

Creekside Psychology Ltd.

Dr. Gregory Pickering, Ph.D.
Registered Psychologist, CAP No. 1745

Strengthening Father-Daughter Relationships

By Linda Nielsen

Why should teachers, counselors, and parents pay more attention to father-daughter relationships? Because, throughout her lifetime, a daughter is profoundly affected by the kind of relationship she has with her father—often more so than by her relationship with her mother. The girl who grows up having a comfortable, communicative, supportive relationship with her father generally has advantages over other girls when it comes to:

- Academic achievement and future jobs and incomes—especially in areas related to science, math, and technology;
Avoiding teenage pregnancy and early marriage;
Being self-confident and self-reliant;
Setting long-term goals;
Avoiding emotionally or physically abusive relationships;
- Resisting peer pressure to have premature sex, smoke, drink alcohol, or take drugs;
Not being overly dependent on boys in order to feel good about herself;
Asserting her opinions and standing up for her beliefs;
Dealing well with people in authority (teachers, employers, etc.);
A willingness to try new things and accept challenging tasks; and
Having less chance of becoming depressed or developing an eating disorder.

So what can parents, teachers, and counselors do to help fathers and daughters create more meaningful, more personal, more communicative relationships?

1. Spread the word: Stop demeaning or dismissing dads

Our first step is to get the message across to everyone in the school and in the family that the father-daughter relationship is vital and needs to be appreciated and strengthened. We need to help others recognize the many demeaning, demoralizing beliefs they hold about fathers—beliefs that hurt father-daughter relationships. One way to raise awareness is to distribute the quiz—especially to fathers and to daughters.

2. Encourage more father-daughter time

We can also help daughters and fathers strengthen their relationships by seeing to it that they spend more time alone with each other—time without other family members around. As fathers and daughters spend more private time with one another, they have more opportunities to communicate honestly and comfortably about meaningful, personal matters. Not only mothers and stepmothers must be helped to feel more comfortable with this idea; teachers and counselors must also

realize that it's not weird or strange or inappropriate for a father and daughter to spend time alone with each other, even during the daughter's teenage years.

Here is one way fathers and daughters can become more comfortable spending time alone with each other and get to know one another on a more personal level. As a daughter, ask your father to choose 10 pictures of himself from different times in his life—especially his childhood and teenage years. Be sure to ask him to include a picture of his father. Then ask him to spend an hour telling you stories about the pictures—in a quiet place where the two of you can talk privately.

3. Help daughters develop positive relationships with their fathers

As a parent, teacher, or counselor, you are in a position to help daughters understand how important their relationships with their fathers are and to help them recognize the ways in which they may be pushing their fathers away. Suggest that daughters take the quiz in order to see how they may or may not be sharing those parts of themselves that will encourage more open and communicative relationships with their fathers.

Parents in particular—both moms and dads—can strengthen father-daughter relationships in the following ways:

Be sure dad spends at least two hours a week alone with his daughter.

Watch movies together about positive father-daughter relationships: *Fly Away Home*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*, etc.

Read books that show fathers being just as competent as mothers in parenting their daughters. Books may include *I Live with Daddy*, by Judith Vigna; *Night Shift Daddy*, by Eileen Spinelli; and *Two Old Potatoes and Me*, by John Coy.

Watch commercials together with your daughter and talk about the ones that make the father look stupid or incompetent.

Using these tools can do a lot to raise awareness of the importance of father-daughter relationships and help families create these loving and powerful bonds.

Linda Nielsen, Ed.D., is a nationally recognized expert on father-daughter relationships. An adolescent psychologist and college professor for more than 30 years, she has taught the only college course in the country devoted exclusively to father-daughter relationships. Her work has been widely cited in The Christian Science Monitor, on National Public Radio, and in a public television documentary on fathers and daughters released in June 2005. Nielsen is the author of Embracing Your Father: How to Build the Relationship You've Always Wanted with Your Dad (McGraw-Hill, 2004).

Fathers and Daughters: Eye Opening Facts

By Dr. Linda Neilsen © 2004



We strengthen father-daughter relationships by making ourselves aware of the facts and freeing ourselves from the demeaning myths about men as parents. Recent national statistics and research from the most well respected experts in psychology and sociology, show that.....

Fathers generally have as much or more impact as mothers in the following areas of their daughters' lives: (1) achieving academic and career success—especially in math and science (2) creating a loving, trusting relationship with a man (3) dealing well with people in authority—especially men (4) Being self-confident and self-reliant (5) Being willing to try new things and to accept challenges (6) Maintaining good mental health (no clinical depression, eating disorders, or chronic anxiety) (7) Expressing anger comfortably and appropriately—especially with men

Because our society emphasizes the importance of mother-daughter relationships more than father-daughter relationships, most fathers and daughters do not ever get to know one another as well or spend as much time together throughout their lives as most mothers and daughters.

Most children's books, TV programs, and movies send the message that fathers and daughters are not supposed to know each other as well or spend as much time together as mothers and daughters.

Daughters who are raised by single fathers are just as well adjusted and as happy as daughters raised by single mothers.

Fathers and daughters are usually closer when the mother works full time outside the home while the children are growing up.

Most fathers want to spend more time with their children, but can't because of their jobs.

Realities: (1) Eighty percent of the fathers in our country earn most of the money for their families. (2) Counting the time spent commuting, working, doing house and yard work, and being with the kids, the average father has 5 hours less free time each week than the average employed mother. (3) On average, employed fathers work 10 more hours a week than employed mothers.

A father usually has a closer relationship with his daughter when the mother lets everyone in the family know how much she appreciates his ways of parenting—especially if his way of parenting isn't exactly like hers.

A daughter has a better relationship with her father when her mother does not rely on her for advice or comfort on adult issues—especially issues involving the parents' relationship with each other.

When parents are unhappily married or divorced, the daughter is more likely to side with her mother and against her father.

Some mothers feel uncomfortable or jealous with the idea that their daughter might share as much time or as much personal information with her father as she does with her mother.

The mother who had a distant or unloving relationship with her own father is usually more jealous and more unsupportive of her daughter's having a close relationship with her father.



Dr. Linda Nielsen is the author of *Embracing Your Father: How to Strengthen Your Father-Daughter Relationship*. (McGraw Hill, March 2004) She is a professor at Wake Forest University and author of the 700-page textbook, *Adolescence: A contemporary View* which sold more than 60,000 copies. Having worked with adolescent and young-adult daughters for over 30 years, since 1990 she has been teaching the only college course in the country devoted exclusively to father-daughter relationships. Through her course she has helped hundreds of young women strengthen or reestablish their relationships with their fathers – especially daughters whose parents are divorced. The recipient of several awards for her research and writing, she conducts seminars and serves as a resource for fathers, daughters, and practitioners through her web site. www.wfu.edu/~nielsen.