

Five Questions with Dr. Adolph Brown: Fatherhood

[music] William Scott: Hi, I'm William Scott from NCECDTL, and I've been in Head Start and loved Head Start and fatherhood for many years, and I'd like to introduce you to one of my heroes in fatherhood, Dr. Adolph Brown III.

Dr. Adolph Brown: My name is Dr. Adolph Brown, and I'm here today with my very first teacher, my mother, Virginia. And we've been a part of Head Start since its inception. Back in the day before performance standards and things of that nature, where if you had a good heart and you loved children, you can be a part of it. So, we're glad to be here today.

William: Well, the only thing I want to say is, hey, one of the things that we do as men, and especially as boys, we love our mothers, we love our mothers. And I still have my mother, thank God. And so I just want to just say, "Hey, mom." And thank you for being a part of this. And Dr. Brown, hey, let me tell you something. You are my hero. You are somebody that I look up to, and a lot of kids look up to you, and I talk about you everywhere I go because I haven't forgotten you since you made that impression on me several years back. So, thank you very much.

Adolph: Well, Will, I'm a social justice advocate. And again, I knew nothing about social justice, but I knew a mother who was the president of our NAACP, who was on the board of the Urban League. I knew a mother who — but long before my brother was murdered, was advocating for justice for other families that this had happened to. So, it wasn't as if something happened to us and, you know, all of a sudden, we got involved. That's been her life.

William: Who are your role models for fatherhood?

Adolph: Men come to understand their roles as dads oftentimes by the role models they have had. I'm here today with my mother because I often talk about being a father like my mother was. And when I say being a father like my mother was, it doesn't do anything to belittle my father because you never talked poorly about my dad. You lifted him up in his absence. My father left. My mother divorced when I was 2. Five children. Have a younger sister, an older sibling, and I have a brother who was murdered, my oldest sibling, who was murdered at 19, when I was 11. And I had another sister, older sister, who died two years ago. So, my role model in essence was my mom at first. You know, people talk about single parenting. I'm unsure that truly exists because of the nature of a village, a true village. My grandfather, who stepped in my life. My grandfather was a farmer who lived a couple hours from here, so I often spent a lot of time with him, particularly when I got in trouble. However, I had my grandfather, I had a host of uncles. My mother has how many brothers?

Virginia: It's 14.

Adolph: 14. So, I had a host of males in my life. However, in my home, I had mom.

William: What do children need most from their dads?

Adolph: The research says that children need time. Number one, if there is one thing that dads can do, is to be there, to be there. And when I say be there, for any dads that are watching that aren't able to be there because of divorce, separation, and other circumstances, be available. And that availability goes to dads who are also present, being around for your children. Ultimately, children want fathers to be proud of them. If there was one thing at the end of the day that you could ask adult kids what they want from their fathers, that's really what it kind of culminates to. But the availability is a huge part, being present. For us in our family, very realistic. Have I missed soccer games? Yes. Have I missed tournaments? Of course. But we have a saying in our family, "You can't miss them all."

William: How can education managers support dads who aren't living with their child?

Adolph: I would make sure that fathers, excuse me, fathers are invited. You got to know them. You got to have a relationship. And if fathers aren't involved and the mothers are, then there's a prime opportunity to kind of mend things on behalf of a child. And I'm not saying necessarily mend the romantic or the intimate relationship, but I'm saying the parental relationship oftentimes. And my mother is here today with me doing this interview because as a clinical psychologist, I can't tell you how often I sit with parents who have bashed the other parent in front of that child, and that child is both of them. So, I think sometimes when you don't have a contact for a father, it's deeper than what meets the eye. Understanding that, OK, you didn't get along, it didn't work out. Let's talk about how this will affect your child longitudinally.

William: How can we support bonus dads?

Adolph: Well, I think for Head Start managers, I would like them to know that blood relations does not a family make.

William: Right.

Adolph: That's number one. But bonus dads, I'm the bonus dad here. I don't know if they're still here, but I had a bunch of teenagers come over to work out in our gym. I mean, that's who I am for them. Guess what, I had bonus dads growing up. I had your good friend Jimmy, who showed me how to treat women, how he treated you. So, the advice that I would give is to whoever loves that child, invite them in. Whoever that child loves, invite them in.

William: Can you describe the influence of Head Start on your own life?

Adolph: But here, this group that was new to the scene came and invited you to be a part of it, and you ran with it. I have our graduation. You know, now they call it matriculation. I call it graduation. Our graduation from Head Start, the robes and the gowns that we wore, you made. The caps, you made. You went to budgetary meetings, and then you started traveling. You've never stopped advocating for us, just like you do for your grandchildren. So, I'm just really thankful for Head Start, and it's beyond me. So, I wouldn't be here if Head Start didn't reach out

to my mother. So, I just want to thank everybody who is involved in Head Start in any kind of way. [music]