

The Legacy From Dad
by
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*"A good father grows right along with his children -
in knowledge as he teaches them,
in strength as he encourages them,
in joy as he laughs with them,
in love as he holds them close and then lets them go."*

HAPPY FATHERS DAY to everyone!! What a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the gift of fatherhood, to look at the dilemmas and concerns that men and their families face, and to reflect, repair and redefine our own relationships with our fathers wherever they may be.

Fathers have far more emotional impact on our lives than we imagine. Babies recognize their father's voice before they are 14 days old, yet most men think of infancy as a bond between mother and child. Most men feel clumsy and unprepared... unprepared for the overwhelming feelings of love and protectiveness, for the energy that children require, for the ongoing demands, for the continuous struggle to find a balance in life, for the profound changes that take place in the marriage, for the awesome opportunity and responsibility to shape confident, happy kids.

No one teaches men how to be fathers. Women's magazines are filled with articles about parenting. Men's magazines are about how to achieve success and status. Men do not get recognized by their peers for being a good father. They get respect according to how much money they make, how much power they yield, how productive they have been... and men are always competing and comparing. Some men were lucky enough to have terrific dads - someone who was truly interested and involved in their lives in a positive way. But for some men having a child brings up repressed feelings of anger, frustration, deprivation and resentment toward their father. Those unconscious hurts can either push a man away from his children or cause him to give his children what he never received but always wanted.

Mothers devote special attention to their children's present physical and emotional needs. Fathers devote special attention to character traits necessary for the future, especially independence, self-reliance, and the willingness to test limits and take risks. Mothers set the standard for children's conduct within the home. Fathers take special interest and pride in their children's conduct outside the home. There is a conditional nature of fatherhood - "I am a good father if my children become good adults". From the beginning, the mother's love is an unquestioned source of comfort and the foundation for human attachment. The father's love is always a little more distant and sought after, deserved and earned through achievement. Lucky is the child who receives both varieties of parental love - the unconditional, intrinsic support from mom that produces a positive self-image and the extrinsic, motivational drive to achieve from dad that makes dreams become reality.

So what can you do if you did not receive the paternal love that you wanted? How can you build a relationship with your father? How can you fill in what's been missing?

From a child's perspective, fathers can be overpowering. They can be abusive with their anger, controlling without limits and dominating with their demands of perfection. Fear is the greatest enemy of changing the relationship with powerful fathers. Even as adults people can remain victims. But if one recognizes his or her own strengths and sees themselves clearly, there is no need to change the father. This is similar to what martial arts teach - if you know how to use your own force, you don't waste energy trying to overcome an opponent's force. You use your strength in your own behalf. So try saying: "Dad, I see what you mean and that probably

would work for you, but that's not the way I need to do it." To maintain your own integrity and positions merely requires standing firm. Nothing aggressive is needed. You do better keeping your feet firmly planted than by digging in your heels...and when you throw dirt, you lose ground!

Children with weak fathers do not receive validation from them. With overburdened or troubled fathers, the children believe their fathers cannot give attention to them because their own worries occupy all of their time. Sometimes children are scolded for seeking dad's attention - "Dad works so hard; leave him alone." Children with silent fathers believe that their dad is rejecting them. Rarely is this the case. Again, there is nothing aggressive or hostile that is needed to repair and redefine the relationship. Simply say, "Dad, you've always been so reserved about expressing your feelings about me. I used to interpret that as my not being important to you. It would really help me feel better about us to hear your views of me and what it's been like for you to be my dad."

Children of divorce sometimes distance themselves from their father because they feel rejected and still carry the anger, hurt, and self-denigration. Children may wonder whether their fathers are spending time with them out of obligation rather than devotion. Money issues often cloud the relationship. The children fear that the father will withhold support and the fathers feel their kids want money more than the relationship. This wariness, mistrust, and mixed-up feelings can make it an uphill battle to repair the torn connection. Healing the relationship requires the comfort and safety to be honest and genuine and to express how you really feel. Address your concerns directly. It is the only way to let go of the past and get your questions answered.

For children whose fathers have died it is important to remember that the connection is not severed, only the human ways of speaking and listening. It is possible to pose questions to your dad and go inward and listen to your own accumulated knowledge of your father and hear his answer. When you reflect on your dad in this way, you will feel even more connected to him. When death disrupts an unsettled or troubled relationship, there are three approaches to achieve a meaningful resolution. First, talk to others about your father, especially those who knew him well. Get some new insights and perspective. Second, talk to yourself about your father. Look at photographs, recall memories, write letters to him to learn about your feelings as a child and as an adult. Third, find ways to honor and be honored by your dad. We honor our fathers when we celebrate their memories and integrate them into our lives. Take his good characteristics and put them into action in your life. Become the father you've always wanted to your own children or to a child who is fatherless. In this way you honor your father and are honored by him as well. Let everyone benefit from his life and yours.

HAPPY FATHERS DAY TO EVERYONE!!

Dr. Darlene Treese has been in private practice in hypnosis and counseling since 1983. She is a Diplomate in Counseling with the National Institute of Sports, Past President of the American Psychotherapy and Medical Hypnosis Association and Vice President of the Rotary EClub of Southwest USA. Darlene has been internationally acknowledged for her positive action and solution-based therapies and work with corporations. "A person for the people", Dr. Dar is always available to help with your questions and dilemmas through office visits, email or telephone consultations. Call her at **850-201-0073** or visit **www.AskDrTreese.com**