

3 Red Flags That Show Your Baggage Is Hurting Your Daughter

That morning I got up early, hoping to enjoy some quiet before family and work obligations kicked in. I shuffled to the kitchen to brew myself some Earl Grey.

In the darkness, my shin collided hard with some unseen obstacle. I tripped and threw out my arms, catching myself as I fell against the wall. My impediment crashed across the hardwoods setting the dog to barking. That woke up the rest of my family.

Bruised, frustrated, annoyed at the dog, I switched on the light to see what had been so irresponsibly left in the hallway. There it was. The blue carry-on baggage that belonged to me.

The week prior, I had made a quick weekend flight for a writer's event. I flew home to a schedule already overfull. Jumping right into the rush of my week, I left my baggage unattended in the hallway, where it sat, waiting to trip some unsuspecting family member. Luckily it was me!

Unattended Baggage Can Be Dangerous

You've heard that recorded message that comes over the airport public address system, the one that warns about unattended bags? The airport officials are trying to protect against terrorism threats, but apparently unattended baggage can be a real terror in other ways.

This isn't just a problem at the airport. Apparently it's a problem in my hallway. It's also a threat to our relationship with our daughters.

The truth is that all of us dads have baggage we've never unpacked. Our hearts carry wounds that have scabbed over with time but have never received the proper healing. This baggage is just sitting around waiting for someone to trip over it. If we're not careful, it's going to be our daughters.

How Does This Baggage Show Up?

Coming back from my trip, I quickly fell back into my routine. The luggage I'd not had time to deal with got pushed to the side of the hallway and quickly faded into the background. I forgot it was there until my shin cracked into it.

Our emotional baggage is much the same. Regardless of what trauma or pain we've experienced in the past, we find a way to make life work.

For some of us, the wounds are so deeply buried that we don't think of them—and that seems almost the same as if we had dealt with them. We seem fine.

So, can we know if we've got untended baggage before it's too late? Sure! There are three clear flags. If these are present in your life in an ongoing way, you've got unattended baggage.

1. Unexpected Outbursts

I noticed my unattended baggage when my shin sent it careening down the hall, waking up my whole family with an unexpected crash. That's often how our emotional baggage surfaces too. Unexpected, loud and painful.

A common example of this is a dad's zero-to-rage speed. Scripture counsels us to be slow to anger, and yet many speed past that instruction. You can call it a short fuse.

You can blame it on your daughter's disrespect or poor listening. But nobody is responsible for your burst of anger except you. If unexpected anger bursts in on us, boiling over in angry words, name-calling, blaming language or worse,

that's a flag that we have baggage that needs to be unpacked.

2. Outsized Responses

When my baggage crashed across the floor, and the dog started barking, the whole ordeal was far noisier than it needed to be. Similarly, emotional baggage often surfaces with a much bigger "crash" than seems reasonable.

If your daughter does something irritating or forgets some small responsibility, how do you react? Think about the tone of voice you use, the type of language you employ, the level of consequence you apply.

If what she did, objectively, weighs in at about a four or five in terms of seriousness, but the intensity of your response to her is more like a nine or 10, that's an outsized response. Maybe you pride yourself on being a strict parent, or "not taking any garbage."

Well, consider the possibility that your intensity has nothing to do with your daughter, or with wanting to "run a tight ship." It's possible you are inflicting emotional intensity on your daughter that doesn't belong to her. Regular outsized responses are a flag that you have baggage that needs to be unpacked.

3. Hidden Hazards

In the dark that morning, I couldn't see my luggage in the pathway. Because I couldn't see it, I couldn't avoid running into it.

Emotional baggage is often invisible in the same way. Sometimes it's invisible to you. Often, it's invisible to your daughter.

She's just doing her life, being a kid. She doesn't understand one particular thing might rub you the wrong way. She probably doesn't get why you have so much energy around a particular

behavior. In her mind “it’s not a big deal.” In your mind, it’s suddenly everything.

If interacting with you is a minefield, full of hidden hazards, that’s a flag that you have unattended baggage that needs to be unpacked.

Don’t Give Your Daughter Your Baggage

The whole incident with the luggage in the hallway could have easily been avoided. All that was needed was for me to take responsibility. Instead of leaving my bag unattended and packed in the hallway, I could have taken the time to unpack it and put it away.

When we don’t take responsibility for our emotional baggage, it often becomes someone else’s problem. Our denial ends up hurting people we love. Then, our baggage becomes their baggage.

As dads, one of our chief responsibilities is to set up our children for the best possible chance of a healthy life. Passing our unpacked baggage on to them is a violation of this commitment.

If you find your relationship with your daughter marked by unexpected outbursts, outsized responses and hidden hazards, it’s time to take responsibility.

Maybe that means investing time in learning how to listen to and process your emotions.

(I wrote a book about that called *The Wisdom of Your Heart: Discovering the God-given Power and Purpose of your Emotions.*)

Maybe it means getting coaching from a professional, like a therapist or a pastor with skills in this area. It’s not weakness to get support in this area; it is you giving your best attention to being the best dad you can be—and that’s part of your commitment to set your daughter up for the best

possible life experience.

Don't leave your baggage out where she can trip over it. Instead, give her a healthy example of courage and personal responsibility by unpacking your own baggage before it becomes someone else's problem. {eo}

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