

6 Winning Ideas for Daddy-Daughter Date Night

A note to dads who really like the idea of “dating” their daughters but don’t know where to start:

Guys, you’re probably making it more complicated than it has to be.

The idea is simply to enter her world and enjoy your time together. You can’t force deep, meaningful, life-changing conversations. But if you keep showing up ... they’ll happen. And you’ll be glad you were there.

If she’s a toddler, it’s pretty easy. Ten minutes lying in the grass, rustling in the leaves or making snow angels.

If she’s five, it’s still pretty easy. Invest a half-hour or so and go ahead and start calling your time together a “date.” Go for ice cream, McDonald’s, donuts and juice or a bike ride around the block. The idea is to be intentional about leaving the house—just you and her. Of course, you should still spend time goofing with your little girl in the driveway with a hula hoop, basketball, bubbles or sidewalk chalk. But a date should have a plan and a destination.

About third grade or so, start thinking about kicking it up a notch—movie dates, lunch dates, library dates. To make sure it becomes a habit, try connecting your daddy-daughter dates with her other scheduled activities. Pick her up after a practice or rehearsal and stop someplace on the way home. Maybe take a class together. If you’re really gutsy, do something girls typically do with their moms, like pottery painting, jewelry making or calligraphy.

Do stuff she likes. Do stuff you like. There is window-shopping, mini-golf and Frisbee golf. Visit a museum. Visit a

pet store—pet a puppy, talk to a parrot or buy a reptile without mom's permission.) Go ice skating. Visit an apple orchard. Make a pie. Go horseback riding. Bowling. Bird watching. Browse a bookstore. And don't think only boys can enjoy sports. Take your daughter to an NFL, NHL, MLB or NBA game. Or save a few bucks and go to a minor-league or semi-pro game. Each time, remember to thank her for the "date."

One annual date you don't want to miss is the daddy-daughter dance presented by your church, school or park district. You might even make it a double-date with your daughter's best friend and her dad. That's a chance to connect with another dad—which is always a good thing—and see how your daughter interacts with her peers.

Once you've established your daddy-daughter date routine, look for a chance to add one more strategic lesson: In the middle of your time together, hope something goes terribly wrong. The bowling alley is overbooked with leagues. The restaurant wait is 90 minutes. The skating rink is closed for repairs. You get a flat tire. Ants overrun the picnic. You lock your keys in the car.

With any of these minor catastrophes, you have a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate patience, resourcefulness and a sense of humor. These are all traits your daughter should expect in any fellow who takes her out. Of course, I'm not suggesting you orchestrate any near-calamities on your daddy-daughter dates, but I'm not ruling it out either.

Here's the point. The primary purpose of dating your daughter is to make memories and cement your lifetime connection. But there's another huge benefit to showing up on time, opening her car door, treating her with respect and handling any mishaps with grace and a smile: You're modeling for your daughter the way any boy should act when she goes out on any date at any time.

If and when some “unworthy weasel” takes her out, she won’t put up with any nonsense because her dad—that’s you—taught her how a gentleman acts on a date.

Finally, when your daughter does start dating boys her own age, that doesn’t mean your dates with her should stop. Actually, that’s the season in life when you want to spend *more* time with her, not less. You may have to work a little harder to get on her busy social calendar. But if you ask nicely, she just might fit you in.

Oh, yeah. And Dad, don’t forget to date your wife, too.

Five Bonus Strategies for Entering Your Teenage Daughter’s World

1. Give yourselves a mutual mission. Asking a young person’s opinion is surprising and empowering. “For Christmas, should I get Mom the amethyst or opal earrings?” “What should we do for Grandpa’s birthday this year?” “We need some new patio chairs. What are your thoughts?”

2. Treat her as an authority. Suddenly, she’s the teacher and you’re the student. “Hey, Sara, can I send a photo on my iPhone that’s 1.8 megabytes?” “I’m designing a flyer for the block party. Can you take a look at this font?” “Bill from work wants to recommend some summer reading for his daughter who’s eight. Any ideas?”

3. Volunteer at one of her events. Initially, she may not be happy you signed up for that chaperone assignment, church event or fundraiser. But if you don’t embarrass her and stay in your assigned zone, she’ll be glad you’re there. Also, make sure you give her plenty of notice. “The Zimmermans asked us to help out at the Christmas dance. I guess we’re in charge of the punch bowl.” “Just letting you know, I’m driving one of the vans for the weekend retreat. And I’m staying in the boy’s cabin.”

4. Get her attention. Figure out what middle school girls like—specifically your daughter and her friends—and give it to her. “Let’s get a puppy.” “Don’t know what got into me, but I bought a Groupon for horseback riding.” “When that movie comes out from that book you read, let’s take some of your friends to the midnight show.” “Pizza’s here!”

5. Tell her you miss her. If you haven’t had a good conversation in a couple weeks, you’re both feeling the same way. “Hey, kiddo. We have both been so busy. Let’s do something this weekend. Maybe brunch after church. Or we could go to the flea market. What’s your schedule?” “You know, I’m reading a book for dads of daughters and it says I’m supposed to ask you out on a date. So pick a night. Any night!”

*The preceding is a guest blog from **Jay Payleitner**—a best-selling author, speaker and good friend of the National Center for Fathering who has written a new book called 52 Things Daughters Need From Their Dads. This blog was adapted from one of the 52 chapters.*

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