**Your Daughters Need Your Affection**

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Little girls are cute. Boys are cute too, but it seems natural to cuddle little girls more than boys and, in fact, parents do tend to pick up and hold daughters more than sons. But before you know it, your little girl has become a young woman, and nurturing her isn't easy, but more like scary. Now you're a little edgy around her, and careful not to do anything that could be misinterpreted in any way. But your daughter is still yearning for your affection and approval.

More and more research is confirming that a woman's sense of worth as a woman, and as a person, is commonly rooted in her experience with her father.

**Demonstrate It With Touch**

Every father needs to engage his children physically. Maybe he takes little Janie and flips her up over his head, holding on to her only by her ankle. Janie shrieks with delight and says, "Do it again, Daddy" for as long as he will. And as the children grow older, that squeeze on the shoulder, pat on the back, or tousle of the hair from Dad helps to create an atmosphere of comfort and security.

Studies have proven that physical touch makes us feel better both physiologically and psychologically. But children-especially daughters-need more than just everyday gestures given in passing.

Our purposeful physical affection will help to create an emotional bond with our daughters. We can "say" things with a hug, a gentle touch, or a kiss on the cheek that we can't say with words, and our daughters desperately need these displays of affection.

Maybe this makes you uneasy. Here's something that could make you even more uncomfortable. In one study, promiscuous men and women told researchers that their sexual activity is merely a way of satisfying yearnings to be touched and held. If a girl's needs for affection aren't met by her father, she may become frustrated, and may eventually give in to the boy at school who is all-too-willing to "meet all her needs."

**Listen to Her**

As a father, there are many things you want to tell your daughter-about boys, about relationships, about life. But you have to earn the right to speak by listening first. Your daughter is moving through some confusing emotions, and needs to be assured that we all experience strange feelings from time to time, and that you'll continue to love her no matter what. She wants to be heard, and if all her father does is lecture, she'll grow frustrated and probably seek out other people who will lis-ten and offer their counsel-and there's no way of knowing what they'll tell her.

The father who has worked on being a sensitive listener will reap the benefits of his daughter's trust; he'll be the natural person to go to when she has questions about boys or men. She needs to hear your ideas and feelings about relationships, and even about sexuality.

Promoting open verbal interaction with your daughter will enable you to give her a male perspective on her questions or problems. When she comes home from the football game crying because Kevin walked right by her without even smiling or waving, you may be able to help her understand what Kevin may have been thinking-but be sure you have listened long enough to accurately understand her situation before diving in with advice.

**Model Positive Masculinity**

As a girl tries to figure out what men are like, the first one she watches is her father. He can be one very significant example of a man who is consistent, trustworthy, and sensitive to feelings, who places his family at a high priority on his schedule, who keeps his promises, and who invests his energies in the lives of those around him.

With such a positive reference point, she'll learn what to expect from the men she meets. You can bet she'll meet plenty of men who are dishonest, irresponsible, and chauvinistic, and she'll be able to see through them right from the start.

**Model Healthy Behavior Toward Women**

If you avoid showing your daughter approval and affection--even though you may just be exercising caution-she may think you don't care, or that something's wrong with her. What is and isn't appropriate when men are present? How will men respond when she "flirts" for attention? As her father, you're a kind of first boyfriend, and you play a large role in showing her what a proper, respectful male response sounds and feels like.

So fall all over yourself and gush with pride when she walks down in her new dress, or when she does something that is especially charming. But make it clear that she has won your heart not with her looks and feminine charms, but because she is a unique, gifted and worthwhile person. If your daughter learns at home that she is accepted and appreciated for her personal qualities, because of who she is as your daughter, she will be much less likely to feel the need to earn love from men through physical means.

**ACTION POINTS**

* Call ahead, get dressed up, and take her out on a date.
* Take her shopping (really!) and do your best to identify her unique tastes.
* Tell her she is beautiful inwardly. Point out some specific examples.
* Discuss with her mother at what age you will let her begin wearing make-up.
* Do a practice job interview. Guide her through the process, then hire her.
* When your teen-age daughter breaks up with her boyfriend, take her to dinner and let her know that there's a man in her life who will always love and accept her.
* Ask her what she enjoys doing with you, and then set a time to do it together.
* Point out the signs you see that she's growing into a woman.
* Tickle her (but don't let it go too far).