

Fathers, Girls, and Boys

It's Father's Day, so congratulations to all dads.

Fathers are unique. They make a special contribution to the home and especially to the life and development of their children. Children need a mother, but a mother is not a father. Kids need both a father and a mother, and fathers in particular are important in the development of children.

Studies show that children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drug and alcohol abuse, drop out of school, and suffer from health and emotional problems. Boys are more likely to become involved in crime, and girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens in homes without fathers. 71% of high school dropouts are fatherless; fatherless children have more trouble academically, ...; and [are] less likely to attain academic and professional qualifications in adulthood.¹

Scholars at the Yale Child Study Center [report](#) that having a father at home increases the likelihood that children will be healthier emotionally and socially, stronger cognitively and academically, and stable throughout their lifetimes.” They add, “[The fact] that men and women parent differently, for whatever complicated reasons, is in most cases a great advantage for children.”² In other words, it's best for the children to have both a mother and a father at home raising the kids. It's good for a child to experience the different approaches that both mom and dad provide.

Of course, we didn't need academic studies to convince us of the importance of fathers. God established the family and gave fathers an active role in raising children. Our authority for the role of father is the Bible. Fathers need to make sure they are carrying out the responsibilities God gives them.

Today I want to consider the responsibilities fathers have for their children. I want to look at what dads are supposed to do for children in general, and then what dads should do for girls and for boys specifically. Boys and girls are different, and they require different approaches from their dad. Fathers have a unique role in the lives of their daughters *and* sons that no one else can fulfill.

- I. A father's responsibility to his children in general—let's briefly consult several passages that talk about a father's responsibilities to his children.

¹ <https://fathers.com/statistics-and-research/the-consequences-of-fatherlessness/>

² Cited on the Daily Citizen Morning Headlines, Focus on the Family

- A. Gen 18:19 *For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*
1. Command his children and household—leadership, providing rules and expectations. The father is the head of the home, and he should guide his family in specific ways.
 2. Keep the way of the Lord – spiritual leadership, insisting that the family follows the biblical guidelines—just as Joshua said: “As for me and my house...”
 3. “to do righteousness and justice” – the father should insure that things are done honestly and fairly, properly, that everyone follows the same set of rules.
- B. Deut 6:6-7 *And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*
1. Parents should speak of the things of God around the house, make sure your kids have a basic knowledge of the Bible.
 2. Kids ought to learn much about God at church, but they also ought to learn much about God at home. The church and the home should cooperate in teaching about God.
 3. So the father is responsible to make sure that his kids are hearing the Word of God at home. Cf. family devotions, books, resources
Ps 44:1 *We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.*
- C. 1 Samuel 3:13 *I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them.*
1. This text refers to the high priest Eli and his wicked sons. Eli knew what his sons were doing, and he urged them to change, but he did not “restrain” them. It was his responsibility to control his sons, but he failed to do that.
 2. God held Eli responsible for the behavior of his sons. Judgment fell on Eli’s household because of his failure to discipline his sons.

3. One of the main tasks of parents is that they restrain their kids. They control them and prevent them from doing what they should not do. Today, many parents simply don't restrain their children. The kids run wild and make a general nuisance of themselves while the parents stand by and watch.

How do you think kids turn out when they are not restrained?
They turn out to be spoiled brats.

Prov 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

4. A primary responsibility of the father is to restrain his kids. If you don't do it, you'll regret it. And God will hold you accountable for your failure.
- D. *Eph 6:4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*
1. Notice that this command is specifically addressed to fathers. Mothers do much of the care and feeding of the children, but God holds fathers ultimately responsible for the nurture and admonition of the children.
 - a) The word translated "nurture" or "training" means discipline. My understanding is that *physical* discipline is in view here. Children need physical discipline. They don't need abuse; they need physical training.
 - b) The word translated "admonition" has more of a *verbal*, rather than physical, connotation. To admonish means to warn or discipline verbally.
 2. The goal of discipline is not only change of behavior, but also change of attitude. Our desire is to change the hearts of our children, to help them develop an internal sense of right and wrong. We want to shape their consciences. We want to help them see the consequences of their behavior. We want to help them develop self-discipline and the ability to make good choices because they want to do what is right.
- E. *1 Tim 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

1. God holds fathers responsible to provide for their children. It's one of the most basic obligations fathers have. Dad's should provide for the basic needs of life for their kids—food, clothing, shelter, education.
2. Failure to provide for your own children is a very serious sin; it amounts to unbelief.
3. One of the great problems in our culture today is that men often fail to provide for their children. We are all aware of “deadbeat dads” who don't take care of their children. That should never be true of a Christian father.

Trans: These responsibilities are true for all fathers. They are generally applicable to all situations with all children. Fathers must provide spiritual leadership, discipline, training, food, clothing, and shelter for their kids. That's all part of being a father.

II. A father's responsibilities to his daughter(s)

A father's role toward his daughter(s) is different from that toward his son(s). We operate under the biblical truth that girls and boys are different and that they require different treatment from their fathers.

I'm speaking in general terms; every person is different, so we can't assume that all girls need the same kind of treatment from their dads. But I think there are some general principles that apply to raising girls that are different from raising boys.

The goal for Christian fathers is that their daughters would develop into virtuous women, Prov 31 women, women that adopt the biblical pattern. The father has a role in helping his girls become godly women.

I shouldn't have to inform you that that is not what the world wants for your girls. The world wants your girls to adopt behaviors and attitudes that are virtually opposite of what God wants for your girls. The world basically wants girls to adopt the feminist agenda—or worse. Fathers must do all in their power to instill a biblical set of goals in their girls and reject a worldly set of goals.

In what ways do girls require special attention from their fathers?

- A. Girls need protection. The husband/father is responsible to protect the whole family, and he should be particularly protective of his girls in several ways.

1. Fathers provide *physical* protection—i.e., the father is responsible to provide a home environment that is safe. He's responsible to protect the family from harm and mishap.

We probably have heard the horror stories regarding what has happened to little girls in some rare cases. Fathers need to be vigilant in their protection to prevent such things from happening.

2. Fathers provide *spiritual* protection—i.e., fathers are responsible to teach truth and to shield their girls from spiritual error. The father is the spiritual leader of the home, and he should both teach the truth as well as protect his girls from wrong ideas.

And under this category, I would also put protection from bad ideas like feminism. Girls need to learn a proper understanding of femininity and proper behavior from their parents. Both parents help with that, but the father in particular should be alert to the bad ideas that might affect his daughters.

And those bad ideas often invade the home through TV, the Internet, and contemporary music. Fathers ought to control the entertainment their kids are consuming. You need to impose some restrictions on what your kids are viewing and listening to.

Phones: Smart phones are really just hand-held computers, and kids today get into a lot of trouble through their smart phones. So families should have a policy regarding when and how the kids have access to smart phones. Fathers should control the technology their kids access.

3. Fathers provide *social* protection—i.e., relationships. Parents should be involved in their children's relationships, especially when potential romantic interests begin developing. Children are under the authority and care of their parents until they leave home, and it's the father's responsibility to insure that no destructive or harmful relationships develop. Again, I think that is particularly necessary for girls. Girls can potentially pick up a lot of bad influence from their friends.

I'm not advocating a "helicopter" parenting approach, where the father "hovers" over his daughter all the time and micro-manages every aspect of his daughter's life. That would be one way to "provoke" your child to wrath. And as the daughter becomes an adult, she needs to take more responsibility for her own decisions. But the father should always be protective of his daughters especially when they are young and impressionable. Fathers should guard access to their daughters, especially for potential suitors.

Under this category, I would also put things like modesty. Fathers have a sense of what would be modest or immodest that a woman/mother might not have. Men can generally tell if how a young woman dresses is appropriate or not. As a man, a father knows what happens when girls wear clothing that is too tight or too revealing or too skimpy. I don't think any decent father would allow his daughter to go out in public looking like a "street-walker."

Fathers know what boys and men find appealing. So fathers ought to play a role in protecting their daughters in the moral realm.

The father's protection for his girls extends until the girls get married. In a certain sense, girls live under the protection of their father until they move to the protection of their husband. That's not the way it works in some cases, but it is ideal.

- B. Girls need *affection*. I think girls naturally want to experience affection from their fathers. If their father is not affectionate, girls often seek male affection somewhere else. That can have disastrous results. Girls should experience plenty of love and affection from their dads so they won't go looking for it elsewhere.

Where does a girl learn how boys should treat her? From her father, assuming that he treats her right. If her father has treated her with godly affection and care, then that's what she'll demand from other boys, and especially from any boy who is interested in her romantically.

- C. Girls need *illustration* (i.e., an example to follow). Most daughters will eventually grow up and get married. Fathers should set an example for the kind of mate their girls will seek. Not that girls want to marry *exactly* the same kind of person as their dad is, but that girls know what to look for in a mate because that's what they saw in their dad. They know what a good husband looks like because their mom had a good husband. They know how a good father operates because they had a good father. So when it comes time for the girl to choose the boy she's going to marry, she'll have a picture in her mind of what a husband and father should be; he should be much like her dad.

Illus.: Patch the Pirate song "I Want to Marry Daddy When I Grow Up"

Girls need to see how men should treat women, and fathers need to demonstrate proper behavior to both them and their mother. Fathers should demonstrate proper behavior toward women in general. Daughters should learn to expect boys and men to treat them like her dad treats them—with dignity and respect.

- D. Girls need *instruction*. Mothers typically teach girls most things they need to know about being a woman. But as the girls get older, fathers should have some input regarding relationship, romance, attraction, dating and the like. Fathers should teach their girls what their father expects—this is the kind of boy we would like you to date and marry; this is the kind of boy to avoid. This is correct behavior with a boy; this kind of behavior is off limits. "Here is how to slap a boy across the face."

Fathers need to emphasize to their girls that it's important to follow the biblical guidelines for female behavior and roles. Girls should know what their fathers expect of them; fathers should be clear about their expectations.

That leads to the final point...

- E. Girls need *communication*. Females in general value communication more than males do. It's a very good idea for fathers and daughters to keep an open channel of communication. Girls should feel comfortable talking to their dad about anything.

Fathers should be approachable; if the girl has a question about boys or relationships, she should feel comfortable asking her dad. Fathers should have an open door policy with their kids and be willing to deal with virtually any question, particularly the very sensitive ones. If you want to have a continuing influence on your girls, you have to keep the lines of communication open. Don't just say "Ask your mother." Girls want input from their dads, and dads should be willing to talk about the things their daughters are interested in.

Trans: The father is the first man in the life of a girl. A girl typically learns a lot about boys and men from her father. Fathers should want their daughters to learn from them and to follow their guidance. Don't expect the mother to raise your girls. Fathers have an important role to play in that task.

III. A father's responsibilities to his son(s)

I don't have any personal experience fathering boys; I have only girls. So I can't really speak from personal experience, other than what I had at home as I was growing up. But practically speaking, I think there are several things that fathers should focus on regarding their sons.

A. Masculinity

1. The Bible does not give us a single passage that defines or pictures Christian masculinity—no Prov 31 for men. Jesus provides a picture of masculinity, as do other prominent characters like Joseph and Daniel and Paul. In any case, the goal for the Christian father is to develop sons that can fulfill the role of husband and father. He wants to duplicate himself in his son(s). He wants to develop within his sons a sense of biblical masculinity.
2. The Bible warns us to avoid effeminacy in males (1 Cor 6:9). The biblical word "effeminate" literally means "soft," and it refers to the softness that women should have. Women should be soft; men should not be soft in that way. Men should not be girlish. Little boys sometimes display slightly girlish tendencies, but they normally grow out of that. Fathers should help them grow out of that. Fathers should help their boys be masculine.

3. Effeminacy can also describe the moral softness of self-indulgence, self-centeredness, and self-preservation. One could be effeminate in the sense of shirking his duty, protecting himself when he should be protecting others, or for seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Fathers should help their sons develop a masculine sense of moral strength and backbone.
4. Biblical masculinity is characterized by spiritual maturity, courage, diligence, and leadership. To me, the biblical characters like Joseph, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul display the kind of masculinity fathers should seek to develop in their boys. So fathers play a role in developing a biblical sense of masculinity in their sons.

One other matter: The world today is telling us to accept and affirm whatever tendencies our children might have. If a boy is effeminate and girlish, that's OK; accept that, tolerate it, celebrate it. He was born that way, and you can't change it. That is not the right approach. Fathers should seek to instill masculinity in their boys. If a son is effeminate/girlish, you need to address that and seek to change it. Not every boy is going to be a macho, he-man, athletic warrior type, but no Christian boy should be softly effeminate. If a boy has those tendencies, the father in particular should address that situation firmly and with great resolve.

Sons should develop a biblically masculine identity, and it's largely the father's task to instill that within his son(s).

B. Restraint (cf. 1 Sam 3:13—*he did not restrain them*)

Startling statistic: 93% of inmates in jail/prison are male; 7% female

There's a good reason for that. Boys tend to be more squirrely, more active, and less self-controlled than girls. Not in every single case, but often, boys tend to be more independent and rebellious. All things being equal, boys tend to get into more trouble than girls. Males are more willing to take risks, they are more interested in showing off and breaking rules. So they need more restraint.

That's the father's job. As boys get bigger and stronger, mothers often simply cannot restrain them. The father must step in and control his sons when they need it.

And boys want restraint; they want to know the rules, and they want to know that there are consequences for violating the rules. Sons know intuitively that lack of restraint equals lack of love.

On the other hand, too much restraint will backfire. An overly severe and restrictive approach will provoke children to wrath. So there has to be a balance; impose the right level of restraint that allows some freedom but that also prevents serious problems. As the child shows more self-control, you can ease up with the restrictions/restraints.

C. Discipline

I think it's generally true that boys need more stern discipline than girls do. Young girls can be very sensitive and delicate; they respond to a cross look or a raised voice. Boys, on the other hand, need more clear and definite discipline—both verbally and physically.

There comes a point at which physical discipline no longer works, especially for boys. The relationship between father and son should be of the quality that the son values the direction he receives from his father. He disciplines himself because of the father's influence. That's what you work toward—self-discipline.

D. Training

A father ought to be intentional about passing on his knowledge to his son(s). Boys ought to learn how to be a man from their father. They ought to learn about how to do manly things from their dad. They ought to learn how to treat women and how to manage a family from their dad. They should learn practical things like how to maintain a car and how to fix things around the house, how to pound a nail and drive a screw and cut a board. By the time a boy is ready to leave the house, he should know all the practical skills that his father can teach him.

E. Example

As they say, much more is caught than is taught. Children learn from watching the example of their parents. If the parents are living a certain way, the kids think that that is the proper way to live.

As I mentioned with the girls, fathers need to set an example for how boys interact with girls. Fathers need to exemplify the proper attitude and behavior boys should have toward girls. Boys in a Christian home should learn how to be a Christian man from their dads.

Illus.: Norman Rockwell picture where the mother and the kids are all dressed up and marching off to church while the dad is still in his pajamas, sitting in the easy chair, reading the newspaper. And you can see from the look on the boy's face that he'd rather stay at home with dad. If dad doesn't go to church, why should he?

So it's exceedingly important for dads to set a good example for their sons. In many ways, the sons will duplicate the behaviors of their dads.

Fathers are unique, and they provide a set of parenting skills that mothers don't have. Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable. If either the mother or father is absent or fail to carry out their obligations, the children will suffer negative results. Both the mom and dad contribute their own set of influences on their kids. These differences are good; the kids benefit from parental differences.

Fathers in particular have a very important set of contributions to make to their children as they grow up. Fathers contribute differently to boys and to girls. All kids need parenting, but boys need one set of things from their dads, and girls need something else. Fathers should be careful to provide what their children need from them, especially those things that no one else can provide.

To be involved in the life of your kids in this way is not easy. Biblical fatherhood is a difficult role, but it's also a great privilege. Those who are striving to fulfill these duties deserve special recognition every day, but especially on Father's Day.