

April 2006

Topic:

Is the Father/Daughter relationship really important?

Question: My husband is an authoritative traditional man. I find most of our conflict comes from me pushing him to spend "quality" time with our children ages 2 and 4 years. The girls adore him and I know he would not have the same relationship he has now with his girls without my influence - but it does cause conflict between us. After he is usually more satisfied with himself as a father (I can see it in his attitude) but I am wondering if I am doing the right thing in pushing him into it. How important is a father/daughter relationship really? Am I being too sensitive about it (I expect quality time at least once a week).

A: You have raised 2 important issues here:

- 1) your relationship with your husband and
- 2) his relationship with your daughters.

Let's look at the primary one first.

Primary relationship – your partnership

It is not uncommon for husbands and wives to have different ideas and values when it comes to family life. But for one partner to 'push' their values and expectations on the other is disrespectful, and may result in conflict in the marriage. In your situation, by questioning your husband's judgement, you may unknowingly be hurtful. His interpretation may be that "he is not good enough. – he doesn't measure up."

So don't let your differences about the children become a wedge between you. Good marriages need nurturing if we want them to last for life. Remember your girls will grow up and move on!

As well, I get the sense that you feel responsible for the future of this family. It is not self-respectful for you to shoulder this responsibility alone. If your husband believed (as you do) that he was equally valued and needed by the family, everyone would benefit.

So, I suggest you find a calm time to share your concerns with him, and together look for a mutually respectful solution. Here are a couple of ideas:

[The Parenting Network mailto:info@parentingnetwork.ca](mailto:info@parentingnetwork.ca)

92 Cheritan Avenue, Toronto, ON. Canada M4R 1S6 | phone 416 480 2499 | Fax 416 480 9977

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Family Values and Life-skills

Get out a pen and paper, and together make a list of the things you value, and the life-skills you each feel are vital to your girls' long-term development (e.g. independence, curiosity, respect, close caring relationships). This will help you understand each other's values and vision for their future. Then explore how each of you can contribute to making these a reality. This is where you can tap into your individual gifts and strengths.

For example, your husband may value education and curiosity about life. If so, he can do the museum, build an ant farm, and go on nature walks with the girls. Whereas, you may value the visual arts, and therefore you can enjoy art and craft activities with them.

Comfort zone

We all have a comfort zone, and it would be helpful for you to explore with your partner what kinds of interactions he finds most natural and fulfilling with the girls. For example, some parents love to roll around on the floor and play hide-n-seek; while other parents may prefer reading stories quietly on the couch or visiting the zoo.

The child's phase of life can impact a parent's comfort level as well. Some of us enjoy the infant/toddler years, while others turn-on when the children get old enough to have discussions.

The point is, there are many ways to nurture your relationship with a child, and one way isn't more right than the other!

The father and daughter relationship

Of course this is important, and it is important to talk about it. So put your fears aside and have faith that with discussion and time you can work this out. Also, respect your husband's right to have his own relationship with his girls. He is in control of his relationship and you are in control of your relationship.

Here are some suggestions that might help you deal with your concerns more effectively:

Encouragement

Go ahead and encourage interactions, but help him do so in his 'comfort zone'. Better to explore what would be more natural and enjoyable for him than try to mold him into the father of your dreams. The girls will learn to understand the different approaches of their parents, and will hopefully be richer for the strengths you each bring to the family.

Mistaken Ideas

If you are concerned that your daughters might interpret Daddy's lack of attention as being a lack of caring or interest, share this with him. And since it is *his* relationship, let him clear this up with them. It is also important to teach children (adults can benefit from this too!) that 'time does not equal love'. They are loved regardless of the amount of time you each spend with them.

Best wishes and let me know how it goes!



Beverley Cathcart-Ross
Certified Parent Educator