped up to ensure that all of our children, including our young boys and young men, are able to lean on and learn from those who came before them, and those who want to help guide their path forward to success. Mayors and school superintendents in cities all across the country are lifting up all students with their committed support and concrete actions like expanding summer jobs programs and launching mentoring initiatives. Being a young man of color should not mean you are a young man at risk—and a constant and committed figure of support in one's life can make all the difference.

At ED, we take the President's charge very seriously. From issuing new guidance to create more inclusive and supportive educational environments, to engaging communities and having honest conversations, from Denver to Chicago to Baltimore to Birmingham, our work has centered around our belief that we are all, in fact, our brothers' keepers.

- We have worked to [expand access to high quality early learning](#) in high needs communities.
- [We are partnering with school districts](#) across the country to improve [school climates](#) and ensure that our students can learn in safe and supportive environments.
- We are working with states to ensure that young people in [correctional facilities](#) can get the education they need for a successful second chance.

Father's Day allows all of us to reflect on what it means to encourage and inspire "[responsible fatherhood](#)," as the President said—both in our own homes to our own children, and to the millions of children without someone to call dad. *Rise: The Story of My Brother's Keeper*, a new documentary, examines this commitment to our children and our next generation of fathers. For me, fatherhood is the nurturing love of a nightly bedtime story; it is words of encouragement, wise guidance, and a helping hand during a time of adversity; and it is the cultivation of confidence, security, and hope through caring and consistent support. *My Brother's Keeper* is about building a world with more of all of those things for all young people. We all have a part to play in supporting the many faces of fatherhood and serving as our brothers' keepers.

What is fatherhood to you? Please comment here, or [reply to me on Twitter](#).

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Posted by
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June 23, 2015

2 Comments

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