

10 Land Mines for Dads to Avoid With Their Daughters

Being a dad who stays the course with his daughter is easier said than done, right?

Let's be honest. When she was younger and used less words, she was easier to track with. But as she has matured and grown, so have her needs and wants ... and words. That's often where you dads get overwhelmed and lost.

Just in case you're wondering why a woman is writing and telling men what to do in the area of fathering, I want you to know that I have such a high regard for your role as a father that I have invested hundreds of hours into helping dads connect with their daughters. After five years of leading The Abba Project (a group forum for dads), speaking to male and female audiences, and 35 years of interacting with girls and young women in roles as counselor, mentor and friend (in addition to being the oldest of four girls), my heart's desire is to help you decode your daughters. I'm addressing this from the inside, so you could say.

Here's my conclusion based on years of observation and feedback: I can confidently say that every dad, without exception, who has been willing to walk this journey with me and invest himself fully in the process has found that the impact on the relationship with his daughter is beyond what he could have imagined.

With that backdrop, here are a few things that I've learned along the way: 10 land mines to avoid if you want to raise a healthy, vibrant, loving and spirited daughter. Think of these as a field-training manual to support your deep desire to truly dial in to your daughter's heart.

Here's what *not* to do and say if you really want to be a

fantastic dad:

1. Tell her she's too emotional. The reality is that, as women, we have 11 percent more neurons in our brain centers involved in hearing and language as compared to men, leading us oftentimes to be better skilled at expressing emotions. I've even read that women retain emotional memories more vividly than men do, which serves as another piece of the puzzle when it comes to you as a dad honoring the wiring of your daughter, particularly when it comes to emotional responses.

2. Require her to talk calmly and rationally in order to communicate with you. I do understand that most men "flood" [aka. zone out] when there is too much emotion coming at them because it feels like they need to fix everything and have the answers. However, the more you can be a sounding board as your daughter vents and expresses, the more of a gift you are to her. When we as girls can talk and express while feeling our emotions, the calmer we will automatically become as a result. Just remember that you don't have to fix it. Listening to her is the best gift you can give.

3. Criticize her. There's a big difference between 1) choosing certain times to correct or discipline and 2) putting her down or highlighting the things she's doing wrong. One researcher talks about the concept of a "love bank," saying there needs to be five deposits to every one withdrawal each day to make a relationship strong. If you have something that needs to be addressed, be sure and pack a lot of positive, life-breathing, encouraging statements around your corrections and there will be a much higher success rate of responsiveness. Remember the 5:1 ratio ... daily.

4. Tease her about her weight or any part of her body. I understand that guys tend towards teasing each other about body parts and it's no big deal. Not with us girls. We remember things that are said, even in jest, forever.

Everything. Make sure to never, ever, under any circumstances, tease her about her weight, her size (breast size, pant size, etc.), or any imperfections on her body. Those words will stay with her long after they're said. And even if she seems to laugh it off, those reminders of her flaws are hurtful and will most likely lead to less self-confidence, a negative body image, and possibly contribute to the onset of an eating disorder.

5. Put her mother down. Whether you're still married or divorced, when you demean, criticize or speak negatively about your daughter's mom, you are essentially criticizing her. She will hear it as you saying that you think she will turn out the same way. Because every daughter sees herself as some sort of reflection of the woman who brought her into the world, she uses Mom as a reference point for understanding herself. Look for the positives in Mom and point them out to your daughter.

6. Think your actions behind closed doors don't matter or are inconsequential. We've all heard the adage, "Do as I say, not as I do." But really, who is kidding who here? As a dad, just remember that the choices you make when no one is looking are the things that define you and measure your integrity. Let your actions on and off the court be filled with self-respect if you want your daughter to live out her morals, beliefs and values as well. Let me say it another way: Be the type of man you want her to marry. It starts with you, Dad.

7. Forget her birthday. Each of us has an innate desire to be known and even celebrated. But simultaneously we as girls don't always feel we're worth the party. This is where you as her dad come in. Your investment of time, energy and money tells her that she's worthy, valued and loved. Make sure to join in the celebration on her birthday because it shouts, "I'm glad you were born!"

8. Compare her to her siblings. Although it might slip out of your mouth, try and avoid ever saying, "Why can't you be more

like" You see, we girls compare ourselves to everyone else without prompting. So if you add to that reality, it only adds more fuel to an already existing internal fire. Make sure to let her know that she's *one of a kind* even though much of the time she may feel like she's *one of a million*. Let her know she's unique and beautiful just because she's herself.

9. Speak in anger. If I had a nickel for all the times I've heard daughters tell me, most often with tears running down their cheeks, about the wounding that has been experienced as a result of dad's anger, I'd be rich. Words spoken in anger do the most damage to a daughter's heart over anything else I hear from girls about their relationship with their dads. If you want to have your daughter's heart stay open to you, make a contract with yourself to never speak in anger to her again because it **destroys her spirit and her soul**. Take a time out to cool off and come back when you're calm. You'll never regret waiting to speak.

10. Give monetary gifts rather than yourself. In a world where life seems to be increasingly speeding faster, it can be easy to give *things* to your daughter more than *yourself*. Remember that she wants and needs you, your heart, your attention and your time more than any monetary thing. You, Dad, are the gift. And when you give her *you*, it communicates to her that she is worthy of your attention and focus. How about writing her a letter telling her what you remember about the day she was born or what you see in her that is beautiful. Any notes you write her will become treasures. Don't be surprised if she saves them forever. Why? Because your view of her matters more than all the rest ... honest!

Remember, Dad, keep the word DON'T in front of all these suggestions. And trust me, these will help you become a more focused, dialed-in, intentional and consistent dad for your daughter.

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Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a 9-month group forum that is designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to dial in with more intention and consistency, and has recently released her first book entitled, Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart. She invites you to visit for more information and to sign up for her weekly Dad-Daughter Friday blogs, where she provides practical tools so that every dad in America can become the action hero they want to be and their daughters need them to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.

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