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**DWYANE WADE** refused to do a fade-away from his kids' lives— so he fought for full custody and won. The NBA star talks to JET about the lifestyle trend he hopes he can help revive:

*Black men putting fatherhood first.*





**Dwyane Wade is already a champion. So whether or not the All-Star shooting guard leads the Miami Heat to their third NBA title, he'll celebrate the same way many other sports stars do at the end of a successful season. He's going to Disney World. But not because of team tradition. He was simply outvoted.**

"I'm the kind of parent who asks my kids questions like what would be your ideal thing to do in the summer? This year it's Disney World," explains Wade, the proud father of two boys— Zaire, 11, and Zion, 5— and legal guardian to his nephew Dahveon Morris, 11. "Even though I make the final decision, I want them to feel involved. Not only in vacations but other things as well."

This approach to child-rearing is in stark contrast to the Chicago native's upbringing. Wade's parents separated when he was only a few months old and the only thing the little guy had any control over was the television remote. Distracted by episodes of *Knight Rider* and *Tom and Jerry*, the youngster was oblivious to his mother's heroin and alcohol addictions. Luckily his older sister Tragil wasn't. She decided to take her then

8-year-old brother to live with his father, Dwyane Sr.— a move that became pivotal in shaping Wade's identity and values as a man.

"Dwyane came up not having a father around, so he didn't think he was missing anything," says his mother Jolinda Wade, who has been drug-free and sober for the past decade. "But having his father take over the key role in parenting was very impactful. That was the first view he got as a young man to see what to do and what not to do."

Wade agrees the move was transformative. "It was bigger than I even knew until I became a parent," he adds. "My dad stepped up when I needed him. I think all boys need men in their lives to show them how to be a man. I love my mom and my sister, but a woman can only take you so far in terms of manhood. That's why I fought so hard for my kids."





**WADE'S WORLD:** (l to r) *The NBA star's nephew Dahveon and sons Zion and Zaire; D-Wade and his mom embrace; Wade men dressed for success.*

Wade and Siohvaughn Funches, who started dating each other at age 15, divorced in 2007 after five years of marriage. But the split was far from amicable. The next four years were replete with an intense series of messy TMZ-worthy legal proceedings over custody of the couple's two children. Things came to a pause in 2011, when a judge ruled in Wade's favor and his sons moved to his Miami home full-time. His ex was granted visitation rights. The Wades' estate was split with Funches receiving a \$1 million payout and reportedly getting approximately \$25,000 a month in spousal support. But the drama is still far from over. Wade and Funches are scheduled to appear in court this July

to determine the distribution of additional marital assets.

"It's a tough situation," says Wade, wearily. "It's not anything I ever thought would happen to me and my family but it was something we had to deal with. I didn't set out to get full custody but I wasn't able to see my kids the way I wanted and I'm not a parent who's going to run away from his responsibilities... I was probably a terrible husband, but I pride myself on being a good dad."

Despite having a career that keeps him on the road half of the year, Wade maintains a very active role in his boys' lives, attending their games and dropping them off at school regularly. "Whenever I'm able to do anything with my kids, I give them my undivided attention," says the pro athlete, who relies on a trusted inner circle that includes

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his parents, sister Tragil, 36, and a nanny to fill in when he’s away. “The boys feel special in those moments even though they don’t happen every day.”

Even with logistics taken care of, full custody wasn’t a seamless transition. Wade had to put on a full-court press simply to earn back his sons’ trust. “When the divorce was going on I couldn’t really get in touch with them as much and they were hearing a lot of negative things,” he shares. “When a kid hears someone always talking ill about a parent they’re going to feel they can do the same. There was a point where it hurt sometimes to have conversations with my oldest son because I didn’t feel that the respect was there, so I had to rebuild that.”

Redeveloping the bond with his boys was crucial to Wade, but so is creating a healthy relationship with his ex-wife. “I made a decision to get a divorce so I knew it wasn’t going to be *The Cosby Show* at my house any more,” he says of how their split has played out in the media. “But it’s been six years and hopefully one day she and I can get to the point where it’s a lot easier than it is now to be co-parents.”

His mother shares the same hope.

“You don’t want to see any family separate... But marriages consist of different seasons. If it’s cold all the time you realize that you have to let it go for your sanity and for the children,” she says.

Given the way Wade’s marriage ended, it’s no wonder he’s not in a rush to walk down the aisle again. But that doesn’t mean the 31-year-old, who’s currently dating actress Gabrielle Union, is completely closed off to the idea. “I look forward to the day I can be a great husband,” he reveals. “I’ve learned that marriage is about finding a true partner where you have the same goals and you’re willing to work together to help fulfill them.”

And if Mama Wade has her way, one day her son and his future spouse will fulfill her wish for another granddaughter. “She’d be the cutest thing,” says the ecstatic grandmother.

Wade is also looking forward to watching his brood expand, but unlike his mother, he’s gender-neutral. “Whether it’s sons or daughters, I’m focused on being a good dad,” he says. “Raising girls can be hard work but I know it would be an exciting experience and I’m sure my boys would feel the same way.”

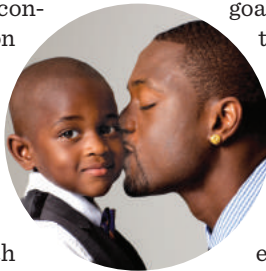


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