

# Daughters

For Parents of Girls

Vol 12 No 2

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## INTERVIEW

### Mindy Bingham on girls and economic self-sufficiency



Mindy Bingham

*It won't be long before our daughters are headed off to follow their passion in jobs that we hope will keep them happy and self-sufficient. But we should start now to prepare them to pursue satisfying options, says Mindy Bingham, author of Things Will Be Different for My Daughter: A Practical Guide to Building Her Self-Esteem and Self-Reliance (Penguin, 1995) and of the Career Choices curriculum that is used in over 3,800 schools. When we begin early to explore wise life choices with our daughter, she'll be able to take advantage of numerous satisfying options in career and family life. Daughters spoke recently with Bingham, who with her vice-president and daughter Wendy heads the educational publishing firm she founded, Academic Innovations.*

#### Exploring goals in a changing workplace

As girls have benefited from the advocacy work of caring adults in the last few decades, we've seen the payoff, with girls gaining confidence and skills in many areas. At the same time, girls see more women in different

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## LET'S TALK

### Is she pessimistic?

By Madeena Spray Nolan

**Allison:** Kim and Traci were whispering at lunch today.

**Mom:** Did you ask what they were whispering about?

**Allison:** I know it was about me. I said something really stupid in class. Everybody thought it was dumb.

**Mom:** Why do you always assume the worst?

If your daughter's a pessimist, she's far from alone. Girls are more likely than boys to have a less-than-positive take on the world, particularly during the insecure preteen and teen years. Experts tell us that girls tend to blame themselves for failures—real or imagined—while boys tend to view setbacks as not necessarily linked to their abilities or worth.

For parents and girl advocates, guiding a girl toward optimism is a challenge. "The girls in my troop are so negative about everything," a Girl Scout leader recently wrote *Daughters*. "How can I help them see the positive?"

One dad, Larry, tells of his

frustration while talking with his daughter, Stephanie, about a gymnastics class. "I won't be able to do the stuff the other girls can do," she lamented. "It won't be any fun." Larry reminded her that she had always loved doing cartwheels and somersaults, but it didn't foster any more confidence. "It dawned on me that we'd had this conver-

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# Daughters

FOR PARENTS OF GIRLS

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## HER WORLD

### Will her pay be equal?

Your daughter may not yet have planned her outfit for Tuesday, April 24, but here's a suggestion you might make: Wear red. It's the recommended color for Equal Pay Day, because females are left in the red when they're paid an average 77% of what males are paid. That paycheck gap means a woman works an extra day each week to make what a man does—which is why Equal Pay Day is always held on a Tuesday: the day when women's wages catch up to men's wages from the previous week.

Use Equal Pay Day to bring home workplace realities to a girl

(check out [www.pay-equity.org](http://www.pay-equity.org)) and prepare her now to make the workplace fairer. If she's scared to ask for a raise from her babysitting clients, coach her on respectful and firm ways to get the money she deserves. And encourage her to pursue more diverse jobs that are more lucrative—lawn-mowing and pet-sitting often pay more than caring for small human beings (an observation which may spark another pay equity discussion). If our girls practice wise workplace tactics now, their generation is sure to shrink the pay gap. ★

## EDITOR'S DESK

How things have changed since I was a girl! I remember when our local paper had classified ads segregated by "male" and "female"; now women are common—or at least represented—in virtually all job arenas. When I entered grade school, 60% of households had stay-at-home moms; now, of women in the workplace between ages 25 and 54, the percentage who are moms is only 8% less than non-moms. Our two girls are awash in cultural expectations that I wasn't: women can work in all kinds of jobs, and most all mothers will work outside the home.



Yet I worry that we're not adequately preparing girls for a rewarding work life that may well include a family. Both surveys and overheard conversations confirm that many girls still believe that their partner will keep them afloat if they want to opt out of work. But our girls will likely face an even higher risk of financial insecurity than we do from what Mindy Bingham (Interview, p. 1) calls the four Ds: divorce, death, displacement, and disability. Even as young women dominate in law and medical school classes, plenty more continue to end up in lower-paid pink-collar professions or service jobs.

You'll learn plenty about how to encourage girls toward a satisfying work future in this issue. Consider a fun exercise in which girls dream up their desired lifestyle at 29, and then you help them do the math to make it happen (p. 6). Help ease the "mommy track" pressures your girl will likely face by encouraging your sons to assume they'll be equitable parenting partners (P. 7). And we can simply change the negative ways we tend to talk about our jobs (p. 12), which can dampen any kid's enthusiasm about work! With our upbeat attitudes and informed discussions, who knows what positive work/life options our girls will be telling their daughters about?

*Helen Cordes*

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## Outsmarting marketers

Advertisers and marketers spend millions to convince your daughter that she's not OK without their product, and the techniques they use are incredibly effective, says Amy Jussel, founder of Shaping Youth, an organization focused on fighting harmful media messages to kids. As a marketing copywriter, she should know, and she shares her expertise in a blog ([www.shapingyouth.org/blog](http://www.shapingyouth.org/blog)) that keeps parents and girls media-savvy and activist-minded.

Check out her links to good news, too, such as the multi-faceted Dove campaign that invites girls and women to celebrate all types of bodies and beauty ([www.campaign-forrealbeauty.com](http://www.campaign-forrealbeauty.com)) and offers compelling short films and parenting resources. And if things like sneaky "viral" marketing for products such as the Cocaine energy drink or video games that encourage violence against women offend you, fire off a message expressing your views. Use the links provided on the blog to let companies know you don't want them manipulating your daughter into buying unhealthy products and succumbing to mindless consumerism.

## Movies and jobs

What kinds of jobs do women and girls have in the movies? If it's movies for impressionable youngsters, be prepared to find stereotypes abounding. Female characters in the most popular G-rated movies are most often secretaries, princesses, or entertainers, according to a report from See Jane, an organization that advocates for better roles for females in movies for children. On the flip side, male characters are only half as likely as females to have children or be married.

You can get a girl thinking

about what she and other kids see in their favorite movies by asking some simple questions suggested at <http://seejane.org/pdfs/Occupations.pdf>. When you watch movies together, track the occupations of female and male characters, and ask her whether she thinks they reflect the jobs people have in real life. See if she'd like to have those jobs. And ask how she'd do things differently if she were making the movie!

## Growing girl scientists

The good news from the recent National Summit on the Advancement of Girls in Math and Science is that at fourth grade, girls are nearly as likely as boys to say that they like science. And more girls than boys now take science courses such as biology and chemistry in high school. Yet girls are still far less likely to pursue science in college and as a career than are boys.

It's easy to get a girl fascinated by science at an early age by engaging in fun activities with her, such as charting the movement of colored water through a celery stick or building a paper pyramid. Learn loads more with the inspiring book *Girls at the Center: Girls and Adults Learning Science Together* from the Franklin Center's Institute for Innovation in Science Learning. Find info and free activity guides at <http://www.fi.edu/tfi/programs/gac.html>.



**More with *DaughtersPlus*!** Our new *DaughtersPlus* package not only includes the annual six issues of *Daughters* but also allows unlimited downloads of articles from *Daughters* archives and bimonthly email updates from editor Helen Cordes—altogether, a great girl-empowering resource. Upgrade or order at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com).

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## Recommended read

When the principal at her son's middle school called parents in to inform them of confirmed incidences of oral sex among students, Laura Sessions Stepp, who writes on family matters for the *Washington Post*, knew she wanted to find out more about how our girls and boys form their sexual views. The result, *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both* (Riverhead, 2007) is both an eye-opening front-line report and a clarion call for parents to help their girls (and boys) form healthier views of sexuality in an increasingly sex-obsessed culture. Use her insightful "Letter to Mothers and Daughters" to brainstorm about better ways to talk about love and sex with your daughter from early on. You can read the full Letter, and share your thoughts as well, in the Book Club area of the *Daughters* Community Forum at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com).



## Keeping a veggie girl healthy

By Helen Cordes

For many parents, hearing a daughter declare her intent to go vegetarian or vegan—especially if she’s young and still growing—raises worries. Will she get enough protein? What about iron? Is she going veggie or vegan just because her friends are?

Relax, say experts. As long as she eats a reasonable variety of foods, she should have no problem meeting nutritional needs, according to Suzanne Havala Hobbs, a clinical assistant professor in the University of North Carolina’s School of Public Health and author of *Vegetarian Cooking for Dummies* (John Wiley, 2001). In fact, several studies have found that vegetarian teens tend to have better diets and health habits than do their carnivorous peers. Among nearly 5,000 middle- and high-school students surveyed for a 2002 study, veggie kids soared above others in eating more fruits and vegetables and less junk food.

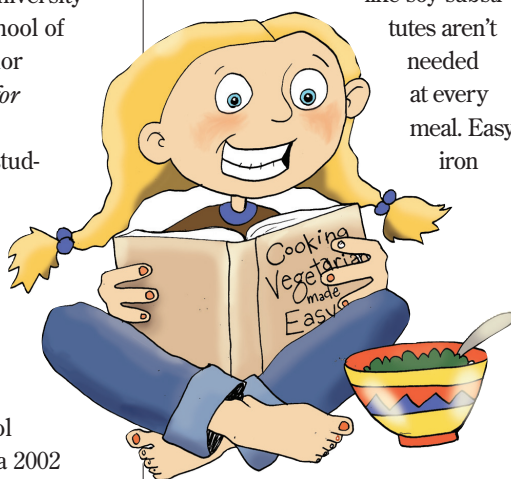
Making a switch to vegetarianism will involve some time and thought from both daughter and parents, but it’s time well spent. Have her research an eating action plan—it’ll provide an excellent opportunity to bone up on nutrition and health as well as food-shopping and cooking skills. While it’s reasonable to expect parents to cooperate by including vegetarian food in the family diet, it’s also reasonable for daughters to take on a fair share of special meal preparation.

If your daughter hasn’t yet gone veggie or vegan, it might be wise to prepare for the possibility. Girls

are twice as likely to eat vegetarian or vegan, and in a 2005 survey by the Vegetarian Resource Group, a whopping 11% of 13- to 15-year-old girls say they never eat meat. So if your daughter votes veggie, or you think she might, here are some tips to make sure she stays healthy.

**■ Learn the basics of nutrition along with your daughter.** You might be surprised by what you don’t know. “You can get protein from grains, beans, vegetables, and nuts,” says Havala Hobbs, so meat-

like soy substitutes aren’t needed at every meal. Easy iron



sources include dried fruit and beans. Even vegans, who abstain from animal-derived foods such as eggs and dairy products as well as from meat, can get calcium through tofu or fortified orange juice.

**■ Explore recipe options.** Due to the popularity of vegetarianism, there are tons of recipes in cookbooks and on the internet, and a booming variety of vegetarian convenience foods in the stores. Compile a list of quickie meals such as bean burritos that your daughter can concoct in a jiffy.

**■ Negotiate a family plan.**

Incorporating a vegetarian family member could be as simple as the vegetarian eating everything but the meat and adding her own non-

meat items. Or you might decide together that she’ll help cook meatless dishes for the whole family. Chart the plan, perhaps with some sample weekly menus.

**■ Monitor.** “Regardless of the food source, teens need adequate and appropriate foods for energy to be alert and do their best in school and everything else,” says Havala Hobbs. If you see that she’s substituting all salads or chips and sodas for a balanced meal, initiate a discussion about how to meet her body’s needs.

You’ll also want to be sure that her vegetarianism isn’t another way to restrict calories. “With all the pressure in our culture for girls to be thin, vegetarianism can be another way to limit food,” notes Havala Hobbs. If you notice this happening, target the unhealthy eating and its causes, not the vegetarianism.

**■ Avoid battles and focus on issues.**

Whether her decision is based on concern for animal rights, a commitment to the environment, or her own health, it’s a legitimate choice made by millions worldwide. But the veggie issue shouldn’t produce either holier-than-thou attitudes from daughters or knee-jerk exasperation from parents. If she wants to argue ethics, join in and let her hone her persuasive argumentation skills! At the very least, a daughter’s vegetarian foray will provide food for thought, and spark a new look at nutrition for the whole family. ★

Find resources for vegetarian and vegan eating at the Health area of the *Daughters Community Forum* at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com).

## STAYING ACTIVE

### *Finding a balance in girls' sports*

By Kristal Leebrick

One of my favorite moments last summer was hearing this exchange between two soccer players on my daughter's team in the middle of a game: When one girl hollered out, "What's the score?" another replied, "I don't know. It doesn't matter anyway!"

That right defender wasn't being defeatist. She was expressing the attitude of many of the teens who played in this low-key park-and-recreation league. They were there to have fun, win or lose. They were busy kids—some gifted athletes, some not—and they were there because they liked soccer and didn't want to commit their summer to attending constant practices and traveling throughout the state to get their play time in.

But involvement in low-key leagues is becoming less common these days. For many girls, participation in team sports has become an all-or-nothing scenario. Girls (and boys) are increasingly placed in competitive "select" teams that require sizeable fees and extensive driving to practices and games on weeknights and weekends. For a parent who just wants a girl to have occasional fun with sports, the options are pretty slim.

Many believe this youth sports trend can be damaging to both kids and families. Elite, hyper-competitive sports leave children (and their parents) too focused on winning rather than on playing for the love of the game. And such competition creates another pressure: the time this level of play demands saps both family time and much-needed down time, according to the advocacy organization Putting Family First ([www.puttingfamilyfirst.org](http://www.puttingfamilyfirst.org)). This group encourages parents to lead local efforts to persuade sports and other extracurricular



groups to limit practice and meeting time and to increase family time. In a Minneapolis suburb last year, the group led a boycott of youth sports, including tournaments, games, and practices, on Sundays.

Some health groups are also concerned that sports begins too early for youngsters. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children delay specializing in a sport until age 12 or 13, when they're more emotionally and physically mature. "Basic motor skills, such as throwing, catching, kicking, and hitting a ball, do not develop sooner simply as a result of introducing them to children at an earlier age," the AAP states. Early introduction to these skills may cause more frustration than success in the sport. Yet it's common to start kids in team sports as preschoolers, with a year-round focus on one sport by age 8 or 9.

Of course, club sports and school teams can be beneficial for girls. Having a social support group outside of school during the rocky adolescent years can also be helpful. Girls learn valuable life lessons as they deal with competition and politics, and the regular

physical activity helps reinforce a healthy lifestyle. While free time decreases, they can learn to become more organized in school and other activities.

But for girls whose parents don't have the resources to commit time and money to travel to competitions, and for girls who aren't skilled enough to join a select team, finding reliable sports programs close to home is crucial. However, it's sometimes even difficult for community-based programs to find a place to practice, because private leagues frequently reserve time on city fields.

Parent groups like Keep 'Em All Playing ([www.keap.net](http://www.keap.net)) are attempting to change the structure of community sports. Charging that public sports facilities are tilted to private teams' advantage, KEAP lobbies for citizen committees that would ensure that public resources are allocated fairly.

As parents, we need to advocate for sports involvement that allows our daughters to learn and practice a sport without allowing it to consume her life. Whether we do it by launching boycotts or forming city committees or simply taking a hard look at the role in sports options in our girls' life, it's time to step up to the plate. ★

*Kristal Leebrick lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.*

**How do sports play out in your girl's life? Sound off and hear from other parents at the Sports and Staying Active area of the Daughters Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)), where you'll also find more resources for keeping a girl involved in sports and other healthy activities.**

jobs, and media reflects that as well, with TV shows including plenty of women doctors and lawyers. But girls and women are still far behind in the technology and science fields. And those are the areas that are becoming more and more crucial in the evolving work world.

I've heard parents say that we don't really need to talk about jobs and careers until a girl is out of high school or headed for college, but that's a disastrous myth. When a girl's in middle school, she's at a good age to begin what's called comprehensive guidance, which helps young people project into the future and understand the consequences of the actions and choices they make today. It's during these and the high-school years that students face choices with long-term impact. She might be thinking, "I'm not going to take advanced math" or "I'd rather be social than grind out the top grades . . . life will happen, right?"

## **We can work with her from early on to develop skills that will be useful in any career area.**

We need to find ways to help our girls understand that, especially in these times, life does not just happen. It requires some planning. To not make a choice is a choice—one that often has negative consequences. That's why schools are increasingly providing resources that get students thinking about future choices in the middle-school and high-school years. These resources are often part of a comprehensive "freshman transition" course. Parents can encourage their schools to adopt this approach for 8th or 9th graders and can also get resources that help them plan with girls at home.

### **Focusing on the big picture**

We may be tempted to prepare our daughter for the future by asking from time to time, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" or by occasionally mentioning how much she might expect to pay to rent her own apartment. This isn't harmful, of course, but she'll be significantly better able to consider options for her future when we provide a more extensive context for her. Saying, "Your mortgage will probably run \$900 a month" means nothing to most kids.

There's a great technique that my father used with me and that I used with my daughter when she was around 12. I sat down with her and had her come up with a budget of how she wants to live when she's 29. She selected a house she wants to own at 29, and a car, and where she hopes to live. She budgets for all the necessities as well as for things she wants. Once she has the cost per month, she factors what she needs to make to take home that amount. The second step of this activity was to research the jobs that will support her lifestyle and what she'll need to do to qualify for those jobs. One handy way to do this is with a short book called *Lifestyle Math* that walks a girl and her parent through the process.

Once a girl completes this budget exercise, her future becomes much more real. At the same time, it's important to let girls know that it's not all about the money. And it's certainly not about picking a career at 14, one that she'll have for the rest of her life. In a globalized world, she'll need career skills that will allow her to change as the world changes around her. We can work with her from early on to develop skills that will be useful in any career area, such as being able to communicate well, think creatively, follow through on commitments, and be willing to work. It's important that she gets the message that education beyond high school is crucial to a self-sufficient life. A girl can get that education in college, or through certification programs, technical vocational schools, apprenticeships, and other skill-based learning opportunities.

### **Talking about work and family**

When I was growing up, my mother would tell me, "You always need to have a career in case you're a widow one day." These days, I talk with girls about the four Ds: death, divorce, displacement, and disability. Most girls will want to have a life partner, and often, they believe that if they need to scale back on work, that someone will be there to prop them up.

In today's world, it often takes two incomes to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Considering the fragile nature of many jobs as well as the possibility of experiencing one of the four Ds, both spouses need to be able to support a family at least part of the time. My mantra to girls is that the higher a young woman advances up the career ladder, the more freedom she'll have to be a mother. Not only will she make more money, she can work part-time or buy services to help her be a better mother. She'll have more flex-

ibility to do things like go to her child's play if she's in a higher position in her company.

It's very helpful for girls to hear our stories. If you're a single mother like I was and you're struggling, you can tell her, "I'm struggling because I made these choices and they weren't the best, and you can make different choices by planning conscientiously." I found that when I opened up and said, "Let me tell you about my mistakes," my daughter was all ears. And those were some of the most teachable moments.

## Ask her: "What do you do that you love so much that you lose track of time?"

### Discovering and nurturing her passions

I put myself through college, and at the end of my junior year, I decided that I really didn't want to keep studying to be a veterinarian. I'm glad I reached that decision before I went through three years of vet school and become something that wasn't going to make me happy. It's my mission to provide the opportunity for career exploration and reflection at a much earlier age, so that young people don't do the same thing I did. When your daughter is trying to narrow down possibilities among thousands of jobs, you can help her identify her passions and talents.

You can ask your daughter, "What do you do that you love so much that you lose track of time?" Parents can often identify the type of activities that keep a girl absorbed or put a special light in her eyes. It might be something that relates to putting things together; a love of "selling" an idea—whatever. Once you can help her see what she might love, it's a matter of planning to channel her passion. And then she's on the road to what we all want for our girls: helping her become emotionally, physically, and financially self-sufficient. ★

To learn more about career planning resources such as Lifestyle Math and goal-setting initiatives such as the freshman transition initiative, go to [www.mindysbooks.com/daughter](http://www.mindysbooks.com/daughter).

## Will she "have it all"?

Most girls say they want to have both fulfilling work and a family, and we want to assure them that, yes, they can have both. But when our daughters look at parents and others struggling to make time for work and kids and each other and themselves, they often see a lot of frustration. How can we best prepare them for the balancing act that lies ahead?

One easy way to help our girl is to have frequent and candid family conversations about work and family—but make sure her brother is there as well. "From early on, I've told our boys, as well as our daughter, that you choose how to work and raise a family and there's not just one way to do it," says Liz Ryan, founder and CEO of WorldWit, a 50,000-member networking organization for women in technology and business ([www.worldwit.org](http://www.worldwit.org)), mother of four sons and a 13-year-old daughter, and wife of a stay-at-home dad. "I don't think it's fair that people talk about a 'mommy track' and not a 'daddy track.'"

It helps a girl understand her parents' choices better if we make our own daily work/family balance explicit, Ryan notes. A mom or dad might say, "Your play is important to me, so I'll be there, but then I'll need to work some this weekend." As we press for family-friendly changes big and small in the workplace, we should also keep daughters and sons informed. When we discuss both triumphs and roadblocks, our girls will be both grounded in reality and better prepared to strategize for the future.

And use the current spate of "mommy war" articles to spark a discussion with your daughter. Point out various parents she knows—or ones you may have heard about—who have different work/family situations. Ask her what she thinks would be the ideal situation for her future. If she's drawn to full-time parenting, have her consider some factors that would make that decision possible, such as family income and job readiness when a return to the workplace is needed or desired.

Encourage her to think broadly about possibilities—after all, family and work situations that were rare in the past are now commonplace, and her generation may well engineer much better solutions. With our help, our girls may actually see a ceasefire to "mommy wars" and reap the rewarding work and family life we're all seeking.

—Helen Cordes

For more information about organizations and resources that aim to improve the work/family balance, go to the Lifeskills area of the Daughters Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)).



## SUCCESS STORIES

### *Celebrate! Great girl moments*

**Here's where we share our success stories—all the ways, big and small, that girls grow stronger with our help or through their own inspired actions. Share your story! Just email [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).**

#### **R-rated movie decision-making**

Our 11-year-old daughter, like most girls, has friends whose parents have approaches and rules that differ from ours. I realize that, especially as she grows older, she will be in many situations in which she'll face choices about whether to do what her friends want to do, or what we'd rather she do. Our goal with our daughter and her two younger siblings is not to try to shield them from these situations, but to help them develop a deep sense of who they are and the skills to determine what they want so they can speak and act their minds.

Here's an example of how that approach paid off. When my daughter arrived at a recent party, the girls were watching an R-rated movie (many of her friends are allowed to watch them). They offered to restart the movie for her. This was an opportunity for her to exercise her free will, and she did. She told her friends that our family had talked over the reasons that R-rated movies aren't a good idea for her and that she'd rather they did something else. The girls happily agreed to do so. When she told me this later, I told her how proud I was of her action. Truth is, I would have been proud of her as well if she had made a conscious decision to watch the movie. The point is that we want her to question, analyze, and independently act.

*P. C.*

#### **Techniques for truth**

My tween-aged daughter seldom lies, but when she occasionally does so, it's always upsetting to deal with as a parent. Thus, I've come up with some techniques that seem to make it easier for her to keep telling the truth. First, I encourage her to talk about what's going on when she's caught in a lie. Not long ago, she lied about why friends were angry with her—it turns out that she was sneaking their junk food at school because we have limits on junk at home. Allowing her to eat limited junk food at school fixed the problem.

I've also learned that discussing rules about things like lying during times when there isn't a problem is important. That's when I can make it clear that the punishment that results from being caught will be more severe than that stemming from the original "crime."

I also have her role-play what she thinks I would have done if she had told the truth in the first place. In addition, every time she tells the truth about a difficult situation or rule broken, I praise her extensively for her courage to stay honest and confess on her own. Finally, I ask her to propose hypothetical consequences for various types of dishonest behavior. She is often harder on herself than I would be!

*Barbara Simerka, Yonkers, NY*

#### **Fair play flourishes**

For years, the girls on softball teams in Maryland's Prince George's County played on fields far standard to the boys' fields. Some fields were pitted with holes, some lacked benches and adequate bleachers, and others didn't even have a scoreboard. Last fall, the girls won the right to equal playing conditions under a lawsuit enforcing Title IX, the federal law ensuring females equal access to sports, filed by the National Women's Law Center. The center had also won a 2005 case involving Roderick Jackson, a middle-school girls' basketball coach and dad fed up with the "second-class citizen" conditions for the girls on his teams. While girls' sports have blossomed tremendously in recent years, parents and girl advocates are still needed to ensure equality for girls. Find more resources to maintain equality and encourage sporty girls from the National Women's Law Center at [www.nwlc.org](http://www.nwlc.org) and the Women's Sports Foundation at [www.womenssportsfoundation.org](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org).



**L to R: Chris Sole (softball umpire and advocate), Nina Chaudhry and Fatima Goss Graves (both are Senior Counsel, National Women's Law Center), and Jack Mowatt (softball umpire, advocate, and Commissioner of the DC Amateur Softball Association)**



## Letters to the Editor

I'm a subscriber to *Daughters*, which my husband and I find so timely, helpful, and fun to read. Our daughter, Samantha, is almost nine. Do you know of any organizations that sponsor mother-daughter retreats for girls coming of age? Or do you have any ideas of something special I could do for her when she begins to menstruate?

*Frances Manners, New York, NY*

*Editor's note: Great idea! Not every girl wants a splashy public celebration of her first period, but many will appreciate a joyful acknowledgment of this special time. Go to the Body Issues area of the Daughters Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)) to get some recommendations for good books about celebrating menstruation and learn what other parents have done. Also, check out our past articles about puberty at the Daughters website, and go to [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org) to learn about puberty articles aimed at girls.*

*I'd love to hear from more parents about how they've celebrated with their daughter for a round-up of ideas in Daughters. Please email me at [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).*

Greetings from Costa Rica! I have been a subscriber since 1999, when your publication was called *New Moon Network*, and now our youngest daughter, Rachel, is 15. Thank you for the great work that you people are doing at *Daughters* and *New Moon*. My husband and I have always taken the duty of parenting our three daughters and one son very seriously. I believe it's necessary to reward and reinforce positive qualities and behaviors that we want our kids to manifest and embrace. It's so important for each parent to know what they value and what is really important to them. I love the French philosopher and mystic Pierre Teilhard Chardin's comment: "The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope."

*Karen Putterman Campos,  
San Rafael de Meredia, Costa Rica*

*Editor's note: Thanks much for your loyal readership! (New Moon Network, which merged with Daughters in 2001, was the publication for parents of girls who read our sister publication, New Moon; learn more about New Moon at [www.newmoon.org](http://www.newmoon.org).) We agree with your advice about focusing on positive attitudes and actions for girls—see this issue's articles on p. 1 and p. 14 about encouraging optimism.*

**Send your letter to the editor or question for "Ask the expert" to [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com). Thanks!**

## Ask the expert



**Courtney**



My 10-year-old daughter is very upset over various forms of disrespect from girlfriends, such as refusing to talk to her over something trivial, accusing her of doing something she didn't, and making her give up her bus seat on a field trip. How can she protect herself in these relationships while keeping her sweet nature and self-esteem intact?

*M. G.*

I love that you are so tuned into your daughter's true heart and what's going on in her friendships! Here are some friendship respect basics you can pass on to her.

**1. Be yourself. It takes courage, but the risk is worth the reward.** Encourage your daughter to not shy away from what makes her unique, special, and a good friend. Her true friends will want her to be herself, too. Ask her: Would a true friend force you do something you don't want to do?

**2. Speak up. Even if you tend to be shy, the secret to great friendships and mutual respect is speaking up and letting others know what feels right or wrong to them.** Help your daughter practice setting boundaries by posing some disrespect dilemmas and have her think of a respectful boundary. I work with teen girls every week and find it's best to ask them open-ended questions like, "What would you say to your friend if she uninvited you to a party?" Their answers are so insightful: "I'd let her know that it hurt my feelings and ask what was going on. I'd tell her if we're going to stay close friends, we have to talk problems out, not just ignore each other."

**3. You get what you give.** Ask her this: How do you treat friends to show them care and respect? Have there been times when you've regretted how you've treated a friend? Talk through these dilemmas, so she can explore how she is/will be a true friend to others. Her standards for how she'll treat people will help her expect the same in return.

**4. Sisterhood and after-school programs.** I've found that girls who join a girl-focused leadership/empowerment/confidence-building after-school program have stronger and more respectful friendships. She'll find friends outside her school or neighborhood, and she'll practice forming strong bonds and friendship "rules" in a mentor-guided, nurturing environment.

*Courtney Macavinta is the coauthor of *Respect: A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect and Dealing When Your Line Is Crossed* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2005). See her advice to girls in Daughters Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)) and at [www.respectrx.com](http://www.respectrx.com).*

sation many times before,” Larry says. “She always predicts disaster.”

Helping a girl learn optimism early on is important, because a girl's expectations can actually shape her life: A pessimistic girl is less likely to take challenging courses in school or try out for sports. But patterns of pessimistic thinking can be altered. As parents, we can both model more positive attitudes and help our girl see positive possibilities more clearly.

### Encouraging optimism

An optimistic girl believes three things and uses these beliefs to explain events. First, all things change. Second, problems are limited. And third, problems are not necessarily her fault. On the other hand, a girl who's a pessimist believes that bad things don't change, that one bad event affects everything else, and that problems are her fault. Helping a pessimistic girl to see things more positively isn't a quick process, but using a number of everyday tactics will make a difference.

■ **Editing her first thought.** A pessimistic girl's first thought when any problem arises is “It's hopeless.” This response creates a powerful, unconscious pattern. Find a quiet time together and encourage your daughter to imagine difficult situations, and then practice coming up with various hopeful responses. Later, when you hear her jump to a negative conclusion, try, “That's your first thought. What's your second thought?”

■ **Empowering her.** Brainstorm with her. This helps her see that problems have solutions and that she is capable of finding them. Your unfaltering belief that she can solve problems will bolster her self-confidence.

■ **Decatastrophizing.** Suppose your pessimistic daughter is worried that she didn't do well on a test. Her thinking may go like this: “I'm sure I flunked it. That will pull my whole grade down. There go my changes of getting into college.” Or she may conclude that a bad score on a test means that she is no good at anything, including music and sports. Help her scale back predictions of disaster by asking, “What is truly the worst thing that can happen?” Then ask, “How likely is that?”

■ **Recognizing different views of reality.** We also can give our daughters alternate ways of viewing events. For example, suppose your daughter's teacher yelled at her. A pessimistic girl would think, “He did that because something's wrong with me. He must really dislike me.” You can help her find different ways of looking at what happened. Maybe the teacher was ill.

Or maybe the principal was angry at him. Help her learn to say, “This may not be about me.”

■ **Filtering media.** Certainly girls today hear more about social problems and suffering than we did at their age. Provide your daughter a context for this information. Limit TV watching in your house, and watch with her when the news is bad so you can discuss events and put them into perspective.

■ **Avoiding empty praise.** Sometimes, in a misguided attempt to build girls' self-esteem, we praise them for skills they don't have and for achievements that cost them nothing. Telling your daughter she did well when she didn't actually lowers her self-confidence. Empty praise doesn't fool girls. It convinces them that we adults don't think they're capable of real achievement. If a girl fails, don't pretend she succeeded.

■ **Enhancing your role.** We don't know exactly how our daughters develop their outlook on life, but certainly we parents are involved. If you tend to be optimistic, your example will go a long way toward helping her see the positive. However, if your own view of the world is pessimistic, you'll need to provide perspective for her. If you catch yourself predicting doom, say, “I know I tend to be pessimistic. There are other ways of looking at this.” If your daughter's other parent is more optimistic than you are, be sure to support his or her upbeat outlook when you talk with your daughter.

Ultimately, the balance between optimism and pessimism is subtle, and change comes slowly at this deep level of consciousness. Even when you don't notice results, your efforts make a difference as you daughter learns to see possibility in the world around her. ★

### Resources

***The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience*** by Martin E. P. Seligman (HarperPerennial, 1996)

***How to Mother a Successful Daughter: A Practical Guide to Empowering Girls from Birth to Eighteen*** by Nicky Marone (Three Rivers, 1999)

Do our girls learn pessimism from listening to our negative comments about “those teens”? Get one mom's opinion in *Mothering Journey*, p. 14.

# Raising an optimistic, resilient daughter

By Sylvia Rimm, Ph.D.

When we spoke with more than 1,000 successful women for our set of See Jane Win books, we found that optimism and resilience developed during girlhood were critical to adult success. Your daughters will require both of these qualities as they pursue their passions in a world where gates are not always fully open to females.

Practicing the optimism that underlies long-term resilience begins in childhood, and parents can foster this life-affirming attitude.

Girls tell me, though, that it's harder than ever to feel positive and bounce back from setbacks. Middle-school students who met with me in focus groups for my recent book, *Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America's Middle Schoolers* (Rodale Press, 2005), reminded me frequently that peer pressure to fit in with popularity was incredibly severe. Among these students, worries were rampant about being popular or pretty or smart or thin enough, wearing the right clothes, having self-confidence, being understood by parents and teachers, and making good decisions about alcohol, drugs, and sex.

At the same time, the media has literally stolen middle childhood and initiated adolescence for children before their minds and bodies are prepared for the pressures that used to start during the teen years. For example, by third grade, 15 percent of the children were already expressing worries about being popular with the opposite sex, and a similar percentage believed their parents didn't understand them. Those who reported good family relationships had somewhat fewer worries, so this suggests that you can teach your children optimism and resilience now. Here are some suggestions for raising a girl's resilience.

## ■ Encourage your daughters to enter competitions.

Whether they're involved in sports, writing, debate, music, art, drama, or other arenas, they can learn the exhilaration of winning, the advantages of collaborating with a team, and most important of all, the lesson that no one wins all the time.

■ **Cheer for them when they win, but especially cheer them on when they do poorly.** Don't commiserate too much over losses, and be sure not to make excuses for them. Learning to bounce back from failures

strengthens them for later challenges.

■ **Gentle criticism teaches resilience.** Suggestions aren't heard well in the joy of victory or the misery of defeat, but at a later time, reviewing performance with a coach (who may be you) helps girls to understand how to improve without feeling that winning means they're perfect and losing means

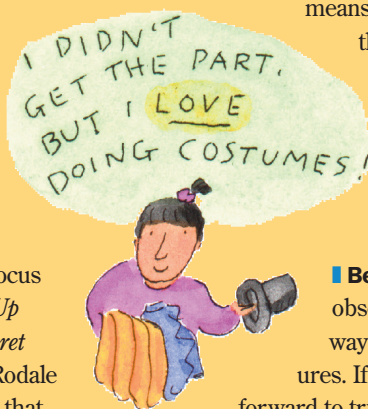
they've failed. Perfect performances don't happen. Perfectionism traps girls into never feeling good enough. Be clear that you expect the best she can do, but that her best may not be the best performance in the group.

■ **Be a role model for optimism.** Girls observe parental self-criticism and the way parents cope with their own failures. If you use failures to learn and move forward to try new experiences with optimism, you set good examples for your daughters.

■ **Let them hear you be positive about them.** Your daughters are listening. Whether you talk directly to them or about them to your partner, parent, teacher, or your friends, they hear what you say and are likely to believe you. Describing their performances as extraordinary, best, or brilliant puts extreme pressure on them. Discussing their sadness or disappointment within their hearing causes them to feel sorry for themselves and think they have serious problems. If the chit-chat a girl overhears sounds tempered and optimistic, she's more likely to feel motivated and positive about her future.

No matter how talented your daughter is, it's important for her to experience both successes and failures. While success can build her confidence, that confidence will not be sufficient to lead her to a successful adulthood unless she's practiced coping with obstacles in the safe family environment you can provide. ★

*Sylvia Rimm is a family educator whose books include See Jane Win for Girls: A Smart Girl's Guide to Success (Free Spirit Publishers, 2003), How Jane Won: 55 Successful Women Share How They Grew from Ordinary Girls to Extraordinary Women, with Sara Rimm-Kaufman (Crown, 2001), and See Jane Win: The Rimm Report on How 1,000 Girls Became Successful Women, with Ilonna Rimm (Running Press, 2001).*



## What does she hear about work?

By Melissa Schenker

As parents of daughters and girl advocates, we repeatedly give girls messages—those encouraging words about following their dreams and making wise choices—that we hope will help keep them strong and happy now and into the future. But we aren't always so judicious with our words about work. Too often, girls hear us complain about our jobs in ways that must make work sound horrific to them. Particularly with younger children, we're apt to portray work as "have-to-do" drudgery that sadly keeps us from their side.

Our unintentional remarks about work may well undermine our empowering messages about a future worklife that will keep them both emotionally and financially rewarded. As a career and life consultant, I know that adults are deeply affected by childhood messages about work that can keep them stuck in unsatisfying jobs and unhappy relationships. We can start now to transform our everyday comments about work into expressions that leave girls with realistic yet optimistic attitudes about jobs to come.

**■ Tell the whole story.** The truth of the matter is that on many days, it *is* hard to work, and the work is hard. It's fine to occasionally complain that work was miserable. But if that's all she hears, it sends the message that work is always awful. It's critical to portray the upsides of work, even on hard days. How about, "I'm beat from working so hard today, but now I've completed this project and it turned out great!" It should be easier to focus on the positive aspects of your job on good days, and remember to specify a range of rewards. For instance, "I had a great meeting with Beth—we really connect" or

"My boss was impressed with my idea and is going to use it."

**■ Focus on better solutions.** If your job really is bad, it's OK to say that, but it's important to let her know that you are looking for a better alternative. When a girl hears us sigh day after day, "I hate my job," she may think that an important adult in her life is feeling powerless and that it may be a part of her adult life too. Let her know that you're determining what you hate about your job and are pursuing ways to fix the problems or making plans to find different work. Or consider whether, like most people, you dislike parts of your job and find parts acceptable and perhaps enjoyable at times. Try to reflect that in conversations. Say something like, "I had a lot of that data entry that's such a drag, but now I can get back to the organizing parts I like."

**■ Getting clear about guilt.** It's totally natural to feel guilty about leaving a child who'd prefer you not go to work. Even when our girl's a tween or teen, we may still feel bad about leaving when she'd like more of our time. But when we say, "I'm sorry; I have to work," she may hear, "I have to do this thing I don't want to do at all."

Consider saying this to a younger girl: "I love and enjoy being with you, but I also enjoy a lot of what I do at work and the income I earn. When I come back, I'll be able to fully focus on you again." As a girl gets older, she'll be able to visualize herself in the roles of both parent and working person. You can help her do this by talking with her about the conflicting feelings that come from wanting to be a great parent while pursuing fulfilling work and needed family income.

With a little revamping, conversations and comments about work

will paint a picture about work that compels rather than repels our girls. And it'll likely make us feel better about the work we do as well! ★

*Melissa Schenker is the founder of Work/Life ([www.worklifenow.com](http://www.worklifenow.com)), an Austin, Texas-based organization offering work/life consulting services to individuals and organizations, and mom of an eight-year-old daughter.*

## Beyond "anything you want"

A few generations ago, kids were routinely pressured by parents to pursue particular professions. But starting with the Baby Boom generation, the parental message has often morphed into "Do whatever, dear—you can be anything you want!" This open-ended, freedom-filled message can be very unhelpful. Without direction or guidance, our girls (and boys) may react much like anyone else faced with too many choices: It's too much, and choosing at random may be the default option. Engaging with our daughters—helping them gather information, consider factors, and make good choices—may be a far greater gift than the permission to go anywhere. ★

*Joline Godfrey is the founder of Independent Means—see [www.independentmeans.com](http://www.independentmeans.com) for information on her books, including *Raising Financially Fit Kids* (Ten Speed Press, 2003) and *No More Frogs to Kiss: 99 Ways to Give Economic Power to Girls* (HarperCollins, 1995), and for more resources to encourage financial self-reliance and well-being for young people.*



## CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

### Writing her voice

By Ellen Birkett Morris



Does your daughter have a hard time speaking out? Expressing her feelings and thoughts can be particularly challenging for quieter girls, who may feel intimidated by more verbally adept peers. For many girls, writing anything—from journals to poetry to letters to the editor—can be a way to let others know “what she’s about” while also strengthening important skills.

When girls try writing something that’s for themselves and not just required for school, they’re often surprised by their abilities, says Susannah Sheffer, a writing coach and author of *Writing Because We Love To* (Boynton/Cook, 1992). “It’s wonderful to see a girl read her story and delight in her own work,” she says.

Of course, a beginning writer may not be impressed by her efforts. Encourage her to think of writing as self-expression rather than as a craft, particularly at first. “Writing encourages a girl to slow down and think more deeply about what she means, what she feels, or what she wants someone else to understand,” says Sheffer. Personal writing, which can include diaries or notes she writes

to friends, is often a good place to start before taking on fiction and poetry. Journal writing also has a therapeutic bonus, Sheffer notes: it lets a girl “notice how feelings change over time, so it’s a way of giving oneself perspective.”

After a girl gets comfortable with expressing her thoughts, suggest she try revising to make her idea or feeling more clearly and deeply expressed. Remind her that no one’s writing comes out perfect

the first time, says Sheffer, who leads writing workshops at North Star, an education center for home-schoolers in Hadley, Massachusetts. “One of the most helpful things we can do for young writers is show our own and others’ drafts and revisions to let them see how a piece can start out really rough and then get better over time,” she advises.

Be prepared for a girl to be too self-critical. One of Sheffer’s students, seventeen-year-old Annie Krakower, had stopped writing because she thought her poems were “lame.” After attending Sheffer’s writing workshop, she was encouraged by positive feedback from peers and adults. It helped her return to poetry, including a love poem she wrote for her brother’s wedding. “He cried when he read the poem, and they’re going to frame it,” says Krakower.

One way to encourage girls to write is to model behavior, says Sheffer. She suggests writing letters to your daughter, to friends, and to the editor of the newspaper. Help your daughter find others who can read her work supportively and critically, such as helping

her form a small writing group or connecting with an adult mentor, advises Sheffer. And consider alternative approaches to writing. Sheffer worked with a fifteen-year-old who didn’t see herself as a writer until she used dictation to express herself and discovered she had a lot to say.

Whatever writing expression she chooses, Sheffer suggests supporting the process with these guidelines:

- **If your daughter shows you her writing, ask her what kind of feedback she wants.** Is she looking to see if the piece works on an emotional level or does she want someone to correct the grammar?
- **Respond as specifically as you can,** pointing out specific passages or word choices that worked (or didn’t work) instead of just offering praise. Identify the strengths of the writing before pointing out areas for improvement.
- **No subject she wants to write about should be off limits.** If a character is using drugs in your daughter’s story, don’t assume this means she’s using drugs. Express interest and use the story as a springboard for discussion of difficult issues.
- **Give her guides to browse,** such as *New Moon Writing: How to Express Yourself with Passion and Practice*, by the New Moon Books Girls Editorial Board (Crown, 2000) and *Write Away: A Friendly Guide for Teenage Writers*, by Peter Stillman (Boynton/Cook, 1995). ★

*Ellen Birkett Morris is a journalist and writer based in Louisville, Kentucky. Her fiction is forthcoming in Alimantum.*

# Pessimistic parenting: Will she sink to our expectations?

By Cindy Kelly Lennartson



Cindy and Anna

Not since she was a two-year-old have I heard so much angst expressed when I tell someone how old my daughter is. “A teenager? Uh, oh!” That seems to be the automatic response of most people, including several parents of my daughter’s friends. Often, parents follow up that gloomy assessment with a litany of complaints about their teen, sometimes right in front of the girl.

What does this tell our girls? I’m concerned that when they so often hear negative parental reflections, they’ll start assuming some pretty disempowering things. One, they may fear that their teen years will be worse than they thought they’d be. Two, they’ll assume that we adults don’t think much of them. And three, they may not bother to set high expectations of themselves and strive for better behavior, because what’s the use?

I was recently chatting with another mom of a teenage girl after I’d dropped my daughter off to spend the afternoon. This mom was full of complaints about her daughter and most of them seemed, well, pretty typical for a teen. Her daughter talks on the phone too much, she griped, and wants to spend all of her time with her friends. She expects her mom to be available to drive her all over town, and she doesn’t clean up her

room often enough. She continued like this, and I walked away from the conversation angry and frustrated—wasn’t there *anything* good about this person my daughter considered a good friend?

Of course, I well understand that the teenage years can be challenging for both daughters and parents. But why do we seem so willing to dwell on the negatives when there are so many positives? Here are just a few things we parents too often overlook:

- Teens are full of energy, and they show it—in their enthusiasm for spending as much time as possible with friends, for example, or in their dedication to an activity that they really enjoy. I marvel at how my daughter can get up at 5:45 a.m. to be at band practice by 6:30, then go to school all day and come home around 5:00 with enough energy to complete 2 or 3 hours of homework and chat online and on the phone with her friends. Her energy seems boundless much of the time. What a wonderful thing!
- Teens challenge the way many grown-ups see the world. When my daughter, who uses a wheelchair, wanted to get up to the top of the bleachers to get a better view at a marching band competition, I was terrified that she would be hurt going up or down the stairs. But she and her friends figured out that one of the bigger boys in the band could carry her on his back without a problem. They showed me that my adult doubts could be overcome by their teenage creativity.
- Teens are passionate about the things they feel are important. Many are involved in one

Share your journey with us. Send your essay to [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).

or more projects with community groups or religious organizations—I know of at least a dozen teens who gave up a big chunk of their summer vacation last year to help low-income communities in Mexico. I see and hear about teens contributing in dozens of ways, from mentoring younger children to organizing large charity events. They have so much to give and they give it freely.

So the next time you hear another parent start to complain, I suggest that you answer with a kind reminder of something good about teens in general or that parent’s teen in particular. I’ve tried this a few times, with great results. When a mom complained to me that her daughter “bugs her” until she has to give in, and added, “She’s so persistent!” I thought a second and then offered, “Yes, but that persistence will serve her well when she faces challenges in her life.” She stared at me for a moment and said, “I know you’re right. Thanks for sharing your perspective.”

Our daughters need to hear us talking positively about them, and other teens, much more often. They’re living through an exciting but often overwhelming time in their lives. If we can keep them—and ourselves—more upbeat about these years, it will set the stage for continued success and happiness. ★

*Cindy Kelly Lennartson is a librarian and mother of three in Round Rock, Texas.*

## CONSIDER THIS

### *Can she really tell you anything?*

By Susan L. Carney, M.Ed.

As a school counselor, I've had this conversation many times. A young girl is crying, sharing with me the intimate details of a difficult decision, a crushing disappointment, a step into dangerous behavior. Maybe she's feeling depressed over a break-up; maybe she's been skipping meals to drop a few pounds. At some point, I'll ask, "Have you spoken to your mom about this?" Many girls have, and this thrills me. But a surprising number of them look at me as if I'm crazy, roll their eyes, and say, "Oh yeah, right! As if she'd understand!"

I long to tell her that yes, she would. We were you once—maybe not exactly, because I know this world is a much harsher one than ours was. But we had the same dreams, fears, and anxieties, and we know. We know in the same way that our mothers knew, though we wouldn't have believed that, either.

Yet I've learned that I can't guarantee this to my girls. When the seriousness of the issue requires it, I call in a girl's parent, usually her mother. I'm often the fly on the wall when girls bare their souls to their moms, and I hold my breath waiting for the response, hoping it is supportive, loving, and accepting. Often it is, and I'm relieved. Other times, though, moms tend to trivialize their girl's concerns. "Losing one boyfriend isn't the end of the world!" I'll hear, or "Honey, you're not fat, why would you think that?" It's just the reaction the girl has been dreading, and she gives me a look that says, "This

is exactly why I don't tell her anything!"

Fear is a part of mothering, and that fear can cause connected and loving women to respond to their daughters in ways that build walls between them. Our need to fix, to protect, can lead us to make hasty responses that undercut our girls' need to be heard and understood. I've heard mothers dismiss girls' concerns as insignificant. I've heard them give ultimatums poorly disguised as advice. I've heard them overreact by reining their girls in so tightly their daughters' only option was to break loose. And I've heard the panic in their voices as their world is rocked by things they thought they'd never hear.

It's a skilled mother who, in the moment of crisis, can fight the urge to tie things up quickly and neatly and who will instead take the time to sift through what her daughter is saying to the feelings and motives that lie underneath. She knows that otherwise, her daughter is likely to continue to

feel disconnected and misunderstood. In fact, the girl will probably feel worse, because she took a risk and now wishes she hadn't. She'll think twice next time.

When we don't truly listen, when we aren't in the moment with them feeling what they feel, when we rush to the solution or the rule or the dismissal that we think is going to quickly fix her problem, make us feel better, and our world feel safer, we invalidate our girl's experience by blotting it out with our own. When we treat them as small or trivial, we make them feel small or trivial too.

Now that I have a daughter, I dread the day that she is this girl, sitting across from another woman, telling her how her mother just doesn't get it. I know that some of this is inevitable, as she grows up and away from me to find herself. But I don't want her to go too far. Not only that, but I'm afraid for her. I know about the world she lives in, and I worry about how she'll navigate that world if she isn't confident that she can tell me abso-

lutely anything.

I hope my daughter will always feel able to confide in me, no matter what. I hope that my love for her will be stronger than my fear for her, and that it will allow me to truly hear her story and validate her perspective. I hope that I'll be the one she turns to when she stumbles, so that together, we can help her get back on her road. ★

*Susan Carney is a middle-school counselor and mother of two-year-old twins who lives in Gilbertsville, Pennsylvania.*



## DAD'S DESK

### *Growing future dads*

By Joe Kelly



Are you sick of seeing “Doofus Dad” on TV shows and in ads and other media? Tired of hearing dads depicted as clueless? I am, and to me, Doofus Dad representations demonstrate just how little our society values fathers. I know a lot of dads and moms agree that this devaluation of dads is appalling. But too often, we overlook the solution, which is to change the ways we raise boys.

We—parents and community institutions that help influence and support families—don’t invest nearly as much time and attention preparing boys to become fathers as we do preparing girls to become mothers. For example, compare the number of family skills merit badges offered by the Girl Scouts to the number offered by the Boy Scouts.

In the Girl Scouts, young women have earned merit badges in child care, cooking, and home health since 1913. Since then, badges have

been added in other parenting areas such as family living skills, healthy relationships, and consumer power. In the Boy Scouts, the only comparable merit badges young men can earn are Family Life, Cooking, and Textiles. And the number of Family Life badges awarded is far fewer than any other badges.

This is not to bash Boy Scouts; indeed, the thousands of Boy Scouts with Family Life badges are better off than most young men. Rather, the merit badge disparity reflects how few boys in our culture get hands-on training in child-rearing, especially infant care.

And what about the everyday ways we can prepare boys for fatherhood? Have things changed much since you were a boy, when it’s likely that you didn’t babysit nearly as much as your sisters (or at all)? Did you learn to change diapers? If you did, the odds are slim that your father was the one who taught you. How much did Dad

ever say about how to be a father, or about how his life was enriched by having you as his son?

It’s up to us to change the generational cycle of father silence. Because new dads tend to start out with less training and information on being parents than do new moms, when we are “newby” dads we have to acknowledge our need and reach out for knowledge. And when we dive in to active fathering and share what we know, we’ll help the new generation of dads feel and act less like Doofus Dads. More importantly, we’ll give our own children the words and wisdom they’ll need when they take their turn as fathers and mothers. ★

*Joe Kelly (publisher@daughters.com) is the president of Dads & Daughters (www.dadsanddaughters.org) and author of Dads and Daughters: How to Inspire, Understand, and Support Your Daughter (Broadway, 2003).*

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