



Devoted Dads

Shaping daughters' lives

BY JULIE BAUMGARDNER, MS, CFLE

Last week, I watched a father enthusiastically gush over the birth of his daughter. He has a son whom he loves, but there was something different about the way he looked at his daughter. What is it about the father/daughter relationship that is so special?

Dr. Meg Meeker, author of "Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters," states that no matter the age of the daughter, she takes her relationship with her father to the grave.

Studies from the University of Canterbury and Vanderbilt University show that fathers provide unique benefits to their daughters through their active and positive presence from the time of birth all the way through adulthood. The trend is for fathers to back away from their daughters during the pre-adolescent and adolescent time period, but the need for attention and affection during that time period is even more important.

After reading an article about the impact of father involvement into adulthood, one woman commented, "I wish my dad could understand this. He still resents having to pay child support for me. All I wanted was emotional support from him that I never got. I'm in my twenties, and unfortunately, I don't think we will ever have a healthy relationship."

Studies show that girls who don't have a healthy relationship with their father will look for other ways to contribute to their development when it comes to relating to men. A 50-year-old woman may still be working on issues that should have been attended to by a healthy, engaged father.

"When you are frozen relationally, it is difficult to know your place and how to develop a healthy relationship because you are working from a point of need instead of working out of a position of co-equal," said fathering expert, Dr. Ken Canfield. "There is a void in your life, and the search to fill that void prompts you to take risks in relationships which usually result in some really poor choices."



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Keys to a Healthy Father-Daughter Relationship

So often, dads don't realize how important they are in the lives of their kids, especially their daughters. Girls who have involved fathers in their lives do better in school and are more likely to have healthy self-esteem. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and sex. They also tend to be less susceptible to peer pressure, more competent, more ambitious, and have more self-control.

Here are some tips for fathers to encourage their daughters from Joe Kelly, author of "Dads and Daughter: How to Inspire, Understand, and Support Your Daughter When She's Growing Up So Fast."

Listen.

Focus on what your daughter thinks, believes, feels, dreams and does.

Encourage her strength and celebrate her savvy.

Help your daughter learn to recognize, resist, and overcome barriers. Help her develop her strengths to achieve her goals.

Respect her uniqueness.

Urge her to love her body and discourage dieting. Make sure she knows that you love her for who she is.

Exercise together.

Studies show that physically active girls often have fathers who are active with them.

Get involved in your daughter's activities.

Volunteer to drive, coach, or teach.

Talk to other fathers.

Together, fathers have reams of experience. Dads can learn a lot from each other.