

Good Dads Shape Their Daughters' Self-Images

Evan Dolive is a dad of a 3-year-old girl, and he's upset with Victoria's Secret.

Maybe you've seen the open letter he wrote to the company (or a radio or TV interview in the days since) expressing concern about a new line of undergarments aimed at middle-school girls, with underwear carrying messages like "Wild," "Feeling lucky?" and "Call me."

(Since then, the clothing store clarified that there is no new line specifically for middle-school girls. Still, his points are valid, since young teenage girls are very aware of trends that affect young women.)

I share Dolive's concern, and I believe this should be on the radar of every dad, whether you have sons or daughters. As he states in the letter:

"I believe that this sends the wrong message to not only my daughter but to all young girls. I don't want my daughter to ever think that her self-worth and acceptance by others is based on the choice of her undergarments. I don't want my daughter to ever think that to be popular or even attractive she has to have emblazon(ed) words on her bottom.

"I want my daughter (and every girl) to be faced with tough decisions in her formative years of adolescence. Decisions like should I be a doctor or a lawyer? Should I take calculus as a junior or a senior? Do I want to go to Texas A&M or University of Texas or some Ivy League School? Should I raise awareness for slave trafficking or lack of water in developing nations? There are many, many more questions that all young women should be asking themselves. ... "

You can read his letter and some follow-up blogs [here](#). But really, this trend is bigger than Victoria's Secret. Intimate apparel for girls and women is a huge business, and numerous stores are trying to appeal to girls' desires to look and feel older—and sexier.

Are a lot of you dads like me? When my daughters were that age, the challenges were a bit different, but I wanted to slow them down and let them enjoy being kids while they could.

I have a teenage son, and I'm very uncomfortable with the thought that girls he interacts with could be embracing the notion that, as author Dr. Meg Meeker has written, "their identity equals their sexuality. But not even a healthy sexuality; rather a cheap one where girls are reduced to sexy playthings."

Instead, she writes, "We want our girls to believe that their identity stems from their character, their uniqueness (not sameness), and their intellectual or physical achievements."

What should we do as dads? Calling attention to the potential dangers is certainly appropriate, although it's hard to see styles moving toward modesty and our fatherly definition of what's proper for our daughters to wear. But no matter what, *we should all be involved in addressing these issues with our daughters*. Just a few months ago, I wrote about daughters and clothing choices in this blog.

Really, we should be concerned about much more than our daughters' outward appearance or undergarments. We have a huge influence on our daughters' self-images, and there's a really helpful section about this in our free e-book, *5 Things Every Child MUST Get from Dad*.

That section opens with this statement: "Girls feel pressure to be smart, thin, pretty, and involved in certain activities. Dads have the ability to combat these pressures and make their daughters feel beautiful, inside and out."

The practical suggestions include:

- Never criticize your daughter's body shape or appearance, but always affirm her as unique, beautiful and highly valued.
- More important, compliment her positive non-physical qualities, like emotional strength, sense of humor, loyalty, intelligence and courage.
- Get involved in her pursuits. Show that she is worth the investment of your time and energy.
- Demonstrate confidence in her abilities.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Write your daughter a letter listing specifically what you appreciate about her. If she's too young to read it, save it until she's older.
- Be intentional about pointing out five or six of your child's *inner* strengths over the next few days.
- Try asking your daughter three questions that Diane Sawyer remembers her father asking her: "What do you love?" "Where is the most adventurous place you could do it?" "How can you use it to serve other people?"
- Ask your daughter (or son) to teach you something he/she enjoys, and be committed to really learning it.

Help other dads! What has worked for you when it comes to affirming your daughter's inner beauty? Please join the discussion by leaving a message below.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers to make the Championship Fathering Commitment. NCF believes every child needs a dad they can count on, and it uses its resources to inspire and equip men to be the involved fathers, grandfathers and father-figures their children need. Subscribe to Casey's weekly email tip by clicking [here](#): I want tips on

*how to be a great dad who loves, coaches, mentors and inspires
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