

Help Heal Your Daughter's Heart With These 4 Practical Steps

A friend of mine recently told me something he believes to be true about most men. He said that rather than risk being viewed as incompetent, men tend to cover up their insecurities by acting like they know things...*even when they don't*.

So that raises a couple of questions for me as one who deeply longs to see healing take place between dads and daughters. If what my friend said is true, I find myself asking:

1. What would it take for men to be willing to step in to learn new things they inherently don't know?
2. What would it take for you as a father to be willing to reach your daughter's heart in new ways, especially when it includes the challenge of listening to her hurts, especially when those hurts are from you?

Dad, whether you have a great relationship with your daughter right now or not, I believe that you want peace and harmony. I believe that you want to mend the brokenness that may exist between you. Yet if you're like many of the dads I've had the privilege of interacting with, you may not quite know how to go about making that happen.

Because my desire is to ally with your truest desire to strengthen the way that you and your daughter relate, here are four practical suggestions to help with healing her hurts, which subsequently will help to open her heart:

- 1. Physical Space:** Go to where your daughter is (face-to-face if possible) with a readiness to listen, not defend, your position.

Here's how dad Brent says it: "The physical space and relationship between me and my girls is important. If possible, I try to walk into her bedroom (her turf), and I try to place myself physically in a lower position than she is. It might sound strange, but if my daughter is sitting on her bed, I intentionally sit on the floor so she is looking down at me. I am taller than both of my girls and I never want to be in a conversation where I am looking down at her. I find if I sit down on the floor, lean back and cross my legs, the non-threatening posture says to her, 'I want to have a two-way conversation with you,' instead of 'I am here to tell you what for ...'"

2. Emotional Space: Be willing to sit with her through her emotional responses without criticism, disgust, impatience or anger.

Here's how 25-year old Andrea said it, "I am beyond blessed that my dad has provided for me and been there for me through thick and thin. However, we've never ever fully seen eye-to-eye. I think it's partly because we're so much alike. But more than that, if he says something is 30, I say it's 29. I don't know what happened, but years ago we stopped hanging out, and honestly, it was probably around the same time that he started saying '30' and I would counter with '29'. And it was probably around that same time that I started thinking he didn't understand me. But beyond thinking that, I believed that he didn't want to understand."

Fathers often tell me that they struggle to pace with their daughters through the messy process of working through emotional things. Yet I promise you that if you don't react to her reaction and simply make a decision to repeat back to her what you hear her saying (which is called "mirroring"), you will discover that she will go through the intensity much faster and there will much less collateral damage. She will also bond more deeply with you because she will feel that you want to understand her.

3. Mental Space: Take time to ask questions that draw out her thoughts and feelings without interrogating her or just questioning to gather information.

Here's what 20-year old Katie had to say, "My dad has started putting his heart out on the line for me and it has meant everything to me. He wasn't always very good at it, but I can tell he's trying. I guess I would say that he's now chasing me with his love and taking the time to get to know me on a personal level by taking me on Daddy Daughter Dates (we call them "DDD"). We've even finally talked through some of the tough stuff in our relationship. I have come to respect my dad even more than I already did, and as a result, we've grown closer than I ever thought possible."

This is a daughter whose heart opened and responded positively when her dad initiated and connected with her while he courageously talked about challenges they'd had in the past. This dad was willing to stay engaged in a hard conversation (which involved talking and listening) in order to connect with his daughter's heart. I guess you could say that the meeting of their minds led to the meeting of their hearts.

4. Spiritual Space: Be willing to push through your potential discomfort and initiate praying with her about things weighing on her.

Here's how 15-year old Lexi said it, "I know my dad isn't as comfortable with the God-stuff as my mom is, but he's started praying with me at night and I love it. It means so much that he comes in and sits on my bed, holds my hand, and then says a prayer over me before I go to sleep. He just started doing it and though I'd feel awkward telling him this, it's making a big difference. It makes me feel protected and special."

Dad, the truth is that God has given you a daughter to facilitate your own personal growth. So as your love for her pushes you out of your comfort zone, let today be a day you

choose to move into her space in one of these four areas—physical, emotional, mental or spiritual.

Because a girl with a healed heart will open it to the world around her ... and she'll always know that her dad helped make it happen. {eoa}

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