

Black families getting stronger

Written by Judge Greg Mathis
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For decades there has been much discussion about the disintegration of the black family and of the negative effects single parent households tend to have on our children and our communities. It is no coincidence that many young gang members come from families where there is no real father figure or that teen mothers often had poor, if any, relationships with their own fathers. These young people would follow in their parent's footsteps, creating a vicious cycle where active black fathers were the exception and not the rule.

Slowly but surely, things are changing. According to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau, two parent black households now make up 40 percent of all black families; that's a five percent increase from 2004 data. Some of this can be attributed to the bureau's new definition of family: in the past, only married couples with children would be counted as a two parent household. Under the new guidelines, unmarried couples living together with children are now counted as a two parent family.

Though the increase in black two parent households is modest, it is promising. For years, that number hovered at or near a very low 30 percent, lagging far behind white two parent households. The traditional black family began to crack during the 1950s when father's had to leave home to search for work in other areas, often far from home. Even then, father's played a part, sending money back to their families. It wasn't until the late 70s that the fatherless black family became the standard and two parent households were a mere fantasy. As our family unit began to disappear, the teen pregnancy, high school drop out and incarceration rates in our communities began to increase.

America is currently in a place where economic circumstances may begin to weaken families. As more people lose their jobs or their homes, couples find themselves bending under the weight of it all. Black couples must avoid this. If financial pressures threaten to drive a couple apart, counseling may be one way for them to continue to stand strong. Many churches and community groups offer free couple's groups or counseling for those who are interested.

It's not simply about keeping a couple together, though that certainly is important. The fact is, with fathers at home and present in their children's lives, black families are statistically destined to do better economically and socially. Our kids perform better in school, they stay out of trouble and our neighborhoods are safer. Strong black families are the cornerstone of a strong black community. If we are to reach our full collective potential we must individually make a commitment to family and children.