

What to Do When Daughter Disaster Strikes

The scariest news a dad can hear is that your daughter's innocence has been stolen. Perhaps she was raped after a "roofie" slipped into her drink, or her virginity was taken by a more experienced boyfriend—or man.

Or maybe she was sexually assaulted, abused or traumatized by a relative, teacher or neighbor.

Dads can hardly imagine allowing their underage daughter to date, let alone imagine the unthinkable. But when daughter disaster strikes, what can a dad do? While pulling out a shotgun, clenching fists or mentally rehearsing a tortuous revenge may seem like a good idea, it's not.

Helplessness, hurt, anger and sadness will settle in. But the Bible—in particular, Jesus—offers some guidance. In my years of counseling wounded young ladies and dads, I've seen the despair and frustration caused by rape, overdose, divorce and other daughter disasters. Fortunately, we serve an all-powerful, all-knowing God who is trustworthy.

From this premise—and from my experience—I offer the following outline to help dads deal with trauma associated with their daughters:

1. Know that God knows. We live in a sinful world. Bad things happen to good people. Good people make bad decisions. It's seen over and over in the Bible. God gave us free will so we would choose to follow his ways. Still, we all choose unwisely at times. But that doesn't change God's love for us. He knows us and our situations better than we do.

Where is God when we are sinning? Is He with us or apart? He's with you. He's grieving too.

In John 4, Jesus knew the Samaritan woman at the well had not one, but five husbands. He knew her. He knew what she needed—living water. He knew she needed forgiveness, and He delivered grace and truth to her. We'll come back to these in a minute.

2. Know the sexual identity slide. Victims of sexual abuse, even consensual sex, are reeling inside. Like the Samaritan woman, our daughters wrestle with the question “Am I worthy of love?” Their sexual identity is constantly being defined by our society. One example is “princess” movies that feed into the idea they must be “beautiful” to be worthy of a prince’s love. Their sexuality can come from this twisted, cultural math that their dignity is equal to quantity or quality of men who desire them.

Too often, the daughter is actually using men as much as men use her, in order to build her identity as a beautiful, desirable woman. This can lead to an unhealthy perspective of men, which can get projected onto dads themselves. It’s a mental and sexual bondage that can lead to hyper-sexuality or hypo-sexuality to turn away all men.

Here’s the downward sexual identity slide dads need to know: Your daughter’s self-perception that she’s not worthy of men’s love can breed a fear. Her fear produces anxiety. Anxiety needs relief. She may start a quest for relief. This quest for relief can come in many forms, including what she wears to get attention, an overt flirtatiousness or vulnerability to risky situations with men.

This can lead to sexual trauma. The trauma creates strongholds in the mind that continue to impact her self-perception. Her self-perception is degraded. She may continue to lower herself and standards to feel better. The cycle continues: She feels dirty and guilty and, because she doesn’t want to feel that way, she does it again. This can lead to sexual distortion. That was bad, so she feels bad.

So, she may continue to try again, with hopes she will feel good. It's all a clever distortion of the truth from the enemy that promotes moral darkness, a space where anger and rebellion are free to traffic. Her purity is lost, emotional infrastructure is weakened and a stronghold is established.

But the slide doesn't have to go that far.

3. Know your role. Dads and daughters may need professional counseling to deal with the range of strong emotions, mental struggles and related issues to address the trauma. But dads must know they played a role in their daughters' sexual identity development. Dads must take ownership of their own behaviors in order to understand their impact on their daughters' lives.

To handle a crisis, we can take a page from how Jesus dealt with the Samaritan women and proceed in grace and truth.

▪ Grace

When discussing the disaster with your daughter, come from a place of grace. Recognize that we all fall short. We're all human. Welcome to the club. That's why we know and love Jesus. He's the friend and forgiver of sinners. Create an environment of safety by *acknowledging* similar vulnerability.

Parents are under the same rules. *Admit* that dads are vulnerable to sexual temptation as well. Dads are *under authority* as well, and they can't go around doing whatever they want to do, or else they hurt people. We all need the living water Jesus offered the Samaritan woman. We are all a work in progress and need *accountability*.

▪ Truth

Now a few ground rules: Have a dialogue, not a diatribe. Don't condone, but don't condemn. Seek to connect rather than withdraw. Lead with forward-thinking convictions, not looking

backward with condemnation.

Now, *recognize the trauma and respond to the reality* of the situation—to what she did, what happened, and how that relates to her identity. You may ask, how was it after? Did you get what you were looking for? Did you find respect or regret? Dignity or guilt?

If she falls on the regretful side, her sexual identity may be sliding. Regardless, by talking in grace and truth, she may be able to see both the consequences and you differently.

Next Steps

- Make amends with God and your daughter. Encourage her to do the same to God and you. Study the Bible about strongholds, and break those chains.
- For her sake, avoid public humiliation. Working with grace, you have to decide to create a safe place and pursue private healing. Particularly for teenagers, avoid public humiliation at school or church, which can get ugly quickly.
- Seek support. Enlist prayerful support without giving details. You and your daughter may benefit from finding one healthy person to confide in, for example, a counselor or pastor at church. If you know the young man who stole your daughter's purity, you may approach his parents to let them know what happened and how it has affected your family. His parents will take it from there.
- Finally, dads need to let their daughters know that they are worthy of love. They don't need someone else's attention to define them. Dads need to step it up, be available, treat your daughters as the gifts they are and prepare them for marriage by being a healthy, loving husband and father at home.

Kenny Luck, founder of Every Man Ministries, men's pastor at

Saddleback Church, and ChristianMingle advisory board member, provides biblically oriented teaching and leadership for men and pastors seeking relevant, timely material that battle cultural, worldly concepts threatening men and God's men. Follow Kenny and Every Man Ministries on Facebook, Twitter (@everyMM) and YouTube.

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