**5 Needs of Daughters**

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Relating to daughters doesn't come natural to many of us, but we can learn to connect in an affirming way. We testosterone-filled males can relate well to girls, and it doesn't require a huge adjustment in our approach. We have so much potential power to influence their self-esteem, their independence, and their healthy body image. Many experts are even finding that our masculine approach is a big benefit with daughters, not a hindrance.

Here are five key things that daughters need from their dads, based on research among several thousand dads:

**GUIDANCE**

As a girl matures, she comes to some significant crossroads. There are important life decisions ahead, and she needs the benefits of her dad's life experiences and wisdom as she considers options and thinks through possible consequences of her choices. We might tend to think more about guiding our sons, and letting Mom have those important talks with our daughters. But girls need their dad's perspective as well.

First, guiding means **discerning** what's right in the midst of all the gray areas in our culture. Young women are under a lot of pressure to look, act, and be a certain way-to maintain a certain image. They also face expectations in regard to their future aspirations. Often, we men can bring an analytical approach to help clarify the picture and guide them along.

We can also guide through **correction**. Guidance really is the ultimate goal of discipline. Enforcing limits and consequences is important, but especially with daughters we need to make sure we're also communicating about why they're being corrected, and letting them know clearly that, though their behavior may be unacceptable, we will always love and accept them as our children.

We also guide our daughters through **teaching**. That doesn't mean you have permission to start lecturing your daughter. Especially when they are teenagers, kids rarely learn from a lecture. Instead, be actively involved in helping her learn-accompanying her and assisting her in her adventures and pursuits.

**ENCOURAGEMENT**

When it comes to our daughters' self-image, we're a huge influence-and it goes deeper than appearance. Girls feel pressure to be smart, thin, pretty, and involved in certain activities. We have the ability to make our daughters feel beautiful, inside and out.

First, we need to ***become comfortable affirming them verbally***-giving thoughtful, clear, specific blessings that say, "You can do it," or simply, "I love you." That does include pointing out beautiful physical features, but it's so much more. Compliment character qualities like emotional strength, a sense of humor, loyalty, intelligence and courage. Most of all, make it clear that, even without those features, you'd still love her just as much.

***Get involved in her pursuits***. Show that she is worth investing your time and energy. Spend time just hanging out together, and be intentional about bringing fun and humor to her life.

***Demonstrate confidence in her abilities***. You might share something you're working on and ask her opinion, or give her a challenging assignment and express trust that she can handle it. One woman who's an engineer told me, "Dad demonstrated that there was nothing I couldn't do because I was a girl." If your daughter knows that you think of her as a future achiever, that can change her whole outlook on the future.

**COMFORT**

Moms are great at giving comfort, but our daughters need it from us as well. The ability to comfort can be a huge asset to our relationships with our daughters-especially after a disappointment or a heated confrontation. If you have a tense relationship with your daughter, it isn't easy to dive in and start comforting her. But you can start building a foundation for that acceptance and comfort by working on these three areas:

First, ***allow her to express her feelings***. It may sound obvious, but too few daughters feel an open acceptance from their dads. She needs freedom to express what she's thinking, all the while knowing that you will respond calmly and not overreact, even when she has made a mistake. It's so important to build the kind of relationship that encourages her to come to you with anything that's on her heart.

Second, and closely related to the first, ***actively listen to her***. Allowing her to express herself won't make a difference if you don't make the effort to draw her out, ask clarifying questions, clear your mind of preconceptions, read her voice inflections and body language, and keep listening for the heart of her concern.

And third, ***respond with empathy***. It's often a dad's first reaction to try to fix the problem or launch into a lecture to make sure she has learned her lesson. But what she really needs is empathy. Simply express sadness or concern for what she is going through. It lets her know you are there for her, it will help you short-circuit your anger or disappointment and help you avoid a meltdown, and it will better prepare you to take action, if needed, to help your daughter.

**VISION**

Vision has to do with the attitudes a dad conveys about who his daughter is and what she can become. If we're negative or even uncertain about our daughters' future, that can be devastating. For example, a dad might tell his daughter, "Don't worry about doing well in geometry; it might be over your head." It's likely she'll associate math with inadequacy-and maybe all her classes will suffer.

Or he might say, "Go easy on the sweets, Honey. You know boys don't date overweight girls." There's a good chance she will prove him right. Or, she may become obsessed with proving him wrong and take any measures to be thin. Or, going a step further, she might throw herself at the first boy that shows her some positive attention.

Our daughters' ability to achieve their potential depends in part on our resolve to appreciate them and cast a positive vision for their future. In practical terms, we can watch and take note of a daughter's gifts and aspirations. Or just ask her, "What are your dreams?" Then be ready to listen and encourage her.

Dads can also "speak destiny" to their daughters by making positive comments that are specific to them. We don't want to place expectations on them, but cast a hopeful vision. You might say, "You have such a sensitive heart. I wouldn't be surprised if you end up helping a lot of people in your lifetime." It needs to be honest and from the heart. Just tell her that her future has great things in store. Write her short notes or e-mails where you affirm her and talk about your hopes for her life.

In many little ways, our daughters are asking us, "What am I good at, Dad? What do you see in me?" We need to be ready with words of hope and promise.

**PROTECTION**

We typically think of protection as defending our daughters' physical safety, but there are also emotional, moral and spiritual dangers out there. If we're fulfilling our role, our girls will have a sense security even when we can't personally be there to protect them.

First, ***be aware and guard against the many forces that could threaten her***. There are people who could try to lure her into a destructive lifestyle, or to follow a world-view that doesn't match with your values. Not to mention the violence and sex on TV, the Internet, in music and movies. You have to be aware and ready to take appropriate action.

Second, ***prepare her to handle dangerous situations***. We can't always be there, but teaching our daughters skills is another way of protecting them. We can talk through scenarios and help them think through appropriate responses-whether it's calling 9-1-1 or changing a flat tire. Or conversations like, "What happens when you lie to a friend?" Or, "What do you suppose a teenage boy is thinking about when your friend wears an outfit like that?" We should prepare them to handle an uncomfortable dating situation, or an adult who does something inappropriate. We need to teach them how to say "no."

And the last one is simply ***prayer***. The thought of protecting our daughters should be humbling, because we can't always be with them, and we can't anticipate every danger. But we can seek God's protection daily for our daughters.

Dad, you are a tremendous and vital resource to meeting these five needs in the life of your daughter. These needs are not limited by age, but manifest themselves in heart of a little girl and continue on throughout her adult life-even in her own marriage relationship.

**Essay by a 5-year-old girl:**

My dad makes fun food, like Malt-o-Meal, and then dyes it green and says it's because of grasshopper guts or something like that.

**Essay by a girl in 9th grade:**

Although we have a firm foundation, there is one thing I'd like to hear more of . . . I wish he would say that he loves me more often. I know he does through his actions, I mean what kind of dad would do all this for someone he didn't love? But every night before I go to bed, I say, "Night, Dad. Love you. See you in the morning." And he says, "Uh huh." I wish sometimes he would say I love you back.

**Essay by a girl in 12th grade:**

From as far back as I can remember, my dad has always been my hero, the person I look up to for one reason or another. He was the first person who taught me to dance... He would take my hand in his, escort me onto the dance floor... tell me to place my feet on his, and then we would begin to dance. He would sweep me across the dance floor, and my feet would never even touch the ground. He made me feel like the most special girl out there, even if I was only four years old... To this day he still saves me a dance, and although I'm all grown up now, it's just as magical as when I was four years old. One thing's for sure: he'll always be my dad, and I'll always be his little girl.

**Essay by a girl in 4th grade:**

If I had to pick a grandfather out of all the grandfathers in the world, I couldn't have picked a better one. Sometimes as a joke I'll put my stinky socks in his briefcase, so at work the next day he'll think of me! My grandpa makes me feel that I can do anything if I put my mind to it. He makes me feel special and loved.