

Here Are Ways Dads Can Bond With 'Different' Kids

I'm all for being our children's biggest fans. Our kids need their dads to be supportive and positive.

We know that each child is different, so we dads need to discover ways to encourage and challenge our kids based on their unique gifts and interests. This has been on my mind a lot recently with my youngest son, Chance. He and his older brother Marcellus are great examples of the fact that some kids follow your footsteps in many ways ... and some just don't.

Chance has been challenging for me because he's different from all my other kids, and especially his older brother. Marcellus played football like me, and generally pursued a lot of the same things I did. Now, as an adult, he's working in a role that's a lot like what I did for years.

Then Chance comes along, and he's into dancing, singing and drawing. I've done my best to encourage him in those areas, but I'm no dancer, and you probably wouldn't want to hear me sing. I'm not artistic either. And unlike when Marcellus was his age, I don't have a good idea what Chance is feeling when he goes to perform, when he's doing what he loves to do.

So this is challenging me to stretch and grow as a father. I have no experience or familiarity with what's happening, so I'm not as confident as I want to be.

I know many of you have children whose interests are nothing like yours, and you've felt similar things. That's often true for dads of daughters. But I want to challenge you *not* to pull back or give up, but stay engaged and go deeper as you try to connect with your child.

How do you do that? With Chance, I've been really focusing on

2 things:

1. Keep affirming your child. If he is going in a direction that's different from you, *he recognizes it*, and he may even wonder if you love him less because of it. So make sure you don't withhold your love and approval. Go out of your way to say, "I love you" and "I'm proud of you." Maybe even see if you can throw in the idea that you're "learning new things" from him and really "enjoying the experience."

2. Really listen to your child. Ask questions. Show genuine interest. Tune in to her words and nonverbal communication. You *will* learn more about your child, and you'll demonstrate that, yes, Dad really is interested in what she's doing. That will give your child an extra measure of security and affirmation.

I'm still figuring out how to be there for my son, but these things have been a huge help. And who knows, you might even see me dancing one day.

I'm sure many of you have experienced something similar with a child. How have you succeeded in overcoming the differences or building bonds with a child who's very much unlike you?

Action Points

- Be willing to get out of your comfort zone and try something your child enjoys doing.
- Try to really learn about why that appeals to him or her.
- Don't hesitate to also invite your child into an activity that you enjoy—even if it might not be his first choice. You'll expand his horizons a bit, and he'll enjoy the chance to enter into your world.

Carey Casey is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering (NCF), as well as a husband, father and grandfather. He is author of *Championship Fathering* and general editor of *The 21-*

Day Dad's Challenge. See more about Carey here.