

The Most Loving Gift You Can Give Your Daughter When She's Overwhelmed

A couple of weeks ago I was talking with a group of dads when the conversation turned to their daughter's mood swings and their common experiences in not knowing what to do much of the time. Understandably, this Venusian dynamic creates a challenge for most every dad when it comes to figuring out how to navigate the changing weather patterns with no meteorological training, if you know what I mean!

Every dad admitted to often feeling lost without a road map when it comes to pacing with the twists and turns of teenage and young adult female development.

As I sat there listening to the added pressure these dads feel when struggling to decode the verbal and non-verbal cues of their daughters, it was clear that they all wanted to engage and pursue their daughter's hearts despite the challenges. Their camaraderie led the way for openness around admitting their confusion over sometimes being invited closer while at other times being pushed away.

Over the last eight years of interacting with dads of daughters, I have discovered that men thrive when they talk with other dads who struggle with their girls in similar ways. Through the process of discussing honestly what's really happening at home, I've noticed that some of the false guilt that seems to unconsciously build up begins to diminish. Even more, men simultaneously feel less alone while many of these interpersonal realities are normalized.

As we talked about ways to connect even when it's hard, I

shared that adolescent girls, in particular, may not always like physical touch from their dads because they may be embarrassed if their friends are watching or might think they're too old for cuddling, hugging or hand-holding.

But I suggested that especially during stressful times, what their daughters really might need is a hug so that she feels wrapped in safe arms that are holding her when she's overwhelmed with life. And this isn't just my opinion; it's actually backed up by research, which states that when we give or receive a hug it releases oxytocin in our brains, an antidote to the effect of cortisol, the stress hormone.

Since they were still tracking with me, I continued.

"Dads, it's vital for you to consistently find ways to connect with your daughters, both inside and outside your homes, because daughters need their dads to teach them what safe touch feels like (in ways that honor her individual wiring—with some wanting less physical touch and others preferring more). Make sure to never pull away and detach during those harder years or your daughter will be left to wonder why she's not worth your time and energy."

It was then that I described the importance of appropriate physical touch and I actually meant to say the words, "public display of affection" (.). But it was one of those times where my words got mixed up, and instead, what came out of my mouth was, "public display of connection!" (which I'm now referring to as ".").

I love when "happy mistakes" like that happen because those words have stayed with me ever since. This has led me now to ponder the question: What would it look like if every dad consistently initiated points of healthy physical connection with his daughter in public places where life is on display?

For me, one of the best ways my dad and I share “.” is during our annual Perfume Day event every December (which you well know by now if you’ve been reading my blogs for any length of time). It’s one of the highlights of my year where we get dressed up, go out to lunch and my dad treats me to perfume at Nordstrom. More importantly, it’s special that my dad enters into the whole experience with absolute joy. And it never gets old to have multiple female sales clerks say that they wish their dad would do something similar with them.

And yes, my dad and I walk hand in hand (or arm in arm) around the store. I feel comfortable with this kind of public display of connection because it says my dad loves me and values me—and vice versa!

It seems to me that if every dad figured out a way to publicly demonstrate relational connection to his daughter, she would feel his love in a way that would go straight to her heart. And she would know that her dad wants the world to know that he’s proud and grateful to be her father. (Additional benefit: it gives a message to boys that this girl has a dialed-in dad!).

We as girls thrive when we feel connected to the people we love. And we wither when there’s disconnect. Just notice the amount of time your daughter spends in the center of relational crises and it will prove my point. Either her own drama or the drama of her friends takes her away from staying balanced.

I truly believe that every daughter needs her dad even when she doesn’t always know that he’s what she needs. In fact, a daughter sometimes pushes her dad away while secretly wishing he’d not give up, even when she makes him work to connect with her emotionally and relationally.

Dad, it’s up to you to take the initiative to connect with

your daughter's heart. You have the responsibility as her father to find a way to reach her. I know it's not always easy, especially when you feel disrespected or ignored, yet that doesn't excuse you from still needing to move towards her.

As we head into this busy month of December, be the dad who finds a way to publicly put your love for your daughter on display in ways that let her know she's one of your greatest loves. {eoa}

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