

You Want Whaaat???

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By Douglas G. Burkland

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Not too long ago my teenage daughter approached me with a very special request... one that not every father gets from his loving daughter. I was sitting in front of the TV after a hard day at work and while I was fidgeting with the defective cable company-provided remote (the one the kids only know how to operate) trying to find a movie I hadn't yet seen ten times already on cable, she blurts out, "Dad, can I have a breast reduction?"

Now, if you're a parent then you know there exists a certain 'conditioning' that occurs over the years when responding to questions from our children, especially if your attentions are focused elsewhere at the moment. They all have this tendency to ask questions at the most inappropriate times. For example, one time I was wrestling with a stubborn pipe while fixing a leak under the kitchen sink. To begin with, I was in a seemingly impossible body contortion trying to manipulate a wrench in a confined space so my frustration level was accelerating. At that moment a passing kid asked, "Dad, can I have ddgrfguff?". I didn't hear the last part of the question but I was safe in responding back, "Yeah, sure." You see, it was a 'can I have' question which was usually food-related as opposed to 'can I go' which requires some passing thought to respond (later I caught holy-heck from my wife for letting my son eat something too close to dinner, but that's a whole other story). But as the kids got older the 'can I have' questions became less about food and more about a request for money... lots of money.

So when my loving daughter asked, "Dad, can I have guffunfgarble?", (again being too sidetracked to hear the end of the question) my first fatherly instinct was to pause ever so briefly (while watching the TV screen fly uncontrollably past HBO and our local city council meeting and stopping at one of those shopping channels) and I reach for my wallet. Suddenly I realized as I was fingering the few singles left in my wallet that she was not asking for money. "You want whaaat??"

Well, as you would expect, my daughter is "blessed" with rather predominant female accouterments (not sure who's side of the family she got that gene from). She went on to express her reason for this request. "I'm tired of people not looking up at *me* when I talk to them, Dad." Ahhh.. this was a deep

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human question coming from a 16 year old; an opportunity for lessons to be learned!

I could have blown this all off by simply telling her that when she is of age she could make her own decisions about that; and for now it was not something her folks were ready to consider. But these things always end up being something more. I was afraid her self-esteem would end up suffering somewhere down the line. So we talked about sincerity, understanding, guys, social attitudes, and personal appearance. We talked about reality... and expectations... and being self-confident. It was the proverbial quality time together.

She has never again asked that question because she has developed a pride in herself and how she looks.. and confidence in her natural instincts and social behavior. In the end my daughter asked a question that could have been answered with a simple yes or no. But what she was really asking was, "Help me, dad." I nearly missed the boat.

Doug Burkland is degreed in the behavioral sciences and writes articles regarding family life, parenting, human sexuality, entrepreneurship, and current events. An aging baby boomer raised in the Mid-West and having liberal-conservative attitudes, Doug is an admitted 'survivor' of public education who thinks he has something to say that people might like to read; sometimes using a bit of healthy satire, mixed with friendly sarcasm, and at times tempered with thought provoking common sense. Along with being an entrepreneur (having had three businesses of his own), Doug has a broad perspective on balancing life and family.

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