

First Hero, First Love: A Dad's Role for Sons and Daughters

I recently came across this fantastic quote about dads: "To a girl, a father is her first love. To a boy, a father is his first hero."

These are powerful ideas that I want to unpack and reinforce this week.

For a daughter, getting love from her dad is a huge thing. How he treats her sets the tone for so many other relationships in her life. Every boy or man she meets will automatically be measured against her dad and her relationship with him. He is her ultimate standard and role model for manhood.

So, dad, if the relationship is open and warm, your daughter will be confident and will expect those same good things from the young men in her life. She'll likely make good choices about who she spends time with.

Of course, if your relationship is distant or cold, she may relate to young men as a reaction *against* what she had with you. She'll be looking to fill a void or get something she never got from you, and she may be desperate enough to settle for less than the best, a counterfeit, or someone who gives her lots of attention, but for all the wrong reasons.

So how can you be her first love? Here are two brief points to consider:

- 1. Be an active listener.** Really tune into not only her words, but also her expressions, body language and everything else. Honor her thoughts, dreams and ideas. Don't rush to a conclusion or a judgment. Listening shows you care.

2. Make sure she knows you think she's beautiful, inside and out. Many girls today feel pressure to look a certain way, and sadly, some dads contribute to that pressure. But our daughters need to know they're beautiful to us just as they are. They don't have to prove or change anything.

Just as important is *affirming her inner beauty*. Spend enough time with her that you really know her gifts and strengths so you can give *sincere* compliments on her sense of humor, her loyalty, courage, intelligence or sensitivity toward people.

Basically, Dad, seek to win her heart and make her feel cherished. You're already her first love; you just need to give her a positive idea about what that means.

For a son, when he first dreams of being a superhero, he's hoping his dad will show him how. We know young boys will find heroes in animated cartoons and movies. Later it's a sports star, or maybe famous actors or rock musicians. But over and above all those stands you, Dad. Your sons look to *you* as a hero, first and foremost. And you don't have to earn that title; it just comes with your role.

Of course, you can give up that title or neglect the responsibilities that come with it, but it really takes some doing to *not* be your son's hero. He has already given you that assignment. So the question to ask is "How can I possibly fill that role?"

Dad, you already know. You need to live out virtues every day that your son can see and emulate. Be noble. Have courage. Demonstrate integrity. Put the needs of others above your own. Respect women. Stand up for what's right.

It comes back to modeling. Your son needs a living example of what it means to be a man, a husband and a father. It's something you need to be intentional about.

Be positive even in the face of conflict—with neighbors, your

boss or maybe the boy's mother, after a difficult divorce. That goes a long way to teach your son how to function in tough situations with heroic resolve.

Model courage when you confront him on issues or behaviors he needs to change, and then hold him accountable. Model humility *and courage* when you go back and ask for forgiveness after you've been insensitive or too harsh with him.

Model how to love when you show him physical affection even when he gets older and it seems a bit awkward. Also, when you make the effort to listen to him and keep open the lines of communication.

These are just a few ways to be your daughter's first love, and your son's hero. These are also mentioned in our free e-book, *5 Things Every Kid MUST Get from Dad*, which has ideas for daughters and for sons. You can download it right here.

What would you add to either category? How have you been your daughter's first love and your son's first hero? Please join the discussion below.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Sit with your daughter in her room and let her talk for at least 5 minutes straight, without any interruptions, as she shares about her day. Just listen. And be ready to share if she asks about your day.
- When relating to your daughter, instead of thinking, "What's the answer here?" ask yourself, "What's she feeling right now?"
- Tell your son about your desire to be a great dad, and what that should look like from day to day. Ask him to "call you out" any time you drop the ball.
- Take your kids with you to volunteer at a local shelter or food pantry. Demonstrate that healthy manhood includes serving others.
- If you're married, let your kids see that you love their

mother. They need to see your heroic commitment to her; they can draw great security from that, and you'll be setting a great example.

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