

Dads, This Simple Gesture Can Bring Powerful Healing for Your Kids

I read a story a couple of years ago in *Father Wounds* by Francis Anfuso that has stayed with me ever since. Some stories have a powerful way of doing that, especially when they go straight to the heart.

Today I shared this with a man who unexpectedly found himself tearing up while hearing it. Because of his response, I figured it would be good to share it with you.

A few years ago, a pastor named George Brantley spoke on the topic of fathering to a student body of 1,100 at a Christian college in Texas. After spending two days with them, he ended by offering a “safe hug” to anyone who needed one.

The author stated that “what happened next was both tragic and astounding.”

One by one, hundreds of young men and women made their way to the front of the auditorium while many stood in *line for over three hours*, all to experience a “safe hug” from this man. Apparently, there were so many who sobbed on George’s shoulders that it literally ruined his jacket and shirt.

I’m struck by the way that this father figure showed up in real time with a real gift of his presence. As a result, kids who weren’t his own were drawn like a magnet to him. There was such a powerful longing for the strong arms of a safe man to wrap themselves around these students that they waited for hours just to receive this small deposit into their emotional bank account.

All he did was offer to put his arms around them in a gesture

that affirmed and communicated love. The result? They lined up and waited their turn. For hours. All for a hug.

My friend, Paul Young, is like that. Some would say that his hugs heal. I can affirm that his hugs have definitely been healing for me. I've told him that I describe them as "holy hugs" because they have a way of drawing me to God the Father's embrace.

Paul says you can tell a lot about a person through a hug. He's held people for 20 or 30 minutes, even longer, as they sob into him. He doesn't need to say a word, because he hears the language of their tears. His presence speaks louder than any words anyway.

Safe hugs have a way of doing that, even without verbiage. They touch the depths of who we are and warmly say that it's going to be okay, and more importantly, that we're worth loving.

Dad, your daughter needs your physical, loving arms around her. Daily.

And she doesn't need you to be perfect; she just needs you to be present.

And this is the kind of "present" where you show up in physical form with hugs ready. No words required.

Ready. Set. Hug! {eoa}

Dr. Michelle Watson is a national speaker, author, professional counselor of 21 years and founder of "The Abba Project," a nine-month group forum for dads whose daughters are in their teens and 20s. She writes guest articles regularly for journals and magazines (online and print), as well as her own bi-monthly Dad-Daughter Friday blog. In 2014, she released her first book, titled Dad, Here's What I Really Need From You: A Guide for Connecting With Your Daughter's

Heart (which is now available in her voice on Audible), and in 2016 launched a weekly radio program in her hometown of Portland, Oregon called "The Dad Whisperer." It is also available in podcast form on iTunes at The Dad Whisperer.

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