

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



Dads & delightful daughters

The father-daughter relationship is precious, and needs to be carefully nurtured. Girls learn many things from their dads including how they should be treated by other males.

The relationship that a man has with his daughter is very precious. Most dads, by nature, are protective of their daughters. They'll often push their sons and be more critical than they are of their daughters. Daughters can be a soft touch for many dads, that's not so bad.

The notion of a father who is **at home** and **available** affords a sense of **security** for girls, even if the only protective behaviours men actually indulge in are the removal of the occasional spider from the bedroom wall or reassurances that children are safe from things that go bump in the night.

There aren't too many hairy mammoths roaming the 'burbs these days, so a man's capacity to protect his brood is severely limited. A man can only do so much!

The real value of fathers in girls' lives is less tangible but more far-reaching. It's from fathers that girls learn their major lessons about the world of males. In a sense, fathers teach their daughters how they should expect to be treated by males when they get older.

The message for a father is simple – **be gentle, be respectful** and **allow your daughters to be assertive towards you** (without being a pushover). This will help them form respectful loving relationships with other men throughout their lives.



Fathers can struggle with teen daughters

Fathers often have special relationships with their young daughters, but they can struggle when they move into adolescence. Interestingly, many girls describe how a previously close relationship with their father evaporates at this time.

Coming to terms with a daughter's sexuality is a problem for many dads which is often reflected in a lack of physical contact (many dads stop hugging their daughters once they reach puberty) and sometimes sheer panic ('you're not wearing that outside this house!') if his adolescent daughter appears seductive.

Dads need to do two things

The language of fathering is often very physical. Many of the lessons we teach, and our interactions with both boys and girls are through games, play and shared activity. That's great, but you are in trouble as a dad, if all your interactions are basically non-verbal. Let's face it, you can't tickle your fifteen year-old daughter under the arm pits and wrestle her to the ground like you may have done with a five year old girl. Do that, and you'll probably hear the term 'wrack off' sooner than you can shake a stick!

First thing to do: Make sure you get into the habit of talking with your girls before they reach adolescence. That means spending a little one-on-one time with them without being too playful.

Second thing to do: Make sure you have a shared interest so you have something to talk about when they move into adolescence and a whole different world than the one you inhabit.

The saving grace for me with both my girls during some turbulent teen years was our shared love of sport, AFL football, in particular. We'd sometimes go to a football game together, but more importantly, we had something to talk about, joke about ('your team is so &%#!') or put a friendly bet on when all my other attempts to connect failed. **A common interest can give a dad an entry point into an adolescent girl's world, and relieve you of the burden of having to find something to talk about.**

I also believe that when a dad shares a real passion with his daughter she is more likely to adopt it than a son will.

But a girl will only adopt her dad's passions if she respects him and he has played an active part in her life.

Being a dad of daughters can be tricky but active involvement, respectful treatment, the habit of talking as well as playing, and a shared interest are simple strategies that will help you stay in the game when your girls become teens.