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LifeLine's
FROM THE HEART Column

**The Daddy Difference: The Incredible Impact of a Dad on
His Daughter's Life**

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Recently I saw a father seated in a booth at a local restaurant with three young girls who looked to be around twelve. I surmised that the young blonde-headed girl snuggled next to him was his daughter and the two on the opposite side of the table were her young friends. The girls were engaged in animated laughter and chatter, moving through a wide range of topics in rapid fire fashion--boys, school, girlfriends and the latest teen fashion trends.

As dad watched attentively, it was obvious that he happily embraced the experience, being both audience and participant in this unfolding adolescent dance. He never interrupted the flow but sat with great interest, not feeling compelled to hold court telling stories about his own achievements or interjecting unsolicited advice. As his daughter talked about her dreams and fears, the father's eyes sparkled with delight--knowing he was in the presence of something wondrous. And here was a man not willing to let it slip away unnoticed. He was completely in the moment, offering encouragement and affirmation, giving them a taste of how they should be treated by the future men in their lives.

The family is the training ground for all future relationships. Family research suggests that daughters who have secure and loving relationships with their fathers are more likely to have greater self-confidence, a sense of well-being and the ability to make healthy relationship choices. Through their fathers, daughters learn what to expect of men, what to look for in a partner and the role of women in relationships.

Here are some important ways fathers can create a rock solid, enduring relationship with their daughters.

- Be affectionate. Give plenty of hugs and verbal expressions of love, letting her know that she is cherished, respected and unconditionally loved. Tell her you love her often and why. Talk about how beautiful she is on the inside--her smile, her spirit, her sense of humor and all her other intrinsic assets.
- Be a listener. Even if hearing about the latest fashion fad or "girl chatter" isn't the most fascinating topic, pay close attention. You can learn plenty about her hopes, dreams and concerns. Be affirming and compassionate.

- Make and keep promises. A trusting relationship with your daughter helps her understand that men can be trustworthy and reliable. If you make a commitment to be at a ball game, recital or other important event, make sure you are there. If you promise to keep a confidence, honor it.
- Plan fun “Daddy Dates”. These outings are excellent opportunities to show her how she should be treated by members of the opposite sex. Treat her the way you want her to be treated by her future dates and relationships. Take her to a nice restaurant, listen, talk, and let her know how much you enjoy her company.
- Respect her mother. The most powerful model for your daughter is your relationship with her mother. If it is one of respect and loving compassion, it sets the pace for her expectations in future relationships. If you and her mother are not still married, it is important for her to see her mother treated with respect even under difficult circumstances.
- Be involved in her interests. If she is involved in sports, go to the games; if she is involved in music or dance, go to the recitals. Learn about her interests so you can talk about them and encourage her.
- Be there at all the important life events. Have an important presence at birthdays, the first day of school, first date, proms, and other special occasions. These are important moments for you and your daughter and your presence will ensure a special place in those memories.
- Be firm and set boundaries when needed. Be her protector. Don’t be afraid to enforce curfews, address inappropriate behavior or deal with other aspects of your daughter’s life that give her direction. This should be done in calm, loving way that lets her know that you love her and want her to be the best she can be.

A father can make an incredible difference in the life of his daughter. He is the most influential man in her life. And it is never too late to make a difference, even if a father has stumbled along the way. He can always get back on his horse and work to become the knight in shining armor his daughter always hoped he would be.