

# Dad, Stop Being a Thermometer in Your Family

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As a dad with three daughters—one 12-year-old and two 9-year-olds—I am learning as I go, just like you. And having been in the Army now for 22 years, I find that the learning process for me as a father looks a lot like life in the military with a mix of challenges and defeats, successes and victories.

I know as fathers it's easy to bring home the stress of our jobs, even though we know that it never bears positive dividends when we do. Here are a couple of proactive strategies I've found that help to support putting my love for my girls into action.

This first goal focuses on my interactions with them, while the second centers on me.

## **1. Divide and Comfort vs. Divide and Conquer**

I have discovered that when my pre-teen “snaps” or acts condescending towards her younger siblings in my presence, I address it immediately. Oftentimes, I make sharp corrections in order to de-escalate the situation, which typically goes like this,

“Honey ... is that your best response?”

“Does that sound like something your mother or I would say or do?”

“No dumping buckets”

Everyone in the house already knows “No dumping buckets” means

to never intentionally demean another person. We are constantly teaching respect, honor and esteem in our home during times of peace.

Nevertheless, at the first opportunity, I separate my little ladies for age-appropriate counseling, comforting and family reconciliation. What's so interesting for me is learning how well they each articulate their desire to be respected by the other siblings.□

My wife and I have laid a tremendous amount of groundwork, as a married couple of 15 years, in modeling proper conflict management. We also stress the importance of maintaining family integrity and respect.

Additionally, because my two 9-year-old daughters so admire their big sister and desire to be valued and respected by her as a peer, I simply use the power of the word "remember." When interacting with my 12-year-old, I may say,

"Do you remember how you felt when you were 9 years old and ...?"

This automatically shifts her from a defensive posture and places her in a mentoring role. When interacting with my 9-year-olds, I may say,

"Remember, you girls will be preteens very soon and ..."

This gives them a sense of hope, and they immediately start giggling and celebrating with youthful optimism.

I must also remember that these little ones are simply flesh and blood looking to be accepted, seeking to be adored and longing to be appreciated. It is my honor to be able to provide that for them.

My heart's desire, as a father, is to foster an atmosphere of love, respect and cohesion while creating amazing memories for my children. It is essential that each of them know that I am

here to not only protect them physically, but emotionally as well.

## **2. Pull Over**

After a long stressful day at work, I so look forward to jumping in my car, turning on a podcast or favorite song and getting home as quickly as possible. There is always so much on my mind, and it seems impossible to turn off: deadlines, presentations, the next “thing to do,” questions, doubts, things to coordinate, things to uncoordinate ... my head is spinning just thinking about it, and I know I am not alone.

I often find myself taking my stress home and downloading on unsuspecting loved ones. What used to be an everyday routine family reunion when I came home turned into a run-for-cover-retreat event for the kids. For my family's sake, I found something helpful that I would love to share. It's very simple and takes as long or as short as you'd like.

Simply pull the car over.

David Code, author of *Kids Pick Up On Everything: How Parental Stress Is Toxic to Kids*, suggests the most critical thing that we transmit to our kids is not our declaration of love, but to provide them with a sense of calm and the absence of stress. Code suggests that stress causes our little ones to accommodate for these vague senses of impending danger which impede normal brain development.

Code claims that in the famous rat experiments, what's being transmitted from mother to pup is not love, it's peace: “By spending a lot of time grooming her pups, the mother rat is saying to them, ‘times are so good and predator-and stress-free that I have lots of time to lick you guys.’” The same reasoning applies to dads, minus the licking.

This is a part of our protection and preparing plan. Code recommends creating calm around them so that they feel no

sense of danger.

Now instead of going straight home, I've found that it helps to:

- pull over and decompress
- put things in perspective
- walk into the house creating an atmosphere of calm, safety, peace, and protection.

Proverbs 15:4 reminds us that the soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

Remember, Dads: We are thermostats, not thermometers. {eoa}