

# *The* Daddy Daughter *Connection*

## *Nurturing Sweet Father-Daughter Relationships*

Written by Jen Petty    Photography by Marisa Hugonnett & Jen Petty

**D**From the time my daughter was 18 months old until she was almost two and a half, I went to work full-time while my husband stayed home working on starting his own business. He got up with her each morning, fed her breakfast, and did her hair. He entertained her, played with her, took her to parks, and read to her. To this day, he still takes more joy in doing her hair - and is more patient with it - than me.

I credit that time together as a big reason the two of them are so close. She is definitely a "daddy's girl," but what does that really mean and how does a dad connect with his daughters at a time when family relationships are often squeezed out by the pressures of living in a non-stop world?

### **Building a Lasting Bond**

The image of "daddy's little girl" is not always positive. It often conjures up images of a spoiled princess who is forever doted on by her over-protective father who can't say no to the pleadings of his daughter.

A strong father-daughter relationship doesn't have to involve these stereotyped extremes, though. Rick Wertz, president of the Faithful Fathering Initiative in Texas, a group dedicated to supporting men in their role as fathers says, "A healthy father-daughter relationship is built on mutual respect and trust, requires intentional effort to continually grow in love, encouragement, and affirmation, and is one where doors are always open for opinions to be expressed."

Dr. Jay Bevan, a clinical psychologist in Sugar Land specializes in working with children and families. Perhaps more relevant, is the fact that he's also the father to an adolescent daughter. Bevan says that fathers and daughters connect because the temperament of a daughter is often a good fit with the temperament of her father. Wertz adds that there is a natural bond between fathers and daughters. "All daughters are daddy's girl until the dad gives her reason to turn elsewhere," he says.

### **Modeling a Healthy Relationship**

Bevan notes that father-daughter relationships are important because they set the model for how relationships should be throughout the daughter's life. One of the most important things, notes Bevan, is how the father treats the mother. "If he treats her with love, respect, and caring, the daughter grows up understanding how a healthy relationship should be and it contributes to her healthy expectations that she will one day date and marry a man that will treat her with the same respect."

Two other key factors work together to promote the father-daughter bond: time and focus. It's not enough to just spend time with the child by going to the child's activities or by being present physically. When fathers spend time with their daughters, Bevan stresses





**THE FJORDS – Johnny, Hannah, and Abigail**

*This daddy daughter trio stays connected by talking, playing, golfing, and hunting together. “We can talk about anything and he’s very supportive of everything I do,” says 15-year-old Hannah. Little sister Abigail, 11, loves her dad because he’s fun to be around and she thinks the two of them look and act alike. Johnny is most proud of Hannah’s amazing work ethic and her beautiful spirit as a person. He’s also very proud of Abigail’s wonderful personality and kind nature.*

Sugar Land dad, Johnny Fjord, with daughters, Hannah, 15, and Abigail, 11.

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**THE TELLERS – Douglas and Sarah**

*Daddy's girl, Sarah Teller, age 11, loves the time she spends with her dad and describes him as "loving" and "always on my side." Their family has been through some tough times, but both agree that has made them closer. "She is my first child and my only girl. We have a special bond." The Tellers enjoy playing sports, traveling, and cooking together.*

Douglas with Daughter Sarah, age 11. Sarah is a fifth grader at Sugar Mill Elementary



the importance of really focusing on the child without distractions, such as phones, emails, or television, so they know they are really getting 'you'.

Discipline is often misunderstood in families. Styles of discipline range from permissive to strict authoritarian. Fathers often don't know how "tough" they should be when they discipline their children, especially daughters. Wertz says, "Clear, understood, and consistent discipline done in love will serve the relationship, while inconsistent and unclear discipline done in anger will damage the relationship and may warp the daughter's perspective on what a healthy man-woman relationship looks like." When a father disciplines with love, says Wertz, respect increases.

## Making Time to Spend Together

Some fathers may face difficulty in finding the time they want to spend with their daughters due to divorce or separation. There are ways fathers can minimize the negative effects of this situation, though. "Be a consistent presence in her life," Wertz suggests. "Prioritize her in your life and confirm that by spending time with her. [Also], be prepared to have age-appropriate discussions about your relationship in marriage, what failed, and why - be real." On a spiritual note, Wertz adds that he believes praying for a daughter daily is important. "A dad's challenge is to be there for his children, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, as much as possible. When the physical and emotional opportunities are inhibited by outside influences, the spiritual presence through prayer will help bridge the gaps."

## A Daughter's Perspective

Relationships, as everyone knows, are a two-way street. As daughters begin to get older, the relationship they have with their father is partly their responsibility, and it sometimes becomes harder for adult or teenage daughters to connect with their fathers. Dr. Bevan says that as children mature, they go through a normal passage of understanding that their parents are people, too. Children need to understand

that a father isn't perfect and has strengths and weaknesses. "Be more accepting and understanding," counsels Bevan. "Learn how to approach your father in terms of his strengths and join him in the things he enjoys."

Wertz's daughter Amanda, 23, says, "Your dad still wants to protect and shelter you from the dangers of the real world as he did when you were little. It was just a lot easier to do when the solution was to scoop you up in his arms and hold you tight 'till you were all right. As you grow up, it becomes harder to talk about or even admit when things aren't going as planned, but your dad is still there and wants nothing more than to embrace you and help you find a solution." As final counsel to fathers,

Amanda says, "Don't let the line of communication fade. Always keep talking! Let your daughter know that you support her... Continue to be present and remind her that you'll always be there for her."

*Experts agree that dads are vital to the development of their daughter's self-esteem. Not only do they positively influence who she will select as a mate, daughters with a strong father figure are less likely to engage in promiscuous behavior.*

## Giving Her a Healthy Start

Rick Wertz has spent years researching father-daughter relationships and knows that the time fathers invest in their daughters has long-term consequences as a girl grows into adulthood. Women who have healthy relationships with their fathers, says Wertz, are more confident and self-motivated, more likely to do well in school and in their careers, and more likely to gain a healthy understanding of relationships with men. Girls with a successful father role model are also

more likely to succeed in their role as a mother and wife.

As the popular song by John Mayer suggests, "Fathers be good to your daughters. Daughters will love like you do." We could add, "Daughters be good to your fathers, too." If you have an inspirational story you'd like to share, email editor@sugarlandmagazine.com. **SLM**

*JEN PETTY is the editor of Sugar Land Magazine and loves watching her husband in his role as a father to their two daughters and one son.*



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**THE HERNANDEZ'S – Jorge and Lori**

*This dynamic father/daughter duo already have a super tight bond even though Lori is just two years old. "She's God's blessing," says Jorge. "We gave her the middle name 'Joy' because that is what she brings to everyone. Jorge says their most special moments are taking walks, playing at the playground, saying their prayers together, and reading bedtime stories.*

Jorge with his 2-year-old daughter Lori



# 7 WAYS to Be a Great Dad to Your Daughter

- 1 Pray for her and with her
- 2 Do fun activities together, whether it's going to get ice cream or see a movie
- 3 Exemplify a strong marriage relationship
- 4 Listen well and be someone she can talk to
- 5 Recognize and affirm her strengths and unique gifts
- 6 Spend quality time with her early on and regularly
- 7 Write her letters of encouragement for milestones like birthdays and high school graduation for her to keep forever

- Adapted from Rick Wertz, president of Faithful Fathering Initiative



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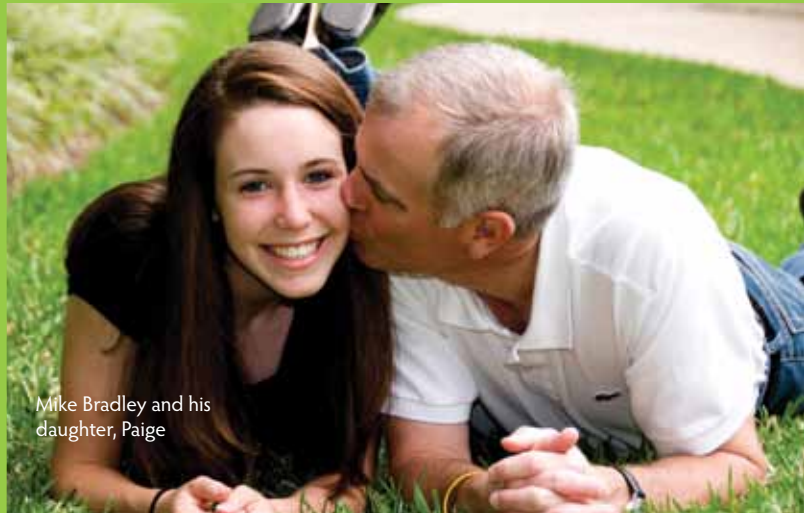
Be a consistent presence in your daughter's life




A healthy father-daughter relationship is built on respect and trust



Spend time together by planning fun activities




Mike Bradley and his daughter, Paige



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Eric Petty and his daughter, Elia

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