

Dad, It's Up to You to Diffuse Conflict With Your Daughter—Here's How

One of my favorite things is receiving emails from dads and daughters who ask questions about how to better their relationship. Not that I always have the perfect answer, but there's something refreshing about an authentic, heart-felt inquiry that opens up an honest interaction. I respect the courage it takes to ask vulnerable questions that have the potential to start movement towards proactive change.

Here's a question I received recently from a 20-year-old young woman:

Hi Michelle,

I think it would be helpful if you talked to dads about how to handle disagreements. My stepdad and I had a big fight over the weekend, and it left me feeling like although we have improved our daily relationship, nothing has changed when it comes to the big stuff. I think it would help the fathers that you work with to learn conflict resolution skills.

Let me ask you a couple of questions as you ponder her words:

1. Does this sound like a woman who wants a better relationship with her stepdad or one who doesn't care about how they relate?
2. Do you think her underlying belief may be that her stepdad is to blame while she carries little to no responsibility in how things went down?

I tend towards believing that she must care about their relationship or she wouldn't have written me. I also hear her

implying that her stepdad bears the primary weight of responsibility in moving their relationship in a better direction, which happens to be something I agree with.

Here's why:

- **You, dad, have to lead by example.**
- **Change has to begin with you.**
- **You must set the tone for how you want your daughter to respond to you and to others by modeling healthy interactions with her.** For example, if she yells at you and you yell back, things will quickly disintegrate and deteriorate (which you already know, right?). So you cannot justify a harsh response to her when she has a disrespectful response to you or there's no parent in the lead.

Believe it or not, your daughter doesn't like it when her relationship with you is off-kilter. In fact, we girls don't do well when our primary relationships are out of tune. So even when our defensiveness rears its ugly head, underneath it all we want there to be harmony. I've discovered that men typically want the same thing.

Here are a few ideas to help you as a father lead your daughter in resolving conflict:

Do:

1. Stay calm and filter every word that comes out of your mouth (just as you do when you're at your best in other spaces, such as your workplace).
2. Take a "time out" that matches your age so your brain can cool down before saying something you'll regret. (If you're 50 years old, take 50 minutes away; then come back and continue the interaction.)
3. Treat her the way you want to be treated.
4. Lead by example. (More is caught than taught, and she is learning from you.)

5. Be the first to admit wrong and ask forgiveness for your part in the conflict.
6. Try texting or writing on paper what you want to say to help de-escalate the emotional intensity while keeping the interaction between you going.
7. Ask your daughter's mom or other adult females to help you better understand your daughter's point of view.
8. Get close enough to see her eyes during conflict and seek to validate the place inside where she's hurting.
9. Seek to grasp what she's saying and how she's feeling while listening for what she needs you to understand.
10. Remember that long past the current crisis, your daughter will remember that you loved her more than having to be right or win the argument.

Don't:

1. Raise your voice and emotionally escalate by yelling.
2. Keep firing words at her, coupled with intense emotion in a futile attempt to control her or the situation.
3. Disrespect her while demanding that she treat you with respect.
4. Forget that she will follow your example.
5. Expect her to soften her tone first.
6. Demand that she immediately respond to what you say or ask since her brain needs to cool off when upset and overwhelmed.
7. Go it alone without inviting input from other women who are more seasoned and can help you decode your daughter.
8. Walk away while shouting your position from another room or at a distance.
9. Make fun of her for what she says or feels, even if she makes no sense to you.
10. Think that you don't matter in shaping your daughter as you teach her how to navigate conflict in healthy ways.

Dad, I realize that it's super-hard, if not impossible, to pursue your daughter's heart when one or both of you are

heated. I also know that in order to lead your daughter in a way that is congruent with your heart goals you will need to embrace humility and gentleness while remembering how much she deeply matters to you (as opposed to focusing on *her* reaction to *your* reaction or vice versa).

This week, I'd love to see you choose one thing from this list of 10 resolution ideas and let me know how it works in the trenches.

Turn the fight to right by leading with love. It's the best way to diffuse a disagreement ... every single time. {eo}

Dr. Michelle Watson has a clinical counseling practice in Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a nine-month group forum designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to help them focus more intentionally on consistently pursuing their daughters' hearts. She released her first book titled, *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 every dad in America can become the action hero he wants to be and his daughter needs him to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.