

## Fathers and daughters

The largest part of our work with our young clients at school focusses on the quality of their relationships with others. When relationships are strong, and young people feel connected to others, they tend to be happier, less anxious and more resilient.



In this week's article we would like to talk specifically about a daughter's relationship with her father. Fathers play a very important role in the lives of their daughters, and whilst we know it is not always possible for them to live in the same household, and indeed, it is true that sadly, some girls have no contact with their fathers, it can be said that the connection, protection, guidance, mutual respect and unconditional love provided by a father are key factors in protecting girls as they grow up.

The stronger a girl's relationship with her father, the less likely she is to engage in risk-taking behaviours. Yet many fathers are daunted by the thought of spending one-on-one time with their daughters. The earlier you start the better, of course, but it is never too late.

A father's influence on his daughter's life shapes her self-esteem, her self-image, confidence and opinions of men. It also sets the stage for all her future relationships with men. Simple things like verbal encouragement, being consistently present (or at least accessible) in her life, being alert and sensitive to her feelings, taking time to listen to her thoughts and taking an active interest in her hobbies will all validate her worth, build her confidence and diminish her insecurity.

If her father is caring, kind, attentive, supportive and loves her unconditionally then she will seek similarly loving men with whom to form loving relationships in the future. If her father is critical, emotionally unavailable or uninvolved in her life, she is more likely to be naturally attracted to similar men, believing these behaviours are acceptable and that this is what love looks like.

Every relationship is different, and people have different ways of expressing their love to one another. We have put together some tips that we hope may help fathers form and foster strong and lasting bonds with their daughters: -

- First and foremost, treat her with love and respect. We know that fathers love their daughters unconditionally, but she doesn't always know. Tell her. Often.
- Demonstrate that you value women by modelling respectful behaviour and kindness towards other women, especially with your daughter's mother, whether you are together in a relationship or not. She will look to your behaviour as an expectation to how she should be treated. Set the highest standard. You have enormous power in this regard. Don't waste it.
- Value her opinion. Listen to what she has to say. She is still forming her views of the world, so don't knock her down because you disagree or think she's being silly. She will value what you have to say as well, but don't force your view on her.
- Make time to be with her one-on-one. Set a coffee date, a movie night, do a fun-run together, or go on a bushwalk. Walk the dog together, or if circumstances require it, set a regular FaceTime date.
- Daughters crave one-on-one time with their dads. Teach her things like how to cook her favourite meal, change a tyre, drive a car, use an electric drill or to snorkel. She is not likely to suggest, it but will most likely love that you did.

We do not live in a perfect world. None of us are perfect parents. We urge you only to be the best you can be and acknowledge that this can look different on different days. Remember it's her perception that's most powerful. If your daughter sees that you are trying, believes that you want the best for her, and knows your love has no strings attached, then you are on the right track.

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