

INSIGHTS

Fathering daughters



5 practical tips for dads on how to be a great father.

A father's influence lasts a lifetime, and it is an important compliment to the mothering role. More and more research is confirming that a female's sense of worth as a woman, is commonly rooted in her experience with her father.

Fathers affect the lives of their daughters in intriguing ways. Including her academic and vocational path, her career success and financial well-being. The well-fathered daughter is also the most likely to have relationships with men that are emotionally intimate and fulfilling, and have better emotional and mental health.

Here are five tips to help you be a great father to your daughter.

1. Make the connection

One of the most natural ways a father can make a connection with his daughter is through purposeful physical affection. A hug, shoulder squeeze or a kiss on the cheek helps to create an emotional bond with daughters who desperately crave these displays of affection. This is great news for fathers, because if you can't find the words to say it then you have a second opportunity to show it through physical gestures.

Studies have proven that physical touch makes us feel better both physiologically and psychologically. But children — especially daughters — need more than just everyday gestures given in passing. When a girl's need for affection is met by her father it has a protective measure on her future sexual relationships.

When fathers can have a purposeful physical relationship with their daughters, which is done in a way that supports her feelings of safety and connection, it can also help to stress-proof them. When girls are given opportunities to be involved in physical play outside the house and in outdoor activities, they begin to understand the skill of risk-taking. Girls who are treated too softly and are not provided with opportunities to experience risk, are left in a vulnerable position.

2. Invest in her

As a father, you can appreciate your daughter for who she truly is. Help her to identify her unique qualities and value them.

Avoid investing in who you think she should be. This can happen when fathers feel like they don't understand their daughters. Remember, this can happen easily as girls tend to morph into what is expected of them rather than excel towards who they truly are. Instead, do whatever it takes to try to understand her. Spend time together, share stories and experiences. Give her opportunities to show her true self, and this will strengthen the relationship.

Be there and be engaged. Get off the bench and into the game, be enormously present and don't let anyone dull her spark



3. Watch your language

The language you use when talking to girls matters. Everything that is said can be taken very seriously and to heart by your daughter. Thoughts and comments are easily internalised, amplified and exaggerated.

Differentiate being pretty from being beautiful. Prettiness is not a good thing to say to a girl, even if she is. Being told she is pretty teaches her to start to trade on her looks and she will expect people to say that. Beauty and attractiveness are not pretty, and it is really important to differentiate those when talking with your daughter. Praise her for the values and characteristics she has which make her beautiful.

4. Provide warmth

Fathers need to find their softer side when dealing with their daughters, to help them open up and share and provide an emotionally safe place for them. When fathers are called upon to give corrections or direction, they can do this in a warm and loving manner that she will positively respond to. Offer your strength to your daughter in a different way than you would to a son.

5. Be a positive male role model



As a girl tries to figure out what men are like, the first one she watches is her father. He can be one very significant example of a man who is consistent, trustworthy, and sensitive to feelings, who places his family at a high priority in his schedule, who keeps his promises, and who invests his energies in the lives of those around him. As her father, you play a large role in showing your daughter what a proper, respectful male response sounds and feels like.

Treat her mother and her sisters with the same respect. As a father, you have many choices about how to use your influence in a positive and empowering way.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.