

## A defining act for fathers and sons

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25 years later, that game of catch in 'Field of Dreams' still resonates for many, and experts explain why.

(HealthDay)—"Hey Dad? You wanna have a catch?"

"I'd like that."

That simple exchange—between a son and his long-dead father—provides the powerful climax of the film "Field of Dreams," which just celebrated its 25th anniversary on Sunday, Father's Day.

But the movie is much more than a film about baseball, or about chasing your dreams, even seemingly impossible ones.

The question voiced by actor Kevin Costner was meant as an unspoken apology to his dad. Yet it still provokes a deep emotional response for

many American men who remember asking the same question of their [fathers](#) on warm summer afternoons years—even decades—ago.

Which raises another question: In the often-tumultuous relationships between fathers and sons, why does a game of catch with a baseball mean so much to so many?

Lawrence Cohen, a Boston psychologist and author of the book "Playful Parenting," said a game of catch allows a father and son to connect in a way that might not ordinarily present itself.

"Catch is bridging a distance," he said. "You're connected, but you're not two inches away from each other. You're at a distance, and the ball symbolically bridges this distance."

It also serves as a different way of bonding, given that masculine stereotypes don't always allow boys to connect physically with their parents in ways that girls can, Cohen added.

"Boys don't get as much encouragement to connect as girls do," he said. "Girls get cuddled more, comforted more."

That connection-through-catching can produce emotional and psychological rewards for both father and child, to the lasting benefit of both, Cohen noted.

Tossing a baseball back and forth has other lessons and rewards as well, not the least that it's an enjoyable pastime.

"You're sharing something with your child. You're helping them get better at it," said Dr. Glenn Kashurba, a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Somerset, Pa. "It's an outside activity. It's fun. It serves as a good way for you to learn more about your kid without really trying."

Catch also allows boys to challenge their fathers in a sort of rite of passage, and test them in a non-confrontational way.

Cohen said he sometimes plays catch with boys he works with. Some are angry, and express that anger by throwing "zingers" at him.

"I think this has a symbolic meaning—'Can you handle me? Can you take what I can dish out?' And by catching the ball and returning it, the father is responding, 'Yes, I can,' " he said.

That's not to say there aren't other ways to connect with kids. Kashurba and Cohen both said "side-by-side" activities —stamp collecting, fixing cars or solving jigsaw puzzles, for instance—can create strong feelings of cooperation and appreciation between parents and their children.

And bonding over sports isn't limited to fathers and sons these days. Kashurba said he was pleasantly surprised when his high school-age daughter wrote a poem about the soccer games their family had played in their front yard when she was young.

"I didn't even realize she remembered those, but it was a really big deal for her," Kashurba said. "It was interesting how she pulled this thing out to put in a poem."

But there's something about a game of catch that really resonates for many American fathers and sons—and daughters.

Kashurba said he listened to a radio news account of former President George H.W. Bush's recent 90th birthday celebration, and noticed that Bush's now-adult sons—including former President George W. Bush—reminisced about games of catch they had played with their father.

"They said he was the cool dad, because he could catch the ball from behind his back over and over," Kashurba said.

For "Field of Dreams," Costner played a farmer who builds a baseball diamond in the middle of his cornfield, at the behest of a mysterious voice. The ghosts of former baseball legends begin to play on the diamond, after emerging from rows of corn to take their positions.

At the movie's end, the catcher turns out to be the farmer's father as a young man. And the climactic game of catch symbolizes the resolution of a never-healed rift between the two.

The original cornfield diamond created for the movie still stands on a family farm in Dyersville, Iowa, and has been a tourist attraction since the movie became a hit.

On Father's Day, June 15, Costner appeared there with his family at the 25th anniversary celebration of the film. And he and his two young sons played catch.

**More information:** For more on parenting, visit the [U.S. National Institutes of Health](#).

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