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Fathers and Sons

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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As a personal coach for men and the publisher of a newsletter, I'm sometimes blessed with personal stories from readers that touch my heart. This story sent in from a father helped me to remember why I'm doing what I do. I'd like to share it with you:

"As a father of two teens, I've enjoyed your insight on fatherhood. I was raised in a loving family environment, but just as you indicated, my father was the primary breadwinner and the "backbone" of the family, not an emotional type. As a child, I never saw him cry or appear weak, nor did he ever utter the words "I love you". It was just not in his vocabulary, though I never doubted his love for any of us.

It was not until his last hours on this earth, nearly 9 years ago, that I saw him cry for the first time. Suffering from the side effects of leukemia, I was visiting him in his hospital room.

As I sat on the side of his bed feeding him ice chips and jello cubes by spoon, it occurred to me that we had reversed roles. He was no longer caring for my needs, but I was there to help him with a basic need.

We talked about things that we'd never discussed

previously and as I was preparing to return home to my family for the night, I turned to him and said "I love you". He smiled and nodded his approval as I exited his room for the last time.

Unfortunately, he'd been experiencing internal bleeding, though he never complained or mentioned it to me, and he expired some three hours after I left.

I feel fortunate to have spent those last hours with him and that I could express my love to him, though I felt out of character in doing it. I only wish that it had occurred years earlier.

As a father myself, I've broken the male mold. I freely express my love not only for my wife but for each of my children. Rarely does a day pass that I don't talk with my kids, always ending the conversation with an "I love you".

I'll be the first to admit that life is not always a bed of roses, and that developing strong family ties requires patience and perseverance. But I'm incredibly proud of the family relationships that we've developed and nurtured in our children."

Millions of today's fathers grew up with fathers who were unable to express their love directly. And yet so many of these fathers have been able to express their love to their own children.

They've done it because they know the pain of not receiving that love. They know how absolutely vital their expression of love and acceptance is for their kids. And they've moved past the discomfort of expressing their love for their kids so that they may thrive.

This is an acknowledgement to the courage of all the fathers who have "broken the mold."

If our world is to change, it won't be without love from our fathers.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, coaches men to be better fathers and husbands. He is the author of

“25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers” <http://www.markbrandenburg.com/father.htm> For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, “Dads, Don’t Fix Your Kids,” at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>.

Raising Strong Daughters
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When my daughter was born, I must admit there was a distinctly different feeling to it when compared to the birth of my son. Part of me was thrilled, but part of me was unsure of how to deal with a gender that I still couldn't quite understand.

When my son was born there was a clear sense that this was territory that I knew: there will be wrestling, playing ball together, playing with cars and, he has a penis! There was a sense of security from all of this and a deep sense of knowing.

Raising a daughter creates different issues for many fathers; it is even more challenging considering the cultural landscape that exists today.

To better understand these issues, it is helpful to explore the expectations of girls that we have as fathers, many of which may be expectations handed down from our own fathers.

Some men feel a strong need to control their daughters, and expect them to act "nice" at all times.

Others shower their daughters with all of the gifts and "things" that they'll ever need, seeing them as weaker than boys (therefore not encouraging strength and discipline in them).

It's easy for fathers to treat their sons and daughters differently. They can be rough-and-tumble with their sons...but treat their daughters with kid gloves. This opportunity to wrestle or to play physically with your daughters is extremely important, because it shows them that you believe they are capable enough to handle it. (If your daughter is eighteen, it's probably not a good idea to start now.)

The cultural messages we get are that girls and young women are valued for being beautiful, thin, talented, etc. Girls should also be happy, agreeable and eager to please. This cultural backdrop may be partly responsible for the alarming statistics concerning rates of depression, anorexia, bulimia, and other disorders for girls when they are approaching or have entered their teen years.

So how can fathers overcome some of these barriers and help create daughters who become strong, secure women?

If fathers want their daughters to grow up to be strong and secure women, it is absolutely essential that they like women and that they respect them.

No matter how negative and pervasive the cultural messages are, your daughter's self-esteem is greatly impacted by your attitude. If fathers think that women are weaker and need protection, they will tend to raise daughters who are weak and dependent.

To a significant degree, your daughter's success in life and in love is in your hands.

As fathers go through the process of raising daughters, they may have to question everything they thought they knew about the sexes and the difference between men and women. How is it that you learn about these things?

You learn by allowing your daughters to teach you about them every day. You learn by not attempting to control or protect your daughters. You learn by opening up your hearts, and not having the answers all of the time for your daughters (or your sons).

If you can allow your daughters to enjoy being female as much as you enjoy being male, you've taken a big first step. If you can also allow your daughter to make most of her own decisions, you will probably enjoy a great relationship with her. You will also know a lot more about women than you did before.

Here are some action points for fathers with their daughters:

- Fully explore your expectations for your daughter. See where you may be too controlling in her life, or are overly protecting her.
- Create special times with your daughter each week, one-on-one, when you can ask her questions about her life and become more fully aware of who she is. Make this time sacred and let her know it's important to you.
- Expect your daughter to be strong and competent; she'll know that you do and will respond accordingly.
- If your daughter is a teen-ager or close to it, explore your attitude about your daughter's sexuality; many fathers are uncomfortable with this and leave their daughters emotionally when they need them the most.
- Be a great model for how men treat women in your relationship with your wife.
- Talk to other fathers who have had daughters, and find out how they have dealt with the challenges of raising a daughter.

Your daughter is depending on your healthy attitude to help her to navigate a culture that is not always positive for girls.

Take a step back and examine your view towards women and girls. Are there changes you want to make?

Your daughter will help you to make those changes if you'll just listen.

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