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Top Ten Common Sense Rules for Fathers

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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There are a lot of fairly sophisticated parenting techniques and ideas out there that are attracting attention. To be an effective father, you can skip most of them and concentrate on common sense rules that have always worked. They won't always make you the most popular Dad, but they'll always be effective:

Rule #1 Expect A Great Deal From Your Kids

If your kids know that you expect a lot from them, they'll rise to the occasion. Everything from saying please and thank-you, to efforts in school or on the athletic field, if expectations are made clear in a loving atmosphere your kids will know that you think a lot of them. When they know this, they'll respond.

Rule #2 Always Be Willing To Be the Problem

When you're convinced that someone in your family is causing the problems and you're blaming them for it, realize that this problem won't get better until you accept that you're making it worse by blaming them. It may briefly feel good to blame, but it never improves anything. Loving and accepting that person will make a positive difference.

Rule #3 Know Your Child's Life Intimately

Get to know all that you can about your kids. Know what their favorite toys and colors are, who their best friends are, who their heroes are, etc. By showing interest, you're showing you love them. By not asking, you show that they're not that important to you.

Rule #4 Say No To Your Kids

There's an awful lot of stuff out there for kids these days...and of course they want to have it all. Kids who get almost everything they want typically don't turn out to be very happy kids. Kids learn discipline,

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self-control, and how to delay gratification when they are told no by their parents. It may be a difficult struggle, but saying no and meaning it will help you to have happy, healthy, and cooperative kids.

Rule #5 Hitting or Spanking Your Kids Doesn't Work

There are plenty of studies showing that kids who are spanked have lower self-esteem. Spanking your kids will also be likely to increase the very kinds of behaviors that you are spanking them for. As a father, do you really want your child to be afraid of you?

Rule #6 Treat Your Wife Extremely Well

This is where your kids get their most important information about relationships between men and

women. Make a great effort not to fight in front of the kids. Remember to be kind more often than trying to be right.

Rule #7 Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Many parents spend time threatening their children when their kids aren't cooperating. But if you don't follow through on the consequences, you can threaten till the cows come home. Your children will learn to ignore the threats. They'll understand action. If certain privileges are taken away because of their lack of cooperation, they'll learn very quickly that you mean business. Try your best to align the consequences with the action. (If you don't clean your room in time, you won't have time for stories before bed.)

Rule #8 Really Listen to Your Kids

Don't just hear their words, but learn to understand the meaning behind what they say as well. I'm picking my own clothes! might mean that your child wants more responsibility or independence. Be able to reflect back what your child says to you. If you want your child to listen to you, you absolutely must listen to her/him.

Rule #9 Give Your Kids Responsibility as They Grow Older

When your kids are very young, maybe they just help make their beds in the morning and keep their rooms clean. As they get older, add things to their list. Tell them that this is how a family works...everybody has certain things that they do. If you do it when they're young it's more likely they'll do it when they're older. Don't reward them for things that should be expected of them.

Rule #10 Tell Your Kids They're Great All the Time

It is especially important to tell them this when they're not at their best. It's easy to tell them when things are going well. Make it a point to tell them specifically what you think is great about them. This will be more meaningful than generalized praise.

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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>.



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