

What I've Learned About Fathering From HGTV's Chip Gaines

I wish there were some kind of reward system in our country for fathers who step up to the plate and hit it out of the ballpark as a dad. In fact, I'm presently thinking about how to actually make that happen!

In the meantime, I'll continue writing about admirable fathers on my blog while highlighting what they're doing right.

Of course, you know by now that I'm highly attuned to watching relationships between dad and daughters. Even when I'm not trying to notice, I notice. It seems that no matter where I am—in a grocery store or at the mall or even at church—my eyes and ears are conditioned to observe the way dads interact with their kids, as well as the way their kids respond back. I truly believe that their interactions in public say a lot about what goes on in private, at home.

I've spent the better part of a year paying attention to and admiring one particularly dialed-in dad on TV. His name is Chip Gaines. He's married to his co-host, decorating genius Joanna, and the show is called *Fixer-Upper*. They have a magical gift of taking the least desirable house in the most desirable neighborhood and turning it into their client's dream home. And they really do!

However, as impressive as their construction and restoration skills are, there is something I find much more remarkable. It's a combination of the fun, positive and respectful way they relate to each other as husband and wife *and* the way they beautifully parent their four adorable young children: two boys and two girls.

With a Twitter following of almost a half-million between them, clearly I'm not the only one who is drawn like a magnet to this incredible couple.

I think one of the reasons America has fallen in love with them is that the way they relate to one another is contagious. I find myself wanting to know them personally while wishing somehow that I could transport myself into the center of their family dynamics.

As I have watched Chip interact with his children, I have noticed a number of qualities and behaviors that I think every dad would be wise to emulate.

Here's a summary of what I've gleaned from watching Chip Gaines:

1. This dad really likes and enjoys his kids. He clearly loves talking with them, laughing with them, playing with them, even wrestling and rough housing with them, especially when he morphs into a human jungle gym. It's obvious that his children *feel* his positivity and his delight in being their dad.

2. His kids feel comfortable being themselves around him. They appear to be fully engaged in life when dad is there. They jump and run, twirl and dance, explore and take risks, ask questions and follow directions. I guess you could say that they get to be kids who have fun being kids without fear of dad forcing them to grow up before their time.

3. This dad sets limits for his kids. At various times all four kids are instructed by dad to do or not do things. He says "yes" and "no" to their requests. He provides boundaries by guiding them in both indoor and outdoor activities.

4. His kids follow dad's lead by respecting each other. Of course, we all know that there are edits to the final version of each episode, yet a consistent theme I've noticed is that

his children treat each other is in like kind to the way he treats their mom. Additionally, the way he relates to and honors them parallels the way they relate to and honor each other. Once again, more is caught than taught.

5. This dad listens to his kids. He looks into their eyes when he talks to them or when they talk to him. And he responds to their questions with answers that are spoken with kindness and are age appropriate. What matters to them matters to him.

6. His kids are given opportunities to enter into dad's world. Whether it's coming to a job site, going on an errand or getting to help dad with a project, Chip lets his kids get up close and personal to see what his life is about. He invites them to look at and take part in that which is important to him, in work and in play.

7. This dad never speaks with harshness to his kids. Again, I realize that editing is potentially king here, but repeatedly all four of them are relaxed and calm in dad's presence. They appear to have no fear that dad may yell or react, even if they make a mistake. They aren't shamed or criticized, but are redirected and corrected when necessary. As a result, their naïve and vulnerable childlikeness is refreshingly evident as they spontaneously interface with life as it unfolds under dad's care.

8. His kids are invited to grow and become responsible one event at a time. Because children learn by doing and actively participating as they learn life lessons, this dad goes the extra mile to make that happen. Whether buying chickens as a practical way to teach them how to tend to life on a farm or selling the eggs of said chickens, these kids are on the path to entrepreneurship, all because of dad's intentional fathering style that engages them first hand in the areas that he believes will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

9. This dad loves his kids' mom. The real, apparent love Chip

has for his wife is literally transmitted through the airwaves from Waco, Texas, to every viewer's home. I don't know how that can happen but it does. When a dad loves his children's mother, it gives his kids a sense of security and safety that frees them up to thrive and truly be themselves without worry that life as they know it may crumble or falter. *This is a powerful gift from a dad to his kids.* (Even if a marriage has already ended, a dad can still choose not to speak negatively about his child's mother).

10. His kids follow dad's lead in honoring his faith traditions. From inviting his children to kneel on the dirt road to their home to dedicate their farm to God or praying before a meal, it's clear that these little apples haven't fallen far from the tree. The gratitude that dad has for the life God has given him is emulated by his four children who respect dad enough to readily follow his example.

Thank you, Chip Gaines, for taking your television show about remodeling houses and actually using it to teach us what it looks to remodel a home—on the inside—one that has love and respect, boundaries and fun.

Thank you for giving a hands-on demonstration to dads in America (should they watch your show, that is!) of what it looks like to be a father who pursues the heart of his wife and his children intentionally and consistently.

And thank you for revealing that it takes a lot more than brick and mortar, shiplap and paint to make a house a home. For when a dad truly loves and leads his family, everyone wins. {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 nine-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.

For the original article, visit .