

Dads and daughters

TIP SHEET

Relationship Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

Research shows that fathers are really important to their daughters. Daughters need Dads to help them learn about relationships, and the most important one she needs to learn about is the one with herself.

By being involved in your daughters' or stepdaughters' life and showing that you care for them, your relationship can thrive and they will more likely grow up to be strong, confident and self-respecting women.

Here are some suggestions to help you build your relationship with your daughter:

1. Engage with her

Don't let being busy or tired get in the way of spending time with your daughters. They need you to be actively involved in their world. You may need to be creative and disciplined to make this happen. Simply walking the dog with her or ensuring you're home for the evening meal conveys that you care.

2. Find ways to stay connected

If you struggle to connect with your daughters, or they feel alien to you (because now they're teenagers), it will help if you share a common interest. Think of what you both like doing. It might be a love of sport, music or bushwalking - or even doing the quiz or crossword in the newspaper. Then, even if you don't see eye to eye, you will have something to bring you together.

3. Schedule regular 'Dad dates'

Many fathering experts talk of the importance of having 'Dad dates'. This is one of the most powerful strategies for connecting with teenage girls. Take her out for lunch or buy a takeaway meal and head to the beach together. There are two rules for 'Dad dates' to be successful however - keep the mood light and friendly (this is not the time to raise prickly subjects), and no other adults or other kids.

4. Encourage her

Most Dads are understandably protective of their daughters, but this doesn't mean you should treat them like princesses. Her ability to extend herself, be brave and set goals starts early and starts with you.

Enjoy the outdoors together and do things that encourage her to be adventurous and build confidence. Go for a walk at night with a torch, teach her how to climb a tree, go bushwalking, have play fights and water fights. Girls benefit from rough and tumble play as much as boys.

5. Learn to be a good listener

Listening can be hard. It can be difficult for Dads to resist the urge to jump in and try to solve her problems or criticize her for her choices. But girls in particular often just want to be heard. Remember they can be 'feelings focused', and want to be understood. Try not to judge and be careful not to criticize her views. If it doesn't come easily, the most important thing to do is make an effort.

6. Demonstrate values that will support her

We know girls are often under huge pressure from social media to adopt values that don't necessarily support them. Dads are very powerful in establishing good values in girls, so talk to her about values such as kindness, respect, compassion, sexuality and dealing with peer pressure. Of course, it's important you model these yourself, as your daughter will be watching and learning from you.

7. Tell her often how much you value and love her

Every child is special, and knowing they are valued and loved for who they are builds their sense of worth. Girls in particular are very sensitive to how their father views them. They don't need to be top students or brilliant at sports, they just need to be appreciated for their uniqueness. You can help her feel special by identifying her specific strengths and encouraging her in them.

Most importantly, even if you feel awkward around your daughter, just making an effort is what matters. You are so important to your daughter and she will love that you are trying.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Dads and Daughters**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.