

How You Can Help Your Daughter Find Her Voice

I've heard it said that communication is 7 percent words, 38 percent tone of voice, and 55 percent body language.

If you do the math, you'll see that this means that 93 percent of communication is nonverbal.

How's that for significant? This little statistic serves as a reminder that as a reflective listener, we often say more by what never comes out of our mouth.

Think back to a time when your daughter tried to tell you something when you weren't fully dialed in. Then (in your estimation), she reacted in a way that seemed entirely inappropriate to the situation.

And there you were, completely dumbfounded because you had no idea how she leapt from a 0 to 10 in intensity over something seemingly insignificant. At least to you.

Two words: nonverbal communication.

In his book *Dads and Daughters*, Joe Kelly talks about the importance of a dad tuning in to his daughter's voice:

"Girls tend to be a riddle to fathers. Like any mystery, the relationship with our daughter can be frightening, exciting, entertaining, baffling, enlightening, or leave us completely in the dark; sometimes all at once. If we want to unravel this mystery, we have to pay attention and listen, even in the most ordinary moments."

Why? Because a girl's voice may be the most valuable and most threatened resource she has.

Her voice is the conduit for her heart, brains, and spirit.

When she speaks boldly and clearly—literally and metaphorically—she is much safer and surer.

Dads, I can't underscore enough how intensely vital it is that you help nurture these qualities in your daughter.

I share below some responses from girls between the ages of thirteen and thirty to the questions, "What is something your dad doesn't understand or know about you?" "What would it be like if he knew?" As you read, listen to these girls' heart cries to be heard, known, and embraced by their dads.

- *"I don't think he understands that I can handle things by myself sometimes and that I'm not a little girl anymore. I also don't think he understands that I don't like the way that he asks to know things, and doesn't really even listen to me when I talk."*
- *"I care what he thinks and I am not as stoic as I seem. I don't know what it would be like if he knew about it, but it scares me to think about him knowing that I am vulnerable."*
- *"I don't think he understands how I could have sex at such a young age, but also I know that he doesn't know that I have had an STD before. It would be weird if he knew about the STD because that isn't something a father wants for his little girl."*
- *"My dad doesn't know that, for about six years, I truly believed that he didn't like me. I felt like everything I did annoyed him and irritated him. I thought I didn't live up to his expectations. I would tell my mom this all the time and ask, 'Does Dad hate me?' I wasn't doing it for attention. I internally, 100 percent believed that he didn't like me and didn't want a relationship with me. It hurt so much feeling like my own father didn't like me."*

- *“Something he doesn’t know is the pain that I will always have about some things in our family. I’ve told my mom about it, but I’ve never told my dad. I know he’d just blow me off and say, ‘There’s nothing I can do about the past.’ He always says that.”*
- *“There are a lot of things he doesn’t know about me—just because we don’t talk that much and aren’t that close. I don’t share many details of my life with him. But on a bigger scale, I am not sure if he realizes how much his parenting affected me and how much he hurt me.”*

Dad, do you hear the heart longings in every one of these daughters to be special to her dad?

This is a need, not a want.

My friend Emily is a wife and mother of two boys. While choosing to parent differently than she was raised, she tells of the pain she felt growing up because her dad “was always too busy for her.” She talks about him being around physically but not emotionally or mentally. He was a pastor and was doing “God’s work,” and she knew she couldn’t compete with that.

Emily recalls sheepishly knocking on the door of his office at the age of seven and being afraid that she was a bother to him. His responses usually confirmed her worst fears. Not only has she carried around debilitating fears like an invisible knapsack ever since, but her childhood insecurities have continued to intersect with every relationship throughout her life. She and her dad have come far in repairing their relationship. Emily is working on healing and letting go. She’s finding her voice. It’s beautiful.

Be a dad today who helps your daughter to find and use her voice. {eoa}

Dr. Michelle Watson has a clinical counseling practice in

Portland, Oregon, and has served in that role for the past 17 years. She is founder of The Abba Project, a 9-month group forum that is designed to equip dads with daughters ages 13 to 30 to dial in with more intention and consistency, and has recently released her first book entitled, Dad, Here's What I Really Need from You: A Guide for Connecting with Your Daughter's Heart. She invites you to visit for more information and to sign up for her weekly Dad-Daughter Friday blogs, where she provides practical tools so that every dad in America can become the action hero they want to be and their daughters need them to be. You can also follow or send feedback on Facebook and Twitter.

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