

Why I Sometimes Feel Sorry for You as a Dad

So Dad, I know that you don't always have it easy when it comes to trying to understand your daughter. As a girl myself, I can truly say that much of the time we think you can tell what we're feeling or needing or wanting just because mom does and it seems obvious to us that you should be able to figure us out, too.

That's where my heart goes out to you, because I really do know that the art of mind reading isn't something that's taught in any Martian courses I've ever heard of! (Reference: *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*). It's really not fair to you that we expect you to "get us" without us giving you any help or guidance. So here's my attempt at putting words to some of what I believe is going on between you and your girl.

My summary of what I see when it comes to male-female communication dynamics is simply this:

Men read ON the lines while women read BETWEEN the lines.

Men tend to be straightforward and say what they mean, and mean what they say. Not a lot of hidden agendas or hidden meanings. In fact, this is why most men are exhausted just trying to keep up with all the possible meanings that we women give to events, relationships, situations, themselves, outcomes, et cetera.

Women, on the other hand, tend to pretty much read into *everything*. This is just how we're wired. It's a DNA thing, I guess you could say, because every woman I know has this same behavior going on. We try to rise above, yet deep down we're always wondering if your tone or look or inflection or mood or stance—basically anything and everything that's

going on with you—could possibly mean that you're mad or unhappy with us. We women excel at looking under, over, alongside, and through every conversation, every look, every voice inflection, and every facial expression.

When it comes to daughters and dads, daughters are constantly reading between the lines of their interactions (or lack of) with their dads. Whether there's a lot of interaction, little interaction, no interaction, reactive interaction, humorous interaction, or loving interaction, every single girl is interpreting every single interaction, good or bad, between her and her dad.

She is continually sorting out who she is and where she's going in life. She's constantly wondering if she is "this enough" or "that enough" while questioning whether she'll be able to keep up or make a difference or live out her own dreams for the future.

This is why her dad's reflection back to her about the "truest truth" of herself helps her to understand and know herself better.

Let me put it a bit more clearly ... in a way that is stated **on the lines, and not between them**:

- If you, dad, laugh at her jokes, she tells herself, ***"I'm funny."***
- If you discuss politics and world events with her, she tells herself, ***"I'm interesting."***
- If you draw her out, asking her opinion about a fact, theory or line of thought, she tells herself, ***"I'm knowledgeable."***
- If you ask for her help to fix something, she tells herself, ***"I'm capable."***
- If you ask her to help you brainstorm about buying a present for mom, she tells herself, ***"I'm clever."***
- If you applaud her for her achievements in sports,

grades, music or work, she tells herself, ***"I'm competent."***

- If you enthusiastically affirm her artistic endeavors, she tells herself, ***"I'm creative."***
- If you celebrate her academic prowess, she tells herself, ***"I'm smart."***
- If you actively listen to her while she is talking, she tells herself, ***"I'm engaging."***
- If you teach her to say "no" and then respect her boundaries, she tells herself, ***"I'm strong."***
- If you light up and brightly smile upon seeing her, she tells herself, ***"I'm delightful."***
- If you respect her opinions about topics ranging from literature to spiritual things, she tells herself, ***"I'm wise."***
- If you treat her with kindness, understanding, tenderness, and love, she tells herself, ***"I'm worthy."***

And on it goes. There is no end to the impact on a daughter from the messages her dad gives her.

The bottom line is this:

Head, or cerebral, interactions rest ON the lines.

(they are predictable, factual, informative, and content-driven)

Heart interactions rest BETWEEN the lines.

(they are intuitive, connected, emotional, sensitive, and heartfelt)

The clearer a dad's positive messages are to his daughter, the less reading between the lines she will need to do. She will thrive as she knows and feels that her father delights in her.

Why is this? Because when a girl *feels* her dad's heart turned toward her, she believes there is nothing she can't do because her father knows best. She then is free to be all she was

created to be.

Let this day be one where you make a decision to grow in reading between the lines of your daughter's life by getting closer to her heart space to hear what she's saying.

Practically speaking, this could look simply like affirming her when she least expects it or choosing to write her a note to encourage her "just because" or even surprising her at school with her favorite coffee drink or smoothie to let her know she's your treasure and you are so glad to be her dad.

These action steps, my friend, will go a long way toward helping you read between the lines in your daughter's life because you'll be targeting her heart needs in ways that speak loud and clear to her.

And the more you practice reading between her lines, the clearer her headlines will become. {eo}

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.