

5



Things Every Kid
MUST GET from

DAD

CAREY CASEY & The National Center for Fathering

5 Things Every Kid MUST GET from DAD

Dear Dad:

I know you want to be a great father—a terrific role model whom your children respect and admire. And the research is clear: Your children are calling out, *begging* for your attention.

Children thrive when they have an involved father—someone who loves them, knows them, guides them, and helps them achieve their destiny.

Statistics speak for themselves: When children do not have involved fathers, they are more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol, and be involved with premarital pregnancy.

They are more likely to grow to be adults who live in poverty, and they are more likely to turn to crime.

When a father's presence isn't as strong as it should be, children have lower self-esteem. Their grades suffer. They develop unhealthy views about male-female relationships.

Unfortunately, today's culture does not provide dads with practical advice they need—at least not nearly at the level of guidance available to mothers.

So what about dads?

At the National Center for Fathering, we want to provide dads with the research and the tools to become great role models and loving fathers who do their best to raise confident, principled children.

Our goal is to change the culture for today's children (and the children of coming generations) by unleashing 6.5 million dads who are committed to Championship Fathering.

Join the Movement.
**Make your Championship Fathering
Commitment Today at www.fathers.com/cf.**

This free book is our latest initiative to provide dads with the resources they need to engage with their kids and be part of the Championship Fathering movement.

Please read the book, cover-to-cover. Absorb it. Implement the suggestions that resonate with you. And when you are done, forward it another dad who loves his children. (Or, better yet, forward it to five other dads who love their children!)

Be sure to find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Let's change the culture of fathering together!

Sincerely,



P.S. "Daddy, you're my hero."

How much would you love to hear those words?
You can.

**Make the Championship Fathering
Commitment [here](http://www.fathers.com/cf).**



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(This material is based on a framework developed by the Center's founder, Dr. Ken Canfield, whose work continues to inspire and equip fathers.)

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At the National Center for Fathering, we believe that *every* child needs a dad she or he can count on. The research is clear: children thrive when they have an involved father—someone who loves them, knows them, guides them, and helps them achieve their destiny.

This free book is part of our ongoing efforts to provide practical, research-based training and resources that inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father figures their children need.

This book focuses on daughters and sons separately, providing one section for fathers of daughters and one for fathers of sons. That said, many of the ideas are universal to all children, so be sure to check out each section, regardless of your child's gender.



5 Five Things Every Daughter MUST GET from DAD

IN MANY FAMILIES, dads guide their sons and moms guide their daughters. But particularly as girls mature, they need their dads' perspective as they approach significant crossroads. Daughters need the benefit of their dads' life experiences and wisdom as they consider important life decisions and think through possible consequences of their choices.

Your daughter also needs to know that you cherish her as a person and you admire her as a lovely young woman. She isn't just another person; she is special and unique, and worthy of your attention. She is **royalty**.

Here are five things your daughter **MUST GET** from you ...



- 1 -

She needs you to give her words of comfort.

What would be your first words to your daughter if ...

- She lost something important?
- She injured herself in a minor accident because she was being careless?
- She caused a fender-bender?
- She came to you and told you that she's pregnant?

What would your first words be?

Would they be comforting words, or words of anger, disappointment, and judgment?



Daughters around the country tell us the same thing: **They do not think they can talk to their dads about their problems because they are afraid of what their dads will say or do. They do not sense unconditional acceptance from their dads.** If they make a mistake, daughters feel their dads will judge them and be disappointed, first and foremost.

Though we do not think a dad should relax his values or stop having high expectations for his daughter's behavior,

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sometimes comforting a daughter is more important than driving home a point. **Certainly, comforting a daughter is more important than proving that you are right.** You will have other opportunities to teach your daughter about right and wrong, but if your daughter comes to you with a problem, your first priority should be to comfort her by:

1. Allowing her to express her feelings,
2. Actively listening to her, and
3. Responding with empathy.

This three-tiered process for comforting your daughter is particularly important if she is disappointed or if she has disappointed you.

First, allow her to express her feelings.

Your daughter needs freedom to express what she's thinking, knowing that you will respond calmly. Even when your daughter has made a mistake, keeping your cool and refusing to overreact are important steps if you want to build a relationship that encourages your daughter to come to you and tell you whatever is in her heart or on her mind.

The secret is to establish a relationship of acceptance during the day-to-day ups and downs of life with your daughter. **Demonstrate that she is accepted, no matter what—that she can come to you about anything.** Then, when a crisis occurs, she will be much more likely to reach for you.

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Let's say that your teenage daughter has a friend whom you think is bad news. They have a fight, and your daughter becomes the victim of her former friend's bullying tactics. She confides in you.

You might be tempted to say, "I told you not to hang out with her!"

But resist the temptation. More important is that your daughter feels that she can confide in you. So replace the judgmental words with **consoling words like, "Are you okay?"**

Show her that her emotions, comfort, and safety are your main concern.

Closely related to the first, actively listening to your daughter is an important part of comforting her.

Allowing her to express herself won't make a difference if you don't also ask clarifying questions, clear your mind of preconceptions, read her voice inflections and body language, and keep listening for the heart of her concern.

Actively listening to your daughter means that you use your ears, eyes, mouth, heart, and body language.

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- With your ears, listen to her words.
- With your eyes, look for facial expressions and non-verbal cues she might be sending.
- With your mouth, ask follow-up questions to make sure you understand.
- With your heart, tune into the feelings your daughter is communicating. Pay close attention even if your daughter is talking about something you think is trivial. Remember that **she** feels the subject is important, so try to tune into her feelings instead of your own judgment. Always keep in mind that you want her to keep coming back to you when more important matters are on her mind.



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- With your body, demonstrate through your own facial expressions and non-verbal cues that you are interested and ready to hear more. Put down the paper, turn the TV off, shift your whole body away from the computer—whatever it takes to give your complete attention to your daughter.

And third, respond with empathy when consequences are necessary.

If your daughter misbehaves, consequences are necessary. But instead of showing anger, try showing empathy and sadness. This allows your daughter to contemplate and learn from her mistakes. On the other hand, when parents respond with anger, daughters miss the lesson because they are too angry, frustrated, or resentful.

Anger + Consequences = More Anger

Empathy + Consequences = Opportunities to Learn and Self-Correct

When a child misbehaves, a dad's first reaction is often to try to fix the problem, launching into a lecture about what she should do, or what lesson she should learn. But if you **simply express sadness about the situation and concern for what your child is going through**, your daughter will know you are there for her. This will help prevent a meltdown.

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Say you come in from the garage to find little Amy drawing on the living room walls with her crayons.

An angry response might sound like this: “Amy! What are you doing? You should know better! Go to your room right now!”

Amy feeds off your anger and launches a screaming tantrum of her own. More importantly, rather than focusing on what she did wrong, she will probably focus on the heated emotions and the angry confrontation.

Sound familiar?

Empathy might go like this: “Amy, this is so sad. We don’t write on walls. Crayons are for paper. What are you going to do to fix this?”

Chances are, you’ll be struggling to control your anger in situations like this. If this is the case, consider adding something like, “Why don’t you go sit in the kitchen for a few minutes and see if you can think of some good solutions.”

The key is to handle it in a way that prompts her to think about the problem and attempt to solve it herself (even if she gets some help from you). This allows her an opportunity to learn and self-correct, all the while feeling loved by her dad. (I’ll share more about correction and discipline under point #5.)

YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Ask your daughter: “Am I a good listener?” If she says that you are not, consider her answer a blessing. You can make some changes and build a stronger relationship with her.
2. Then ask: “How can you tell when I’m not really listening?”
3. Follow this up with: “How can I do better?”
4. Practice the skills of active listening.
 - Face your child squarely. This posture says, “I am available to you; I choose to be with you.”
 - Adopt an open posture. Crossed arms and legs say, “I am not interested.” An open posture shows your child that you are open to her and what she has to say.
 - Put yourself on your child’s level. If your daughter is young, kneel or squat down so you are at eye level. This communicates, “I want to know more about you.”
 - Maintain good eye contact. Have you ever talked to someone whose eyes seem to be looking at everything in the room but you? How did that make you feel? That’s not something you want your kids to experience.

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- Stay relaxed as you listen. If you fidget nervously as your daughter is talking, she will think you would rather be somewhere else.
- Watch your child. Learn to read her nonverbal behavior: posture, body movements, and gestures. Notice frowns, smiles, raised brows, and twisted lips. Listen to voice quality and pitch, emphasis, pauses, and inflections. The way in which your daughter says something can tell you more than what she is actually saying.
- Actively give your daughter nonverbal feedback. Nod. Smile. Raise your eyebrows. Look surprised. These small signals mean more than you realize. They will encourage your child to open up even more and let you into her life.
- The last step to listening is speaking. But before you give a response, say, “Let me make sure I understand...” then restate in your own words what your daughter has told you. This proves you were listening. It also gives your daughter the opportunity to say, “Yes, that is it exactly,” or “No, what I really mean is this...”

- 2 -

She Needs to Know You Think She Is Beautiful, Inside and Out.

When it comes to daughters' self-image, dads are a huge influence—and it goes deeper than appearance. Girls feel pressure to be smart, thin, pretty, and involved in certain activities. Dads have the ability to combat these pressures and make their daughters feel beautiful, inside and out.

Let's start with your daughter's body image.

Some daughters have told us that they felt unloved by their dads because of all the comments from their dads about exercise and food.

Most outside influences in our daughters' lives—from TV and the movies to magazines to their peers—glorify women who are thin, without even an ounce extra in the “wrong” places. We also live in a world that oftentimes places more emphasis on a girl's outer beauty than on her inner beauty.

Unless a child's home life combats these pressures, this environment can lead to all kinds of insecurities and disorders.

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Part of your job as a dad is to be concerned for your children's long-term health. Teaching a child to make healthy nutritional choices and exercise habits is important, and dads should join their daughters in eating well and being physically active. **But dads must never criticize their daughter's body shape or appearance.** Never. Not even if the child does need to lose weight.

Before anything else, always affirm your daughter as unique and beautiful and highly valued.

If your daughter does, in fact, need to lose weight for health reasons, focus on being healthy. Never comment on her weight or how she looks. Instead, talk about making healthy lifestyle choices.

Instead of telling your daughter to eat more vegetables so that she can lose weight, say things like, **“I want our family to eat more vegetables so we have more energy and live longer.”**

If need be, have a compassionate female doctor talk to your daughter about how her weight relates to her health, but remember that the focus should always be on health and not on appearance. Otherwise, your daughter will begin to believe that her physical qualities are as important (or more important) than her non-physical qualities.

Speaking of non-physical qualities, make sure you affirm your daughter's positive attributes.

Go ahead and compliment your daughter when she has taken care to look attractive, just as you would a son who has intentionally spent time making sure he looks handsome. But more important is your ability to compliment her other qualities, like emotional strength, sense of humor, loyalty, intelligence, and courage. Make it clear that what you love most about your daughter are her non-physical qualities, and that even without her physical features, you would still love her just as much.

If your daughter tells a funny joke, say, "I'm so lucky to have a daughter with such a great sense of humor."

If she does something kind for a sibling, say, "I sure am proud of my daughter for treating others with such respect."

If she stands up to a bully, say, "Wow. I admire you for being so courageous!"

It's almost impossible to overdo verbal affirmations. Open your heart to your child, see her, and tell her how beautiful she is on the inside.

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Remember that physical assurance is also important.

For many dads, physically affirming their daughters is a bit scary, particularly as their daughters grow and begin entering puberty.

Dad, let me assure you: more than ever, your daughter needs your affirmations in ways she can physically feel. Without physical affection, your daughter might think you don't care or that something is wrong with her, particularly if you used to be affectionate but have withdrawn affection as your daughter has grown older.

If you are cold—physically or otherwise—to your daughter, she will go looking for affection and warmth in other places, and these might not be healthy or appropriate places.

So look for appropriate ways to demonstrate affection: a kiss on her forehead, an arm around her shoulder, or a squeeze of her hand. And she may not admit it, but she still needs big bear hugs, too.

Next, get involved in her pursuits.

What causes laughter and silliness in your daughter? What brings that mischievous grin to her face, or makes her fall on the floor in convulsions of hilarity? Find out, and then capitalize on it for the benefit of your relationship.

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Show that she is worth investing your time and energy. Show her that you like seeing her happy. Spend time just hanging out together, and be intentional about bringing fun and humor to her life. If she likes to cook, help her make up crazy concoctions like grasshopper-gut oatmeal (regular old oatmeal with green food coloring). If she's an athlete, attend her sporting events. If she's a "girly girl," compliment her fashion choices.

Look for activities the two of you can enjoy together. You could spend time playing music, camping, finishing word puzzles, playing computer games, jogging, playing softball, or whatever clicks for the two of you. And remember to look for an adventure—big or small—that only a dad can do with his kids. One dad I know took a mountain-climbing trip in Colorado with his teenage daughter. Another created a race between his kids to see who could change a car tire the fastest.

I know it's tough when our daughters have different interests, and most of us don't understand the female sex that well in the first place. But almost no one fits perfectly into gender stereotypes. I guarantee that you can find some "feminine" interests and your daughter can find some "masculine" interests that the two of you can enjoy together. **I challenge you to be creative—and even make sacrifices if necessary—to find that common ground with your daughter.** Find fun activities and small or big adventures that allow you to spend time together, and good things are bound to happen.

Finally, demonstrate confidence in her abilities.

You might share something you're working on and ask her opinion. You could give her a challenging assignment and express trust that she can handle it. Teach her how to do “adult” things, like changing the oil or fixing flat tires.

If your daughter knows that you think of her as a future achiever, her whole outlook on the future can change. Literally, it shapes her destiny. It will serve her well in relationships, in her education, and in career pursuits.

YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Verbally point out the positives—at least six or seven times more often than you focus on the things she needs to improve. Point out qualities of her inner beauty more than physical beauty.
2. Block off time on your calendar to have lunch with your daughter, whether she's two or twenty.
3. On a special holiday, write your daughter a letter listing specifically what you appreciate about her. If she's too young to read it, save it until she's older.
4. Find an activity she enjoys and do it together. Does she like to dance? Perhaps you could take an evening ballroom dancing class. If she likes volleyball or tennis, make it a tradition to play a

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game weekly. Let me re-emphasize: **Get involved in something she enjoys and is interested in doing.** This might require you to stretch a bit and learn something new. Remember, the idea is for her to look forward to it.

5. Try asking your daughter three questions that TV news anchor Diane Sawyer remembers her father asking her:
 - “What do you love?”
 - “Where is the most adventurous place you could do it?”
 - “How can you use it to serve other people?”
6. Ask your daughter to teach you something she enjoys, and be committed to really learning it.



- 3 -

She Needs You to Cast a Positive Vision Without Placing Expectations.

“Vision” has to do with the attitudes a dad conveys about who his daughter is and what she can become. All dads give vision to their children, good or bad. When it comes to casting vision, there isn’t much middle ground. While some fathers give blessing and approval, others create a demanding home, condemning atmosphere, or pessimistic environment.

If we aren’t intentionally **positive** in the way we influence our children’s future, then it’s a net negative. And being negative or uncertain about your daughter’s future can be devastating.

Here are some examples of a negative vision ...

A negative vision can be downright demanding: “No kid of mine is going to come home with a report card with Cs on it.”

“The only ribbon acceptable is a first-place ribbon.”

It can also be condemning: “I know you are lying to me. You’re turning into a liar!”

Or, it can be pessimistic and discouraging: “Don’t worry about doing well in geometry; boys are better at these subjects.”

It’s likely she’ll associate math with inadequacy—and maybe all her classes will suffer.

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On the other hand, a positive vision allows children to see the good in their actions and their character.

Here are some examples of a positive vision ...

Stating the positive is easy when you truly believe your child is doing something positive. “Wow! Look at your arm. You really can throw a ball far.”

“You got five As and one B. You must be so proud. I know I am!”

But imagine that your child is crying about something trivial. She isn't misbehaving; you just think she's being overly sensitive. Even then, **your job is to cast a positive vision.** Instead of calling her a baby or chastising her, you can find something positive to say.

You might say, “You have such a sensitive heart. I bet you will end up helping a lot of people in your lifetime.”

You might look at a report card and see a few less-than-stellar grades. You know that your daughter tried hard, but academia isn't her strength.

Instead of immediately focusing on her weaker subjects, you could say, “Wow! You are doing great in creative writing. I'm not surprised. I bet you could entertain the world with your short stories. I know I always love it when you tell me stories!”

(Of course, if your daughter is really struggling, you might

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have to talk to her about her study habits, but your first response should be a positive one. And subsequent conversations should come from concern and encouragement.)

In many little ways, our daughters are asking us, “**What am I good at, Dad? What do you see in me?**” We need to be ready with words of hope and promise.

When we encourage our children to think big, we’re giving them self-confidence for the future and jump-starting their journey toward their true potential.

Casting a positive vision includes helping to prepare your daughter for her future romantic relationships.

As much as we would like to choose whom our daughters will date and eventually marry, we are not making these decisions. So, from a young age, we need to focus on preparing our daughters to make wise choices. We do this in two ways.

First, teach your children about becoming the right person a lot more than finding the right person. Your daughter doesn’t need to be out looking for Mr. Right all day long. Instead, keep her focused on becoming a young woman of character.

Then, when that young man shows up, your daughter will be ready and able to spot those qualities that would make him a good partner.

The second way you can prepare your daughter is through your example.

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You are the main man when it comes to setting her expectations for how other young men treat her. When she begins dating and thinking about what she wants in a husband, do you want her to settle for a relationship that is merely okay? One that may not be a source of real contentment or joy, but as long as she can tolerate the guy and he is not abusive, then she will live with that?

Of course not! You want her to marry someone who treats her like royalty! Someone who works to have healthy communication, really listens and cares, gives her genuine compliments, and considers every moment with her to be precious. If that's what you want her to expect—and not settle for less—then that's exactly what you have to model for her every day.

Do this by showing your wife that you are still head-over-heels in love with her. At the same time, treat your daughters (and your sons, for that matter) like royalty.

And if you are not married to your children's mother, you must still treat your ex with respect.

By modeling kindness, respect, and love, you teach your daughters to develop healthy expectations about all relationships. If Mom and Dad treat each other well, and they are respectful toward all people in their life, your children will be more likely to develop benevolence toward relationships, and they will walk away from any relationship that is unhealthy.

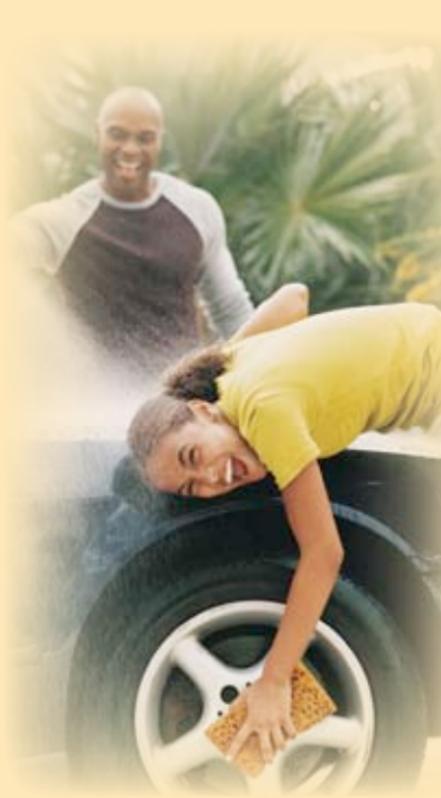
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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Don't ignore your daughter's vocational future. Help her discover and develop her gifts and talents, and—without pressure or expectations—talk about some occupations or life pursuits those might turn into someday.
2. Each and every day, make a point to sit with her in her room and give her the chance to talk for at least five minutes straight, without any interruptions, as she shares about her day. Just listen. Then be ready to share if she asks about your day.
3. Simply ask your daughter, “What are your dreams?” whether she is seven, seventeen, or twenty-seven. Then be ready to listen attentively, nod, and encourage her. Even if her goals seem somewhat outlandish, convey optimism. Your instinct may be to downplay her dreams with a dose of reality. But don't! Let her dream. Tell her that anything is possible, and there are great things in store for her.
4. Every day, convey your unconditional love for her. Make sure she knows she doesn't have to achieve to win your approval. You love her no matter what.

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5. Encourage your child to be physically active. Research shows that girls who participate in sports and physical activities are less likely to be obese, have heart disease, take drugs, be sexually active, drop out of school, and struggle with depression.
6. You are the standard she will use when it comes to choosing a husband. So take an honest look at your own marriage. Are you controlling, demanding, or moody? Or are you considerate of your wife? Do you do your part around the house? Do you show evidence of a loving and affectionate marriage? With your wife—and children—do you communicate openly and make yourself available when they need to talk?
7. Make the Championship Fathering Commitment at www.fathers.com/cf.



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She Needs You to Protect Her, and Not Just Physically.

We typically think of protection as defending our daughters' physical safety, but there are also emotional, moral, and spiritual dangers out there. If we're fulfilling our role, our girls will have a sense of security even when we can't personally be there to protect them.

First, be aware and guard against the many forces that could threaten her.



There are people who could try to lure your daughter into a destructive lifestyle, or who encourage her to adopt a world-view that doesn't match with your values ... not to mention that she could be exposed to violence and sex on TV, the Internet, in music, and in movies. You have to be aware and ready to take appropriate action.

One dad I know was shocked to hear that his daughter's ninth-grade biology teacher had played an R-rated movie in class. Supposedly, the movie was educational. The girl was offended, and she asked her dad to

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watch the film himself. He, too, found it offensive and contrary to his beliefs, so he immediately wrote a two-page memo to the assistant principal, and he called his daughter's teacher, trying to show them why it's unwise to show such films to ninth graders, who are certainly under the given age for R-rated movies. He tried hard not to come across as a senseless, angry parent, but he did see the need to be a little bit of a "father bear" and take action to defend his cub.

Second, prepare her to handle dangerous situations.

We can't always be there, but teaching our daughters skills is another way of protecting them. We can talk through scenarios and help them think through appropriate responses—whether it's calling 9-1-1 or responding to strangers who might approach them.

Have conversations like, "What happens when you lie to a friend?"

Or, "What do you suppose a teenage boy is thinking about when your friend wears an outfit like that?"

We should prepare them to handle an uncomfortable dating situation, or an adult who does something inappropriate. We need to teach them how to say "no."

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YOUR HOMEWORK:

- Does your daughter trust you to protect her? If not, you can **build that kind of relationship during everyday interactions**. Hold her hand as she crosses the street. Make sure she wears a seat belt. Give her a curfew. Warn her about drugs and alcohol. Each time you say or do something to keep her safe, you're building trust. She's learning that you care and she can count on you.
- During times of worry or crisis, be there to hold your daughter tight and whisper in her ear, "I'm here. It's gonna be okay." Then be willing to stay there as long as it takes and help her through the challenge.



- 5 -

She Needs You to Walk the Fine Line.

One morning some years ago, I was driving my three oldest children to meet the school bus. They were in grade school.

They were in the back seat, and on this particular day my daughters were talking about who wore what to school, and they were wishing they could wear the designer labels that some other kids wore.

During this time, there had been stories on the news about people who killed each other for a certain brand of shoe or jacket. My kids were growing up in this crazy environment, and I really believed that they had lost their minds. Some kids didn't even own more than one pair of clothes, and my kids wanted designer labels?

In that moment, I started worrying about everything they could get involved in: drugs, alcohol, sex, and a greater focus on material things.

Those thoughts were churning in my head, and in a moment of what I would like to believe was righteous anger, I stopped the car, turned it around, and said, "We're not going to school today; we're going back home."

We had to talk about some things. They were a little bit shocked, so I think they listened to me pretty well. Then I took them to school later on.

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That's one time when I became aware of how the culture can sneak up on us. We don't notice it so much, but then we have a wake-up experience—like I did that day—where we see or hear something and we ask, “How did this happen?”

Did I make the right choice that day? I think I did. And I want to encourage you, Dad, to stay watchful and confront tough issues as they arise.

Turn the car around. Have a heart-to-heart talk. Go for a one-on-one campout. Take a missions trip with your son or daughter. I know one dad and teenage daughter who volunteered to work at a soup kitchen once or twice a week for a whole summer. The dad wanted to expose her to a side of life she hadn't seen and help tame her materialism.

Dads, if our kids are given the opportunity, sometimes they will lose their minds. Part of our coaching role is to bring them back to earth. Your daughter needs you to guide her. But she also needs you to walk a fine line. Your guidance should be more than simply setting a fine example, but it should not be an endless stream of lectures.

Guiding means **discerning** what's right in the midst of all the gray areas in our culture.

Young women are under a lot of pressure to look, act, and be a certain way—to maintain a certain image. They also face expectations with regard to their future aspirations. Often,

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dads can bring an analytical approach to help clarify the picture and guide them along.

Our daughters need the benefit of our experience and wisdom as they consider options and think through possible consequences of their choices. Discernment involves making wise decisions about life's choices. It's about sifting through opinion, facts, and knowledge, and then judging and examining that information so you can form a coherent conclusion. As dads, it's our job to model discernment and then equip our daughters to be discerning as they face tough choices and peer pressure.

Let's say, for instance, that your daughter's best childhood friend is the school "nerd," Leslie. Other kids are starting to tease your daughter for being friends with Leslie. Your daughter tells you that she's not sure she should invite Leslie to her birthday party.

You might be tempted to lecture her about any number of things, including:

- Making decisions for herself,
- Being a leader versus being a follower, and
- Being kind to her friends.

Instead, help her discern right from wrong by asking questions like:

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- “Do **you** like Leslie?”
- “How do you think it would make Leslie feel if you didn’t invite her?”
- “Do you think the other kids are being considerate?”
- “What would happen if you started letting the others kids make decisions on your behalf?”
- “What if the roles were reversed and you were labeled a ‘nerd’? Would you want Leslie to invite you to her party?”

Often, you can guide her through the follow-up questions you ask. You’re still helping to shape her thinking, but it doesn’t come across as a lecture, and she may feel a sense of accomplishment at coming to a sound conclusion at least partially on her own.

We can also guide through **correction**.

Ultimately, correcting behavior is the goal of discipline. You want your daughter to shift her behavior to something different. **Enforcing limits and consequences is important, but we must also communicate why a daughter’s behavior is being corrected.** If you do not draw a line between action and consequence, your child will not have an opportunity to self-correct.

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When you think about discipline issues and how you respond, don't settle on snap judgments and quick answers. Come up with consequences and experiences that will help shape your child's character and change her heart. Those moments of foolishness and disobedience are really opportunities for your child to learn and grow. Make the most of them.

For instance, if your child loses her cell phone—a cell phone that you paid for—tell her that she must either repay you or purchase a replacement cell phone using her own money. If your toddler draws on the walls, have her clean the walls, tell Mom what she did, and then apologize.

And remember that you do not have the right to belittle your daughter in the process. You must show her respect, even in her worst moments, and no matter how she might treat you. How we carry out correction makes all the difference.

Think about this: If one of your friends were in a bad mood, you wouldn't start yelling at him to shape up. You'd never say something like, "I can't believe I have to put up with this from you, you miserable brat!"

Surely our daughters deserve at least that much consideration.

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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Monitor your daughter's media habits: watch what she watches on TV or online; check out movies before she watches them; learn about music artists before she downloads songs or albums.
2. Encourage your daughter to be in relationships with older girls and women who are a positive influence on her.
3. Next time your daughter has a problem or asks for your opinion about something, respond only in questions to help her think through the situation (but of course, your questions are helping to guide her to a positive solution.)
4. Sit down with your child's mom at a time when things are calm, and come up with a plan for situations where your daughter needs correction. That way, you won't be making things up as you go next time something happens.

Dad, you are a tremendous and vital resource to meeting these five needs in the life of your daughter. These needs are not limited by age, but manifest themselves in heart of a little girl and continue on throughout her adult life—even in her own marriage relationship.

5 Five Things Every **Son** MUST GET from DAD

SINCE YOU USED to be a boy, you might have a more natural companionship with your sons than your daughters; you are probably more alike, and you might enjoy more of the same activities.

Oddly enough, even though it might be easier to build rapport with your son, you might have a distant relationship. Building a close connection with sons requires intention, as does giving them a healthy model of what it means to be a boy, man, and father.

Here are five key things that your son needs from you ...



- 1 -

He Needs a Living Example.

Your son needs reference points, and you serve as your son's example of a man. Living a responsible lifestyle can impact your children and children's children for generations. That's the kind of power your example can have.

A dad's example really encompasses all aspects of life. But let me mention a few areas where you need to be intentional about modeling:

First, set the example for expressing emotions responsibly.

While there's been a lot of progress in the last few decades, many men don't think of emotional vulnerability as a masculine trait. A lot of dads hide their emotions, as if having an emotion makes a person weak. But sons need to see their fathers' feelings; it's a vital part of who they are.

So instead of shutting down when you feel nervous or ashamed, look for ways to open up. Stay engaged with your family members and learn healthy ways of



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expressing emotions. It may take time, but it's something you must learn. At first, you can start by writing notes or letters to family members, and then go from there.

Or, start by talking to another dad. Find some other men who are good models of this—whether in your extended family, your neighborhood, or your local church. Talk about what happens during times of real pressure and challenge as it relates to the emotional side of your life, and then develop skills you can use at home.



Second, learn to regulate anger—and other negative emotions.

Research shows that most men are comfortable showing just one emotion. Guess what it is?

Anger.

Imagine if this is the only emotion your sweet son can show. Consider what this means for his future relationships!

My friend, Jason, tells of the splintered mark in his teenage son's bedroom door, just above the handle. Jason doesn't have a short temper, but one night he and his son were engaged in a

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verbal sparring match. The son decided it was over, and Jason was determined that it wasn't. The boy slammed the door, and Jason slammed his fist into the veneer of the door. He was embarrassed—and everyone was shocked. To his credit, he quickly apologized.

Maybe you can remember the overwhelming frustration of having a baby who kept crying and crying despite every sensible thing you tried. Or maybe you're going through that right now.

Harvard researcher Samuel Osherson wrote, "Anger is often a father's way of responding to the powerlessness of parenting."

Isn't that true? In many areas of our lives, we have a sense of control; or at least we know what to expect most of the time. But with our kids, some situations are simply beyond us. We're powerless, and sometimes clueless.

Here is something that might sound familiar: At home after a terrible day at work, you ask your son to pick up his toys before dinner. He doesn't listen. You're too tired for this. Can't he just obey you this once? You ask again. No response. You raise your voice, and now he hears you, but whines because he doesn't want to comply.

Your immediate response is anger. So how do you regulate it? Here are some suggestions from various experts.

1. First, get away. Say you have to use the restroom, or go for a walk. Once you're alone, do

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something to change your mood to positive. Pray for patience and wisdom. Think about the joy that your son has brought you, recall his sense of humor, or his gentleness, or some other gift. Keep focusing on the positives until you know the chance for an outburst has subsided.

2. Second, use self-talk. Repeat words and phrases to help calm yourself down. For example, you might say or think to yourself: *Hold on, big guy. You are losing it. Don't do something foolish here.* Or repeat a simple phrase (“firm but pleasant” is one of my favorites) or repeat a quick prayer asking for help.
3. When you are finally ready to confront the child again, choose statements that express empathy and sadness. This puts the responsibility back on your son’s shoulders. You could say, “Hmmm, it’s too bad that you didn’t clean up your toys like I asked. You must feel bad about that. Now you are going to miss out on something fun. What do you think that should be?” Your son might offer a reasonable punishment, but of course you should be ready to suggest an appropriate consequence if needed, such as missing dessert, losing TV-time, or being “grounded” from playing with his favorite toy.

That way you’re not pointing at the child, you’re partnering with him.

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If your anger habits are deeply ingrained and you can't make any progress in this area—or if your anger is getting destructive toward yourself or others—it may be time to get professional help. A compassionate, trained professional can offer insights, encouragement and motivation to help you.

Along with modeling for your son's emotional life, your son also needs you to set the example for what it means to respect women.

One day, Mike was outside in the yard, talking with a neighbor boy. The boy, who was about ten, told Mike that he had a new “girlfriend.”

Mike's first response was, “Is she pretty?”

At the time, Mike's question seemed harmless enough, but the more he thought about it, the more he realized that in that



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brief moment he had just classified “looks” as more important than about a dozen character traits that are actually of much greater importance.

Boys get most of their ideas about women and how to relate to women from their dads and the key father figures in their lives. So with that in mind, ask yourself: What are my words and actions teaching my son?

Do you want your sons to see women as objects? To value women only for their appearance? You may think those habits develop during adolescence, but—like so many character traits—they are really learned much earlier.

Dad, use your powerful influence to model respect for women—to your sons, the boys in your neighborhood, and even other men. Demonstrate that women are to be valued for their fascinating character, their intelligence and integrity, and the feminine personality traits that complement and complete our masculine approach to things.

Being a healthy role model is particularly true for fathers who have experienced a family break-up.

For divorced dads, being a good model means dealing positively with feelings toward an ex-wife. If you are divorced, remember that your kids love both you and your ex. They don't want to hear their mother blasted. No matter what she is saying or doing, you need to respect her as the mother of your children.

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What does it say to your son if you blast his mother? What does it say about the sanctity of sex and love if you repeatedly tell your son that you hate his mother? Keep this in mind, particularly if your son's mother is mistreating you.

Taking the high road will always serve you well. Your children will respect you, and they will develop a healthier attitude toward romantic relationships.

Even if you feel like things aren't fair and your ex is being vindictive and unreasonable, your best course of action is clear. You need to maintain your poise, keep your dignity, and do the right thing. Many guys would go to the other extreme and do something hurtful toward their ex. But you can't do that.

Being positive even in the face of conflict shows children how to handle adversity. As hard as it is, this trains a boy to function in a tough situation and show respect for people at all times.

One final note: If your ex-wife is open to it, I suggest you seek counseling, not necessarily to repair your relationship, but to learn how to be strong co-parents.

Of course, if you are married, be a good model.

Dad, your marriage is an important foundation for your son. He needs to see what a healthy, loving marriage looks like. So make yours strong! Show respect to your bride and encourage your kids to honor her as well.

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It's hard to connect with your wife when the most pressing needs seem to be the kids. But, men, I can't affirm enough the importance of your marriage. It's vital that you nurture that relationship. You do need regular communication time with your bride to catch up on your day, talk through issues, discuss the kids, and just enjoy each other—even if it means telling your children to let you be alone for 15 minutes sometime in the evening.

It's good for children to see that their parents value and defend their time together. Children draw great security and confidence from seeing you value your marriage, which is the foundation of the whole family.



And don't forget to leave the kids with grandparents or a babysitter for a regular date night or a weekend away. The kids may protest, but they'll get used to it, and in the long run, they will take comfort in seeing your commitment to each other and to the family. It's worth your investment of time and money.

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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Model courageous humility for your son. Whenever you do something that hurts him or makes him feel left out—or if there's some lingering hurt in the past—go to him humbly, ask for forgiveness, and commit to do better in the future.
2. Increase the amount of verbal affirmation you give to your son. Consciously strive to notice and praise what he does well. Become comfortable saying things like, “I love you, Son, just the way you are. And nothing you ever do will change that.”
3. Make your [Championship Fathering Commitment](#), and tell your son that you plan to be a great dad. Tell him to “call you out” any time you drop the ball.
4. Once a day, call your wife from work just to check in. That will help create an expectancy and atmosphere for communication when you get home, and you'll have some idea of what's going on at home before you walk in the door.
5. Ask your children's mother what you can do to help relieve some of the stress she's feeling, then make it your goal to help her address that

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issue. And take a leading role in getting your son involved in that task or chore as well.

6. Train your son to look for ways to serve his mother and other women: holding doors, offering his jacket, giving up his seat, holding or offering an umbrella, etc. Reward him for finding new ways to express good, old-fashioned chivalry. Ask him to point out when you drop the ball in this area.
7. Make it a point to show appreciation for your wife **in front of your son**. Tell her how she makes you a better man and father. Be specific. Think of five things you've learned from her over the years and thank her for her partnership, caring and insight.
8. Make the Championship Fathering Commitment at www.fathers.com/cf.

- 2 -

He Needs a Four-Part Plan.

Dad, do you have a plan to help your son become a real man?

You've heard the maxim: if you fail to plan, you may as well plan to fail. Your son needs a dad who is thinking about his future and taking action to prepare them for that future—whether we're talking about tomorrow, next week, next year, or ten years from now.

This consists of:

1. Vocational planning
2. Relationship planning
3. Rites of passage
4. Skills, attitudes, and values planning

You can help your son plan for his vocational future by:

- Helping him explore a wide variety of interests and hobbies. Is he gifted at music? Has he been to space camp? Is he a superstar athlete? He won't know unless he tries.
- Even with a young son, you can start planting ideas in his mind about the kinds of careers that might go with his interests and talents. Don't focus on just one career path, and do all you can

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to avoid pressuring him. Simply seek to help him learn and explore. It's good for him to learn early on that his skills and interests can translate into a profession or a life calling.

- Helping your son brainstorm about career possibilities, and then exposing him to jobs that might interest him. You can do this well before high school. If he wants to be surgeon, see if you can take a tour of a hospital and ask a surgeon questions about his line of work.
- Showing him the variety of jobs within an industry. If he likes music, point out that there's much more to it than performing. He could be a sound technician, or a producer. He could work in radio, or he could be a composer. Some children do grow up to be sports stars, but he could also be a coach, sports journalist, or play-by-play announcer. Some children do become movie stars, but the movie industry also needs lighting technicians, screenwriters, set designers, make-up artists, and so on.
- Trying not to talk negatively about your own work. Those comments under your breath make a big impression, and shape your son's ideas about work. You should want your son to love his job, even if you don't love your job. Think of something positive to say about your job so

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that your son believes that work can be fun. You could even take your kid to work with you so that he can witness first-hand your commitment to integrity as an employee.

- Helping your child see the opportunities in front of him. Your son probably isn't thinking about ways he can start building his career while in junior high or high school, but he can. If he likes to skate, for example, he could be a skating teacher's assistant or get a part time job at the rink.
- Encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit. Those baby-sitting and lawn-mowing jobs teach your kids that both time and effort have their rewards. Even young children can begin to learn this by helping at your summer garage sale. Sure, not every lemonade stand will be a huge success, but those setbacks can be even more valuable learning opportunities. Why didn't it work? What could he do differently next time?
- Keeping dreams alive. Your son might not have what it takes to be the next Michael Phelps, but encourage his dreams nonetheless. Plenty of other people will tell him the cold-hard facts, but he has at least two people who believe in him unconditionally: you and his mom. Instead, instill an optimistic spirit about the future that

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is grounded in realism. Talk to your son about what it takes to become an Olympic swimmer, look at the stats together, and set goals for your son to meet. In that kind of atmosphere, even seemingly impossible dreams can become a reality for your son.

- Being in touch with your son's studies. The activities and curricula in schools are diverse enough that you'll be able to identify strengths and interests. What's on his mind after school? What are his favorite classes, and why? And be sure, talk to teachers, coaches and counselors. Take advantage of assessment tools—the aptitude, personality, and career tests—and discuss the positive results with your child. Ask, “Did you know that you possess this skill? What do you think about it?”

Then there's his relational future.

Dad, don't leave your son to learn these things from his friends or some men's magazine he picks up. Give him accurate information. Help him really understand the importance of integrity, purity, and respect for women, and that you're available to talk anytime. You can help him plan for a healthy relationship by:

- Talking about what to look for in a mate, discussing what it takes to make a marriage

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work, and having regular discussions about how he relates to the opposite sex.

- Encouraging him to develop positive relationships with everyone—coaches, friends, siblings, bosses, and teachers. If he treats his friends poorly, he'll likely treat a spouse poorly, so be sure to look for signs that your son is not a good friend. If he isn't, use this as an opportunity to correct behavior.
- Pointing him toward friendships that inspire him to be his best. Peers play a powerful role in his life, and you can influence his decisions about friends through the quality of your own relationship with him and by getting to know his friends and what they stand for.
- Talking about what love is. It often involves strong emotions, but it's more about a steadfast commitment and a decision to serve and seek



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her best interests—even when the emotions take a temporary backseat. Early on, your son needs to learn about the importance of protecting a young woman's integrity and well-being.

- Giving him a long-range perspective. Most likely, a teenage relationship will not turn into a marriage. So, why get serious with anyone? It's much better to work at a strong friendship. If it does become serious, that friendship will be the best preparation anyway.
- Talking specifically about boundaries. What's appropriate with physical affection? What about risky behaviors involving drugs or alcohol that could arise? The stereotype is for the boy to convince the girl to do something she shouldn't, but it does happen the other way around sometimes.
- Sharing some of your own experiences. Tailor the discussion based on your child's maturity level, but share lessons you learned and the stories behind them. Being open will also help you build a stronger relationship.

Third, give some thought to rites of passage—benchmarks along the way that help signal new levels of maturity and responsibility, and that affirm him as a beloved son.

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Imagine this scenario: You're out in the country with your fourteen-year-old son, coming back from someone's house. You pull the car over to the side of the deserted dirt road and turn off the ignition.

"Dad, what's going on?" your son asks.

You take the car keys and dangle them in front of his face.

"Son," you say, "why don't we trade places?"

Your son gets a look on his face that is elation combined with fear. He gets behind the wheel, and you don't even have to remind him to buckle his seat belt. He starts the car and revs it a few times. His left hand tries to find just the right place on the wheel; his right hand grips the stick shift. He flashes you a smile, slips the car into gear, and both of your hearts race as you spin down the road. You have communicated that you trust him with your car—and actually with your very life!

It is a father's unique privilege to bring his son through various rites of passage. Maybe you'll get him up early on Saturday to go out to breakfast with you and your adult friends. Maybe it will be the first time you let him stay home without a baby-sitter while you and your wife go out of town for a few days. Or the first time you trust him with your credit card or your electric razor. Or when you take him down to open his first checking account.

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These are big moments for all boys and, as fathers, we need to be there to share them.

I suppose a driver's education instructor could teach him to drive just as well ... another dad in the neighborhood could help him check the oil in the car or change his first tire. But there's something different, something special about a boy learning these things from his father. You are your son's measuring stick for manhood. And there are many ways you can tell him, "I'm proud of the way you're growing into a young man."



These rite of passage moments should happen continually along the journey. Significant events should be celebrated with new privileges and responsibilities. Create opportunities to talk with him about what it means to be a man. What are the marks of true manhood? Help him recognize people in the world who are getting it right ... or missing the mark.

You could:

- Take a trip together to have fun **and** talk about what it means to be a man.

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- When your son reaches a milestone, give him a gift—a plaque, a book, or maybe something that your father gave you. Talk to him about the significance of that gift and your hopes for his growing maturity.
- Work together at a local soup kitchen or help clean an inner-city neighborhood. Demonstrate that manhood includes serving others.

On a camping trip, talk about appropriate guidelines for dating and responsible sexuality. Be open about your life, and invite him to ask questions.

Also, I'd suggest listing some skills, attitudes, and values to instill in your son by the time he leaves home.

Look specifically at what you want to develop in your son. Do a little brainstorming to create a list.

- In the category of **skills**, consider adding the following: Balancing a checkbook, accepting criticism and correction, prayer, personal health and cleanliness, home management, financial management, basic automobile upkeep, essential skills for cooking, the ability to say “no.”
- When considering his **attitude**, add the following to your list (assuming they are important to you): A sense of humor, perseverance and diligence, self-respect,

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servanthood, humility, thankfulness, an appreciation for simplicity, a can-do spirit, optimism.

- With respect to his **values**, think about: Honesty, respect for privacy, modesty, the value of hard work, appreciation for the arts, a love of learning, courage, personal integrity, family togetherness.

Review your list from time to time to help assess how your son is progressing in each area. Brainstorm with your wife about some ways you can teach him a particular skill or value. You'll want to avoid placing unrealistic expectations, but encourage his growth and development at the same time.



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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Take your son to tour a workplace of a career he might like to pursue someday.
2. Tell your son five good things about your work.
3. Help your son with a lemonade stand, garage sale, or mowing enterprise.
4. Tell your son about when you met his mom and some highlights (and lowlights) from your dates together.
5. Write him a letter blessing him and offering your thoughts about this stage in his life, including your own memories about what you were doing when you were that age.
6. Create a list of skills, attitudes, and values you hope your son develops.
7. Tell your son about a skill your father taught you. Then ask, “What would you like to learn from me?”
8. Choose a value or principle that’s important to you and brainstorm for a specific way you can help your son appreciate or grow in that area.

- 3 -

He needs moral and spiritual benchmarks.

Spiritual benchmarks are events, experiences, or habits that help to activate your son's faith and teach him what it means to live a life that looks out beyond himself. We can focus on three areas that are important to a son's moral development:

Respect for authority: Does your son respond to authority in a proper way? Does he respect those who are over him? Submitting to authority will help teach your son humility.

At the National Center for Fathering, we recently received an e-mail from a dad saying, "I am concerned for my 12-year-old son's attitude toward his mother. Somehow he and I have improved our relationship since he entered this age, but my wife is feeling that her relationship with him is deteriorating.



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He barely speaks to her, and any conversation she tries to have with him ends up in an argument. Is this normal?”

Maybe this boy is reflecting some attitudes of his friends. Or, he might be trying to separate himself from being a “momma’s boy” and forge ahead into what he thinks is a more clear-cut masculinity. Or, he may be adopting some of the disrespect that he has watched his father model toward his mother.

Dads need to confront their children about improper behaviors and hold them accountable, clearly stating, “This is unacceptable.”

You are your son’s main instructor about what a man is and how he should act. If your son is being disrespectful toward an authority figure, sit down with him, tell him what you’ve observed, and explain why that behavior is wrong. If he continues to act rudely, keep establishing consequences until his behavior changes.

Spiritual vitality: By example, sons will gain an appreciation for prayer, worship, and other acts of devotion. Many fathers are absent from equipping their sons in this area. And if boys grow up without a masculine model of spiritual vitality, they may view faith as a feminine pursuit. But a real man shows compassion and strength, humility and decisiveness.

So while you strive to model submission, humility and love, you also need to show your sons that walking by faith also requires toughness, resourcefulness, and courage.

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In today's world, many dads work long hours, kids' schedules are jam packed, and there is just no regular time for extended or regular family devotions. But dads can't use that as an excuse. If it's important to you, make sure it gets on the calendar, and follow through. I would also recommend one-on-one times with each of your kids, where you read and discuss Scriptures and check in about how they're doing and what challenges they're facing.

In addition, get creative and invest real time by grabbing bits and pieces of life here and there.

- When driving your son to and from school or games, talk about things happening in your life and his, and ask him how he has seen God at work around him, or about friends who might have specific needs.
- During meals, try bringing up a question for everyone to discuss—some challenge they are likely to face. How did you handle that issue, and how did it impact your faith?
- Take children along for routine errands, and show them how you operate in the real world.

Real-life experiences of service: Give your son many experiences serving others, from the family whose car has broken down on the side of the road ... to the inner-city project or homeless shelter in your community ... to the missions trip

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to Brazil. Maybe these could even be combined with rites-of-passage activities with your son.

As a dad, you must intentionally look for opportunities that will help your son grow and stretch. Maybe he can serve as a camp counselor or volunteer at a local shelter or other charity. Take your son to help out at a senior care center; tutor a disadvantaged child; work in a soup kitchen; sponsor a child overseas. Some of the most profound life changes for teens come during mission trips to third-world cultures, or charity projects in your neighborhood or city.



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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Challenge your son to never let another student sit alone in the school cafeteria. He should take the initiative to go over and sit by that student.
2. Get your family involved in service-oriented activities on an ongoing basis: sponsoring a needy child, supporting a missions organization, or helping a family you know who may be in need.
3. Encourage and assist youth workers, coaches, and other mentors who are investing in your son's life. Show appreciation for what they do. Even though you are the one with primary responsibility to train your son, they are wonderful assets who can sometimes get through to your son at times when you can't.

- 4 -

He needs a “respect-and-purity” monitor.

Part of our work through the years has included helping with development training for some players in the NFL. I'll never forget the day I was talking with one player and trying to help him through a tough time that was made worse because of his drinking habit.

I asked him, “Where did you first take a drink?”

And he told me, “I drank a beer with my dad when I was a kid.”

I can remember another time when a young man had been drinking, then got in a car with his buddies and had an accident. All the other guys in the car either died or had serious injuries, but this young man came out fine, though he served a short time in jail. He came to me afterward to talk about it.

Again, I asked him, “Shoot me straight. When's the first time you ever took a drink?”

He said, “With my dad.”

Most dads would never intentionally initiate their son into a potentially destructive habit like this or hand their child a bottle of something dangerous. But that's exactly what can happen if we aren't intentionally teaching them respect and helping them remain “pure.”

This is why I say you must be a “respect-and-purity” monitor.

Many young men have lost their sense of **respect**, and it especially shows in their speech. They trash talk, curse, and make crude jokes. They denigrate women or use foul language in front of children. Somewhere along the way, someone failed to correct their behavior.

Monitor the way your sons are talking, and teach them to use their speech for positive ends—like articulating thoughts and feelings, building relationships, giving encouragement, and speaking words of life and peace.

Teach him how to respect other adults—looking them in the eye, shaking hands firmly, speaking clearly, and even using “Sir” and “Ma’am.”

If your son is disrespectful toward a woman, particularly his mother, hold him accountable by saying, “That is unacceptable. Your mother is my wife. You cannot talk to her like that.” You are your son’s main instructor about what a man is and how he should act. Sit down with your son, tell him what you’ve observed, and explain why that behavior is wrong. If he continues to act rudely, keep imposing consequences until his behavior changes.

Be sure, too, to do everything you can to help your son protect his innocence and purity.

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The ultimate goal is to raise a boy who has self-discipline—an internal strength that helps him avoid life’s pitfalls and make wise choices, based on solid values. This includes:

- Abstaining from sex. Talk to your son about how putting the brakes on his sex drive now leads to greater rewards later. To prove the point, look for other examples of the benefits of delayed gratification. Tell him: “Taking extra groundballs instead of watching TV might earn you a starting spot on the varsity team. Finishing homework Friday night would allow you to really enjoy your weekend. And spending less on fast food or music downloads today and you can buy that bass guitar tomorrow.”
- Having integrity with his school work, which will lead to be a valuable employee.
- Playing by the rules in games.
- Handling money with honesty.
- Saying “no” to drugs and alcohol.

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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Is there anything in your life that would make you ashamed if your children or your bride found out? Maybe it's time to eliminate that from your life and put positive accountability into place.
2. Talk to your son early and often about sex. You know your own children best, but remember this: *first messages are usually the most powerful.* It's better for you to present an accurate message from a perspective that includes your faith and values than for them to learn from someone on the playground or even from their teachers at school. That way you won't have to change or argue against what they've already heard.
3. Ask you son's mom about ways he is showing disrespect. Then talk with your son. Set clear, specific expectations for respectful behavior in his behavior, speech, body language, and tone of voice.
4. With an older son, tell him about your first exposure to drugs, alcohol, pornography, or the first time you committed a crime (whether or not you were caught). Ask about how prevalent those things are at his school, and tell him you'll keep checking in with him.

- 5 -

He needs you to show him how to love.

We need to cultivate love—or responsible action toward others—in our sons.

Too many dads fail to affirm their sons, because it's just too uncomfortable. They rarely show them physical affection or speak words of blessing. Maybe it's time to start some new habits.

You're the best resource your son has if he is going to learn to be vulnerable and trust the people he's close to. You can teach him that love is a positive, manly attribute.

Good communication is vital. Make communication a high priority so that you can teach your son by example and through practice. In a nutshell, listen first before making your opinions known, and do away with lectures in favor of two-way discussions.

Be open to receiving feedback, even if it's negative. And importantly, take the initiative in rebuilding relationships when fractures occur. Have the courage to admit when you're wrong and seek forgiveness. See, those are all demonstrations of love.

By being a good communicator, you serve as a model for your son in hopes that he will communicate with you. But let's be honest: getting your son (especially if he's a teenager) to talk

5 Things Every Kid MUST GET from DAD

with you can be one of the greatest challenges of your fathering career, but it is doable.

The public service announcements on television make it sound like the best approach is to just start a conversation about drugs or alcohol at the breakfast table. But most teenagers would just roll their eyes, and probably tune you out.

How do you bridge the gap?

1. The first suggestion is a paradox.
 - To get your son to talk, don't try to get him to talk.
 - Sure, face-to-face chats are great if you can pull 'em off. But usually, the best approach is to talk sideways.
 - A teenage boy will talk to you much more easily while you're working on a project together or doing something fun. So enlist his help as you work on the car, shoot some hoops, hang drywall, run errands together, or join him in something he wants to do. Suddenly, he'll bring up something that's been on his mind or willingly respond to a question you throw out.
2. Second, watch for cues that he's ready to talk. For example, maybe he talks more at a certain

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time of the day, or when he's in a particular mood. The cues may be subtle, but you can learn to spot them.

3. Third, be available. He may have a pressing question at eleven o'clock at night—or at three o'clock in the morning. His concerns may sound hair-brained or trivial or way off the mark. That's okay, dad. Be flexible. Let him know that he can come to you anytime, about anything. Those times may be rare, so be ready. And put aside the cellphone or laptop, or turn off the TV when it happens.

And a word for dads who don't yet have a teenager: Build a close relationship with your son now. If it's easy for him to talk to you during these younger years, there won't be a gap to bridge, and that will do a lot to ease the strain once you have a teenager.

Another other key factor is closely related, but worth mentioning separately: showing affection. Boys with affectionate fathers develop



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positive self-esteem, they tend to thrive in schoolwork, and have fewer gender identity issues.

When Juan was very young, his father abandoned him, his mother and little sister for another woman. His father did maintain regular contact, but their time together was filled with harsh ridicule for very superficial reasons. This confused Juan. He wondered if he was normal, and he felt as though he never quite had his father's approval.

Here's what Juan said: "More than anything, I wanted my dad to show his emotions in a positive way, to hold me and tell me everything would be okay. Since I didn't receive that, I've got a lot of work to do before I get married and have a family someday."

Juan's story demonstrates—among other things—the profound need sons have for physical affection and attention from their dads. Their self-esteem blossoms when we nurture them in appropriate ways.

With sons, affection can be less direct—more shoulder-to-shoulder. Boys gain self-esteem from sustained contact, such as wrestling, playing or being picked up by their dad, sitting on his lap, or being held for safety.

That can include any physical contact, like wrestling or roughhousing, pats on the back, piggy back rides, tickle fights, and so on. This doesn't mean dads should neglect a more direct approach—big bear hugs and other displays of affection are

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still important on into adulthood. But with boys, think “shoulder-to-shoulder.”

Verbal affection is important as well. Positive words give sons confidence and belonging, and again provide a model of a man who can express love in healthy ways. We need to tell our sons how much they mean to us, point out their positive character traits, and say, “I love you, and I’m proud to be your dad.”

A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting together. The man, on the right, is wearing a blue shirt and jeans, and is smiling broadly while looking at the boy. The boy, on the left, is wearing a white t-shirt and is also smiling. They appear to be in a casual setting, possibly a living room or a sports area, with a dark background. The lighting is warm and focused on the two subjects.

When I played ball in high school, I used to run back punts and kick-offs. And I can vividly remember a few times when our team was behind or it was a close game, and our coach instilled great confidence in me through his words.

As I waited there for the kick-off, I would hear him say, “We need one, Carey. Run it back for us.”

He showed that he was depending on me, and his words helped me focus and dig a little deeper, reaching for excellence.

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There's great power in words, especially for fathers. Proverbs 12:18 says: "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Dad, your words have that kind of power with your children. You can bet they'll remember many of your statements for years to come. Their whole outlook on life could be determined by what you say—for better or for worse.

You can be challenging and inspiring like my coach was. Or you can be reckless with your words. When speaking to your son, have you ever heard yourself saying something like, "What are you thinking?" or "Can't you do **anything** right?"

But remember that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Our children will respond much better to positive words than criticism, or preaching at them, or nagging them to do what we want. We need to use words intentionally to bless and to build up.

Saying, "I love you" is great, but don't stop there. Make sure they understand that there's nothing they can do that will make you stop loving them. No matter what, your love is never up for grabs. It's constant and reliable.

And then, like my coach did, instill confidence in your child to do his best. Tell him, "I'm proud of you," or, "You can do it."

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YOUR HOMEWORK:

1. Show interest in what he likes, and affirm his positive qualities—especially in those areas that are not like you.
2. Be intentional about giving your son more physical affection like what I have described: hugs and kisses, grabbing him and holding him in your arms, a hand on the shoulder, a pat on the back, a tousle of his hair. Include lots of loving physical contact as you interact and play together.
3. Start a new project with your son that allows you to be side-by-side for long stretches of time.
4. Notice something that your son does well and affirm him for it. Tell him, “I’m proud of you. You can do anything you set your mind to.”
5. Make the Championship Fathering Commitment at www.fathers.com/cf

About the **CHAMPIONSHIP FATHERING COMMITMENT**

At the National Center for Fathering, our vision is that every child will have an involved father or father figure—that *no child* will go unfathered.

That vision begins with the conviction that **every child needs a dad he or she can count on**. We know that children thrive when they have an involved father—someone who loves them, knows them, guides them, and helps them achieve their destiny.

Motivated by this heartfelt conviction and encompassing vision, the Center's board, employees, and volunteers work to inspire and equip men to make and live out a commitment to Championship Fathering.

You can join this movement by making the Championship Fathering Commitment.

Even if you are an involved dad, your children and grandchildren will grow up in a world full of unfathered kids, and they will be affected by a culture that places too little significance on the role of strong fathers.

Dads are a critical part of the solution, and we have to get involved. For the sake of our children and grandchildren and millions of other kids, we need to stand up and be counted.

So please join me in making the **Championship Fathering Commitment** at www.fathers.com/cf.

The Championship Fathering Commitment

I will **love** my children.

I will **coach** my children.

I will **model** for my children.

I will **encourage** other children.

I will **enlist** other dads as members
of the Championship Fathering team.

About the National Center for Fathering

The National Center for Fathering (Fathers.com) is a nonprofit educational organization that provides research-based training and resources so that men are equipped to address their children's needs. Our goal is to reverse the cultural trend toward fatherlessness by helping every dad learn how to be a father.

Our goal is to enlist 6.5 million who are committed to reversing the cultural trend toward fatherlessness. The Center reaches more than one million dads through seminars, small-group training, our WATCH D.O.G.S (Dads of Great Students) program, our daily radio program, and our weekly e-mail tips for dads.

[Join the movement and make the Championship Fathering Commitment today.](#)