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# What Can Fathers Do To Become More Involved In Their Daughter's Lives?

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**A weekly question/answer column**

## **What Can Fathers Do To Become More Involved In Their Daughter's Lives?**

*Sue Cardwell\* answers:*

Paternal involvement in children's lives is essential. Research lists a variety of positive benefits to youth when fathers take the time to invest in them. This is especially true with daughters. An absence of depression, drug abuse, promiscuity, eating disorders and teen pregnancy have been linked with positive family relationships when fathers are both physically and/or emotionally present. Fathers need to recognize the essential role they play in their daughters' healthy emotional development.

Here are some places to begin building a positive relationship:

- Start early. Building begins when a daughter is young and continues into adolescence. Most young girls who have spent time with their fathers throughout their younger years are more willing to spend time with them during adolescence when it's less "cool" to be with their fathers.
- Laugh and play together. A daughter needs to know there is more to life than work. Laugh with her and help her develop a sense of humor about what is happening in her life. Do things together that you both enjoy, whether that's fishing or going to the opera.
- Ask questions. Find out what is going on in her life and listen without being judgmental to what she has to say. She needs to know you love her even if you don't always love what she does.
- Set reasonable limits and monitor activities. One of the easiest ways to let a daughter know you care is by being concerned about where she is, who she is with and what she is doing.
- Share emotions. Discuss feelings about things taking place in both of your lives. When daughters know that fathers have feelings too, they are much more likely to share what is happening in their own life.
- Helping a daughter understand relationships with the opposite sex without the sexual implications is important for a daughter's self-definition. Fathers can help their daughters come to a better understanding of their potential when they develop a relationship full of love and caring. Allowing a daughter to make decisions without the threat of abandonment, either emotional or physical, helps her to regulate her own behaviors without compromising self-worth.
- Taking the time to listen and being involved in a daughter's life will help determine future relationship. Daughters raised in loving and caring environments are much better prepared to meet the requirements of other opposite sex relationships they encounter.

- It is important to understand that any positive male role model can be a benefit. Because it is not always possible for a father's involvement, a grandfather, uncle, ecclesiastical leader or close neighbor can help fill the role as long as the relationship is safe, caring, and positive.

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\* Sue Cardwell is M.S. student, Family and Development, Utah State University