

# Daughters

For Parents of Girls

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## INTERVIEW

### Mimi Doe on raising compassionate girls



*"Kind" and "compassionate" may not be the first words that come to mind when we describe our daughters dur-*

*ing their tween and teen years. It's no surprise: a girl's best instincts are sometimes submerged as she struggles with the challenges of relationships, school, and puberty. But when we guide girls to easy daily opportunities to express their compassion, we will soon see kindness unfold, says Mimi Doe, parent educator and author of Nurturing Your Teenager's Soul: A Practical Approach to Raising a Kind, Honorable, Compassionate Teen (Penguin, 2004). We recently spoke with Doe, who's also a mother of daughters ages 15 and 18, from her Concord, Massachusetts, home and office.*

#### Making sense of self-obsession

Girls are often misunderstood at this age. Like most teens, they're all over the map—one minute they're into Gandhi and the next moment Eminem. They can be so self-focused. And some do the "mean girl" thing, which is how they deal with their emotions and try to manage a complicated social structure.

At the same time, girls are going  
*continued on page 6*



## LET'S TALK

### Helping her change disrespectful language

By Kristal Leebrick

**Mom:** I just overheard your phone conversation. You called Audrey a "whore"?

**Emma:** No, I didn't—I called her a "ho."

**Mom:** But Emma, "ho" is slang for whore. Do you know what a whore is?

**Emma:** I know what it means, Mom. We say "ho" as a joke. It's friendly.

Barbara Danforth remembers the day she walked down the hall of a suburban Cleveland high school and heard a boy say, "Hey, bitch." She was amazed to see an attractive young woman turn from her locker, smile, and reply, "What do you want, sweetie?"

Danforth, the executive director of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland, would soon see shocking language even closer up. A few months later, she happened to intercept a letter to her then 13-year-old daughter from a boy she had recently met. She was horrified to see that the

letter referred to her daughter in a number of derogatory ways and included the word "bitch." As Danforth read on, she recalls feeling "like someone had punched me in the stomach."

What Danforth heard and read won't surprise many parents. These

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# Daughters

FOR PARENTS OF GIRLS

Publisher Joe Kelly  
Editor Helen Cordes  
editor@daughters.com  
Art Director Jeanne Schacht  
Proofreader Kate Regan  
Publication management  
New Moon Publishing, Inc.  
Publisher Nancy Gruver  
Chief Operating Officer Linda Estel  
Fulfillment Manager Sandy Smith

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*Daughters* provides parents with information and support, intended to help them communicate with and enjoy the company of their adolescent daughters. If communication breaks down or severe problems develop, *Daughters* urges parents to seek the help of professionals.

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Dads & Daughters

## HER WORLD

### Surprising bedside reading

If you hesitate to bring up a touchy topic with your daughter—say, her problematic friend or her dating behavior—try putting it in words. Somebody else's, that is. Some parents have discovered that giving a girl "advice books" she can read on her own can work wonders.

Keeping her supplied with girl-oriented lifeskill guides "can help reinforce ideas you want to convey but that she may not take seriously because it's from an 'uncool' parent," says Catherine Dee, author of *The Girls' Guide to Life* (Little, Brown, 2005; [www.empowergirls.com](http://www.empowergirls.com)) and other books including *The Girls' Book of Wisdom* and *The Girls' Book of Friendship*. "If she reads something interesting in any book, fiction or nonfiction, she's

more likely to turn to you to discuss her views. A book can pave the way for in-depth conversation by giving her a little preliminary perspective."

One mom found that a book passage addressing male-female behavior opened a door with her daughter. "It led to a very interesting conversation that was enlightening for both of us—for me because I found out what her thoughts were about how girls should act around boys and for her because she realized that I really had been her age once and had had similar feelings," she notes.

For suggestions for more good books for girls, see the Media conversation area of the *Daughters* Community Forum at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com). ★

## EDITOR'S DESK

We love Father's Day in our house. But we don't wait until the third Sunday in June to celebrate it. Every day is Father's Day here, because my husband Eric is a full-fledged father every day. And that fact has made raising our two girls the most fun, most fulfilling thing that the two of us have ever done. Not to say that every moment of daughter-raising is a holiday. Anyone who has raised a daughter (or son) knows that kids are a complicated, time-intensive, not-always-pleasant life project. But Eric has always been in the trenches right alongside me—from getting up night after night to soothe a crying toddler to listening patiently to our girls as they wend through the moody and parent-testing teen years. And I see the benefits of his loving, reliable fathering presence shining through constantly in our daughters.

I've met many, many other fathers who share Eric's notion of fatherhood. These dads know that fully fathering a daughter can make a huge difference in a girl's life—loads of studies back that up. And of course, these dads find fathering profoundly emotionally rewarding as well. Dads can learn lots about how to enrich a daughter's life at [www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org). Have a heck of a happy Father's Day—every day!

[editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com)

[www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)





Peggy Collins

## Safer schools

When Mary Kay Clipner's daughter was bullied in grade school, Clipner vowed to do something that would help her daughter and other kids coping with increasing school-based bullying. She pulled together a coalition of groups ranging from the American Association of University Women to Girl Scouts to 4-H to local religious groups. Now all the schools in her local Ohio school district—from kindergartens through high schools—are participating in programs that show kids, teachers, parents, and administrators how to make schools feel safe.

If teasing, harassment, and bullying is a problem at your daughter's school, check out resources Clipner used. Hundreds of schools have seen bullying relief after using the National Education Association's free school training ([www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html](http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/bullying.html); includes resources for parents). And the Ophelia Project's Creating A Safe School program ([www.opheliaproject.org](http://www.opheliaproject.org)) also reports success, with a recent study documenting lower rates of "relational aggression" such as spreading rumors and excluding friends among the 3rd- to 8th-graders completing the program.

## Cheerleading dangers

Cheerleading injuries have doubled in recent years, reports *Pediatrics* (Jan. 1, 2006). Most of the injuries

were suffered by 12- to 17-year-old girls, and cheerleading caused over half the serious and sometimes fatal injuries to female high-school and college athletes. Injuries have increased because of the increasing competitiveness of cheerleading, say experts, which has expanded to a booming industry of non-school cheering competitions that has girls training as early as age three. Too many cheerleaders try risky stunts without adequate training and safety measures, and regulation is lax.

If your girl's attracted to cheerleading, make sure you do plenty of safety investigation first. And help her explore other sports and activity outlets that let her enjoy honing her physical skills without high safety risks.



## Is she drinking?

An estimated 4.5 million tween and teen girls drank alcohol last year, but most moms say they never knew about it. Sixteen percent of 13- to 16-year-olds admitted they drink with friends, while only five percent of moms think their daughter is drinking, according to a survey of mother-daughter pairs by the Century Council, a group of leading alcohol producers. Thirty percent of 16- to 18-year old girls drank, but just nine percent of the mothers were aware.

Try exploring [www.girlsanddrinking.com](http://www.girlsanddrinking.com) with your daughter, and start getting real honest about drinking. When girls and adults

share the truth on why and how they drink, girls get great guidance for better choices.

## Sports inspiration

Girls gain so much through participation in sports, yet many girls bypass sports because they fear not being "good enough" or find sports boring. The number way to get your girl gung-ho about sports is to show her yourself how fun it can be. *USA Today* sports columnist Christine Brennan tells how her dad inspired her lifelong sports fascination in *Best Seat in the House: A Father, A Daughter, A Journey Through Sports* (Scribner, 2006, available May 9). Father's Day gift, anyone? And Christine will answer your questions on how to get your girl crazy about sports at the *Daughters* Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)).

## Driving smarts

Most girls love getting their driver's license, and most parents love not being the chauffeur. But girls need more than driver's ed to set off on the road. While boys are still riskier drivers than girls, teen girls and boys are the most deadly drivers. Drivers age 15 to 17 killed 30,917 people between 1995 and 2004, according to a recent American Automobile Association report.

Teens crash their car more often because they're distracted by friends and cell phones, under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and fatigue, and insufficiently experienced in driving, particularly at nighttime and in hazardous conditions. Proposed laws upping the age of licensing and banning cell phone use for teens may appear soon, but keep your girl safer now by enforcing driving limits and mandating plenty of practice.

## LIFESKILLS

# Putting perfectionism in its place

By Barbara Gruener

As a child, I loved to please people by doing everything perfectly. I worked hard, made straight As in school, and looked forward to parent-teacher conferences, when the people I loved to please most would discuss how well I was doing. So imagine my shock when my father returned from my 6th-grade teacher conference with a stern look on his face. “Barbara,” he said, “you got two Bs on your report card.” Two Bs? I remember feeling my legs go numb and my heart rate accelerate. Bewildered and fighting off tears, I stammered out two little words: “In what?” With a half-smile, he replied, “Your name.”

I laughed, of course, but I’ll never forget that night and the unrealistically high standards I set for myself. And I hope I’ll never forget how easily our own daughters can fall into the same trap of perfectionism. Therapists and other experts who work with girls say that perfectionism affects many more girls than boys. When girls are unable to achieve perfection, they can feel they are failures, which in turn makes them more likely to experience depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and chronic stress-related ailments.

Perfectionists, says Thomas S. Greenspon, author of *Freeing Our Families From Perfectionism* (Free Spirit, 2003), often feel fear, anxiety, anger, and shame. Perfectionism breeds a kind of Catch-22, because any effort that’s less than perfect can leave girls feeling inadequate about their ability to excel and be, well, perfect. As they strive to be superior, they often end up feeling inferior.

Girls can learn perfectionism from parental behavior, Greenspon says, particularly from supermoms who try to “do it all”

and do it perfectly. Thus, one way to help our daughters tone down their perfectionism is to chip away at our own, by modeling acceptance of fallibility and managing our own feelings of anxiety or anger. Instead of beating ourselves up when we make a mistake, for example, we can use it as a learning opportunity.

Here are some strategies to help girls let go of their need to be perfect.

- Create an environment that is both accepting and encouraging. Let your daughter know that you appreciate her and that you value who she is more than what she can achieve.
- Give her permission to mess up and allow self-expression without judgment. Sometimes we don’t realize how our judging comments can make a girl feel. Eva put it this way: “I feel like I’m a criminal in my own home every time I mess up.”
- Be willing to share your personal struggles so that your children see your imperfections. Respond to her imperfections with unconditional positive regard.
- Hold family meetings. This is an avenue for healthy expres-

sion of thoughts and feelings. And without blaming, remind girls that their perfectionism can have an exhausting effect on everyone in the household, as they try to keep up with her demanding standards.

- Encourage her to keep a journal of writing or artwork. This is an excellent way to help her process feelings. It also allows for reflection. When she goes back and reads it, she can chart emotional growth.
- Try bibliotherapy. Find stories that promote discussion of the positive and negative effects of perfectionism. *Perfect Pals: How to Juggle Your Way from Perfection to Excellence* (by Janet M. Bender and Amy R. Murray, National Center for Youth Issues, 2003) provides great insight into the consequences of perfectionism, especially for younger girls. *Perfectionism: What’s Bad About Being Too Good?* (by Miriam Adderholdt and Jan Goldberg, Free Spirit, 2005) is a good how-not-to for teens.
- Use humor. Learn to laugh at mistakes rather than ruminate over them.
- Encourage your daughter to sign up for something that’s just for fun with no grade or expectations attached.

If we model healthy ways to manage our feelings so they aren’t stuffed away until they sour hearts and minds, we can free ourselves from our own unrealistic expectations. And Dad, it’s really okay to have 2 Bs on your report card, even if your name isn’t Barbara. ★

*A recovering perfectionist herself, counselor Barbara Gruener lives with her family in Friendswood, Texas.*



## HEALTH

# Body boost: Keep her “full of herself”

By Helen Cordes

As parents, we can't help feeling confused and fearful when reading recent headlines about girls' body issues. Eating disorders such as anorexia, say more researchers, are increasingly striking girls as early as nine. Girls of all sizes are starting to diet at ever-earlier ages, with reports showing that girls both here and abroad are now obsessing about their size and weight from first grade on up. At the same time, thousands more girls (and boys) are being diagnosed as obese.

It's nice when we can breathe a sigh of relief about a daughter who seems unscathed by such troubling trends. But we all need to take proactive measures to keep her healthy and body-confident—and do so from early on. “The fact that eating disorders are showing up at earlier ages is a sign that the cultural messages that all girls get are more powerful than ever,” says Catherine Steiner-Adair, a clinical psychologist and director of the Eating Disorders Education and Prevention program at Harvard University.

Girls too often gravitate to unhealthy eating patterns—whether it's too much or too little or a particular diet regimen—as a way to deal with stress or address a need for control or lack of connection in their lives. And any girl's body insecurities can balloon when she sees constant media images of the “right” body, notes Steiner-Adair. Thus, to treat or “inoculate” girls before they have eating problems, parents should take a good look at all aspects of a girl's life to make sure she's “full,” with nourishing surroundings and supportive connections.

This philosophy guided Steiner-Adair and coauthor Lisa Sjostrom, an educator and director



of Helping Kids Thrive, as they wrote *Full of Ourselves: A Wellness Program to Advance Girl Power, Health, and Leadership* (Teachers College Press, 2006). The guide helps girls ages 8-14 appreciate their real strengths, learn ways to address stresses, and deepen connections with adults and peers.

While the guide is intended to be used with groups of girls, it can easily be used by a parent with a daughter, with conversation-starters, games, and writing prompts providing entertaining ways to get her talking. For example, a yummy “conscious eating” session helps a girl embrace food as a friend, not an enemy to be avoided or overused. An undercover assignment to record every shaming remark about size and food gets girls aware of the debilitating effect of such messages. Techniques that encourage a girl to celebrate her strengths let her feel good about “throwing her weight around.”

When girls talk honestly about bodies and eating, “it's clear that things can change,” says Sjostrom. She talked with hundreds of girls and group leaders while evaluating the program, which involved more than 800 girls and 70 adult leaders at some 30 schools, after-school

programs, and community organizations in five states. Girls who completed the program scored significantly higher than peers in body satisfaction assessments. When all the girls in a grade participated in the program, they were much less likely to engage in weight-loss behaviors.

One particularly powerful component of the program occurs when the middle-school girls complete the program and then lead groups of 4th and 5th graders through the same program. “You can see how the younger girls look up to them and respect what they're saying,” observes Sjostrom. Parents can facilitate the same mentoring process informally. “Even if an older girl or group of girls comes to talk just once with a group of younger girls, such as a Brownie troop, it can make a big difference,” Sjostrom notes.

While teachers or counselors typically facilitate a Full of Ourselves group, parents could also facilitate a group for a daughter's friends or classmates. “It's best for two parents to team up, but you don't have to have teaching or counseling experience,” Sjostrom notes. Some parents have used the guide to talk together about strategies to use with daughters. The bottom line, says Steiner-Adair, is to create a family atmosphere in which a girl is encouraged to be full of herself. “Once a girl is proud of who she is,” she notes, “there's no need for her to abuse her body to feel better about herself.” ★

For a free miniguide for parents or schools, see the Full of Ourselves website: [www.mclean.harvard.edu/education/youth/guide/php](http://www.mclean.harvard.edu/education/youth/guide/php).

through a natural developmental process that has them thinking all the time about how they define themselves. They're trying to figure out "Who am I?" and "Where do I fit in?" This is normal—that's what they need to make the journey from childhood to teenhood. But the result is that they're all about themselves.

What I also see is that girls are very passionate and caring at this age. Unfortunately, they're surrounded by a culture that emphasizes what you can get, not what you can give—a culture that doesn't value kindness and compassion. We've created a population of kids who see their parents constantly striving to "get ahead." And we as parents have been hammered with the message that we must raise "successful" competitive kids who have to get into the best schools. I hear girls saying, "Wait a minute, we want more."

Our children are taught to log community service hours to fulfill a school requirement and look good on college applications, but they don't go into service with any kind of gut motivation. What we want is for girls to feel organic compassion, not just do something to log more hours. We can help them see that when they give of themselves, it helps them develop a finer sense of who they are in the world. As they give, they'll see that being a good person gives them a high; a self-gratification around giving. And that only incites them to give more.

#### A conducive environment

The key thing we can do to help our daughters develop compassion is to help them articulate the inner voice that tells them what's right and wrong. Intuition, gut feeling, conscience, internal compass, God within—whatever you want to call it—we can help them recognize it and practice using it.

Encourage your daughter to listen to what her emotions and her body tell her. It could be saying to her, "What do you feel like having for breakfast? What's your gut feeling about what your body needs?" Or noting to her, "You're mad at Sam—what's your gut feeling about what's wrong?" When she goes to a party where there might be drinking or drugs, say, "If you get a gut feeling that something isn't right, call me. I won't ask questions, and I will trust your gut. It's your connection with wisdom that will be your helper and advisor in any decision you make."

But for girls to listen to their inner voice, we need to help them create the calm space to hear it. Girls can be overstimulated with too many things to do and the constant noise with iPods and IMing. We parents can set limits. If we say that every Saturday is no technology day,

then that's the way it is. Sure, they're going to fuss at first when we enforce a quieter, calmer atmosphere. But once girls experience the calm, it really helps them center and de-stress and connect with their true inner selves.

#### A compassionate household?

We've gotten the notion that if we drop our kids off at Sunday school or have them in the youth group, then our kid is a good person. We get religion mixed up with spirituality, and we get religion mixed up with compassion in everyday life and having our kids live the Golden Rule.

Compassion happens when a girl thinks about what the other person is going through, instead of being fixated on how she is affected by other people. But she needs to see us do that. Say you have a coworker who isn't pulling his load. You might say, "I found out that Bill just lost his mother and needs to take care of his dad who has Alzheimer's disease, and that's why he's not doing well at work. I'll try to support him by finding out about an Alzheimer's support group." Then the next time a girl is judgmental about someone, you can ask her whether she can think of a reason the person acted that way.

We can also model everyday kindness. She'll notice when we choose not to begin conversations with a sharp word, and when we bring muffins to the new

#### Compassionate conversation starters

If we want girls to grow and show their compassion, we need to make time for conversations that help her see how to develop kindness and forgiveness, as well as realize the benefits of modeling those values. Try posing these questions from *Doe's Nurturing Your Teenager's Soul* with your girl—and answering them yourself!

- Who do you think has the hardest time at your school (or workplace)? Is there an individual or a group of teens who really find it hard to be there every day?
- What's the worst thing that happened to you this week? How did you respond? Would you do anything differently if it happened again?
- Do you think I practice what I preach?
- Is there anyone in our family whom you look toward as a model for you in life? Why?
- Is there someone who looks up to you—a sibling, neighbor, younger friend? What behaviors do they emulate?

neighbor, and when we call others when we're going to be late. When my girls were young, we had a kindness board where we wrote down nice things we did for one another.

Show her how you incorporate forgiveness in everyday life. If you spoke to her in an angry and disrespectful way, say so. Let her know that even when she makes a mistake and hurts another, she has the chance to apologize and have a "do-over." You could say, "I want to take back the way I spoke to you; it was not OK and I'm really sorry. Can you just cancel that?" When girls see that they can make a bad situation good, it helps them from getting stuck in self-reproach and feeling powerless. Girls at this age can be so spontaneous with their words, and this technique shows them that they can fix a hurt they have created.

#### Channeling the passion

When we give girls the time and permission to explore things important to them, when we give them time to sit down with us for dinner so we can hear what they care about, that's the beginning of growing compassionate action. If you have a daughter who's fantastic on the computer, you could say, "Wouldn't it be incredible if you could teach senior citizens internet skills for a few hours a week?" or "You know your concern about the lack of water in the world? You could set up a website that helps other teens take action about that."

We have to be ready to support them in their compassionate efforts. I have a daughter who wanted to play her flute at the nursing home. I would take her there sometimes, but I didn't like it because it was depressing and smelled bad. We adults sometimes undercut our girls' desire to do good, because we're too busy and we don't make it a priority.

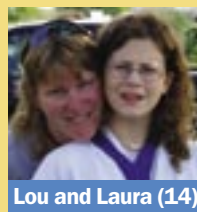
Girls have a great desire to fit in, and volunteering gives them a great way to do this. Help her look for groups of other kids who are following interests similar to hers. That might be an online group, an activist organization, or a spiritual community. Girls hunger to be a part of something and to be accepted. When we help them develop that sense of giving that completes their need to be involved in something bigger than them, it's a magic formula for growing a compassionate girl. ★

*Mimi Doe has also written 10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting (Harper, 1998) and Busy but Balanced: Practical and Inspirational Ways to Create a Calmer, Closer Family (St. Martin's, 2001). See her website at [www.spiritualparenting.com](http://www.spiritualparenting.com).*

## WORKING IT OUT

### Self-defense solution

*We want girls to feel self-confident through strong bodies and minds, but it's not always easy to find a way to develop that strength if a girl isn't gung-ho on the method. Here's how Lou and Laura, 14, worked it out.*



Lou and Laura (14)

**Lou:** My husband has a black belt in karate, and we both felt it was important for girls to have a strong foundation in self-defense. Laura wasn't really interested in it, but we asked her to go for a while and see if she liked it.

**Laura:** The idea of self-defense seemed like taking a math class or something you have to do and you don't like it. I knew my parents would make me go, so I gave it a try.

**Lou:** At first, I'd ask her after class how it went, and she'd say, "I didn't really like it." But the teacher said she was actually doing really well, and he decided to let her teach some of the less experienced students some basic movements.

**Laura:** I got to teach other white belts as young as seven and as old as fifty. That made me feel really proud of myself, and I started staying on after classes to practice.

**Lou:** All of a sudden, she wanted to skip church and other things she likes so she could take more Tae Kwon Do. And I noticed that she started having a greater sense of responsibility and helped around the house more. Before, she wasn't eager to take care of her younger siblings, but lately she's offering to get the kids dressed and take charge of them.

**Laura:** Self-defense classes get you stronger and improve your concentration. I had been diagnosed as ADHD, but I found after taking classes that I could concentrate better, and I stopped taking the pills. I felt more confident. Before, I was known as a quiet bookworm at school, but now I'm making a lot more friends.

**Lou:** She has really thrived there. She has gotten more mature and started doing some great volunteer work.

**Laura:** I go to visit at a nursing home. There's a lady there who lived through Nazi Germany and she showed me pictures from that time and we talked. I really enjoy going there.

## Dealing with her mood swings

“How do you deal with your daughter’s mood swings? One minute we’re having a nice conversation; then I’m the bad guy and the cold shoulder is issued. Some days her rudeness is painful and I can’t help but take it personally.”

R.T.H., Havertown, PA

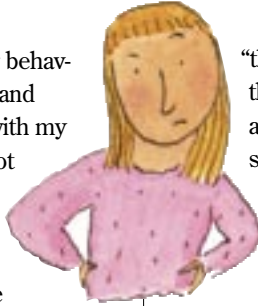
The key answer is your own: don’t take her behavior personally. Although this is easy to say and often a tough thing to do, I get along best with my own teen daughter when I remember it’s not about me. Yes, rudeness can be painful, but ask yourself: has she gotten enough sleep, is she about to have her period, has a friend hurt her feelings? Consider the information about sleep deprivation in a recent issue of *Daughters*—as simple as it sounds, it can seriously spark unwanted behavior. How about humor? My daughter and I are the closest when we are laughing uncontrollably over something silly. And even if she does make a rude, uncalled-for comment, if I run with it with my own light comment, it can break the tension and set us both on equally silly terms.

R.S.U., Hilo, HI

Gosh, I know how you feel. Sometimes I can be so philosophical, and sometimes I get my feelings hurt. I have a particular friend I call—one who knows that my daughter is both fantastic AND fifteen. She’s always very sympathetic but without making me feel like I have to defend my daughter from judgment. She also knows it’s my intent to teach my daughter through modeling courteous behavior, as well as honest feedback when appropriate (for example, reminding her that my saying “ouch” is not a guilt trip). I find it absolutely wonderful and necessary to have that sort of a “go-to” person. When I can deal with my feelings through a friend, I don’t escalate a teenage moment into a miserable day.

C. M., Nashville, TN

To stay sane about mood swings, aim for progress, not perfection. I like how Michael Bradley, author of *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy! Loving Your Kid Without Losing Your Mind* (Harbor Press, 2003), puts it: Our teens are “crazy” with hormones and wild brain development and misfirings, and their behavior is inexplicable even to them. Even as they pop off to us, they’re wondering what is possessing them to be this way. If we enter the fray and pop off back at them, they can react with even more anger. If we do what Bradley calls



“the dispassionate cop” with them, mostly what they hear is their own rant when they’re actually expecting us to rant back at them. This, he says, creates respect because they actually see the power that we have not to be hooked by their behavior. I have a 13-year-old daughter and a 9-year-old son, and this approach seems to work. I’m happier, they seem to

be happier, and home is a lot more harmonious. My daughter just started reading Bradley’s *Yes, Your Parents are Crazy!*—I’ll be curious to hear her learn about how come I do and say the things that I do!

D.Y., San Diego, CA

Before I even start discussing an outburst with my daughter, I ask her to cool down for ten minutes in her room with a drink of water and a square of dark chocolate and to think about what might be up. If it’s



really, really bad, she has to run around the house at least once, too. Then we are both better able to talk it all through. To help with my own responses to her, I have taken out many, many early family pictures of that happy fat-cheeked child who adored every word from her parents.

It helps me remember that I’m talking to this child I am crazy about, not some alien infestation! When she sees me smiling at her pictures, she remembers, too. Nothing beats chocolate, humor, and a good workout at our house!

K. H., Charlottesville, VA

What do you think? There’s more advice from other parents at our *Daughters* Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)) in the Parenting conversation area; come add your thoughts!

### Next question:

Some of my daughter’s friends have gone to coed sleepovers. At what age would this be appropriate and what would be the guidelines for such an event? Why do parents and kids think they’re a good idea?

K. C., Portland, OR



Please send your advice and questions for Parents’ Forum to [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).

## Letters to the Editor

Have you considered publishing a *Daughters* oriented to the earlier years of raising daughters? I have two daughters, ages 2 and 5. The 5-year-old is already like a pre-teen—she came down the stairs the other day dressed totally in black and told me that “the boys like girls who dress in black.” I nearly fell off my chair! Unlike previous generations, very young girls are already paying attention to clothes and fashion and want to wear make-up. I think it’s largely due to media influence—even when parents limit TV viewing like we do, they get messages from ads and kids around them who watch more media. It’s crucial to have information when girls hit the teen years, but nowadays, when they seem like mini-teenagers so early, we need help even sooner!

J. R-N, Warren, NJ

*Editor’s note: You’re not alone—many other parents of younger daughters also report that their girls want to dress and act older than they are. It’s so important that we parents begin to address these issues as soon as they show up, just as you’re doing. One helpful resource is the book *How to Say It to Girls*, by Nancy Gruver (Prentice Hall, 2004), which gives tips for talking with girls ages 1-7, 8-13 and 14 and up. She answers questions online at our Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)). We are planning an article on ways that parents can talk with both younger and older girls about the issue of appropriate clothing and appearance. I’d love to hear from readers about this—email me at [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).*

*We try to make our advice for parents of girls as wide-ranging as possible; however, we typically describe *Daughters* as a publication for parents and advocates for girls ages 8-16. Our readers most often have daughters in the tween and teen years. Let us know how to make our coverage most relevant for your family by taking our short reader’s survey at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com). We’ll send you a free article as thanks! ★*

Send your letter to the editor to [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com).

Does your daughter read *Daughters*? Many do—our reader surveys indicate that in 25% of households, girls read at least part of *Daughters*. We think this is great—when both girl and parent read the same articles, it can often provide an excellent conversation-starter about an important issue. We can learn a lot from what girls have to say about what we parents think is the “best” thing to do. We’d love to hear about such conversations! Please share your experiences by emailing [editor@daughters.com](mailto:editor@daughters.com) or posting at the Parenting conversation area of the *Daughters* Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)).

## Ask the expert

I have a 13-year-old daughter who tells little white lies on a routine basis and occasionally tells a more serious one. We have always stressed the importance of trust and honesty. She has been grounded from her social activities and has lost other privileges. She is an honor roll student and a high achiever. How do we help her understand the importance of telling the truth?

J. L., San Jose, CA

Lying occurs for a variety of reasons. For many kids, the biggest obstacle to telling the truth to a parent is the risk of upsetting or worrying them. Because your daughter is a high achiever, she may be lying to avoid an uncomfortable situation by displeasing or disappointing you.



Barbara

Here are some of the responses I’ve gotten from young people about why it’s easier to lie than to tell the truth: “If I tell the truth, it just makes matters worse”; “If I tell the truth, it will be used against me”; “I tried telling the truth and I didn’t like feeling embarrassed.”

In order to get the truth, you need to be willing to hear the truth without preaching, using condemning words, or saying, “This isn’t what we taught you. How could you do this to us?” This is particularly true if the parent responds explosively or is highly controlling. Make it safe for your kids to tell you the truth. Resist the urge to lecture. Instead, ask your daughter to make amends for any situation caused by her lying. Focusing on how your daughter can make it right will teach her responsibility.

Most importantly, model truthfulness. Adults inadvertently teach children to lie by making casual suggestions such as, “Don’t tell your mother I let you have candy,” or pretending a child is younger than she really is to save money by getting a kid’s-only meal at a restaurant. Remember, parents are not the only influence on kids, but we need to be the *best* influence.

In the end, you cannot stop your daughter from lying or withholding information. You can, however, create an environment that fosters telling the truth. ★

*Barbara McRae, Master Certified Coach, is a parent/teen expert whose advice appears in many media outlets, including radio, TV, national magazines, and newspapers. She is the author of *Coach Your Teen to Success (Achiever’s Trade Press, 2004)* and founder of [www.teenfrontier.com](http://www.teenfrontier.com). © 2005 Barbara McRae, MCC.*

For more parent advice and resources about dealing with lying, see the Parenting area of the *Daughters* Community Forum ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)).

days, girls are surrounded by disrespectful and hurtful language, from music to movies to TV shows. We hear our girls use this language repeatedly in casual conversations with other girls and boys. As parents, we want what we've always wanted for our children: that they use language that doesn't demean others. We particularly want our girls to know that anti-female language is harmful to them. We wish that our daughters would insist that others use respectful language toward them. But how do we do that?

### Make respect central

All humans want respect, but girls (and boys) who are struggling to find their way through the tween and teen years may be particularly sensitive about being respected. We should talk with our daughters about how hurtful words may seem "harmless" in their conversations, because that is the reality for many kids. But we should then go on to help them see the connection between the words and very harmful, disrespectful behavior.

And we should show them that they can effect change by simply setting a healthy example. "How girls think and talk about and treat themselves shows the world how they want the world to think and talk about them," says Courtney Macavinta, coauthor with Andrea Vander Pluym of *Respect: A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect and Dealing When Your Line Is Crossed* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2005). Parents can help girls recognize the powerful effect of words by explaining how disrespectful words degrade women and others (see sidebar).

Macavinta makes the connection this way. She's heard from parents upset to hear their daughters call other girls "b-yatch" in a friendly way, instead of "bitch." She knows girls think the word, which began in a rapper's song, "seems lighter, because it's slang." Girls also may think that when they use "bitch," "ho," or "slut," they're taking the sting out of words that are commonly used to insult women. "Sometimes when words are used against us, we want to take ownership and give them new meanings," Macavinta says. But that backfires when most people don't understand the intended new meaning, and instead the words continue to "send the message that it's okay to disrespect girls."

When girls allow disrespectful language, it can send the message that disrespectful behavior is acceptable for those around them. Danforth made this point when she decided to write the boy who'd sent her daughter the letter and say that he'd "used words that are not words of respect." She was pleasantly surprised to get a response

## Talking tips about language

By Courtney Macavinta

- **Put it in context.** Talk to your daughter about topics such as women's history, sexism, racism, and intolerance. Let her know how derogatory names have been used historically to repress and degrade people. Watch a movie on this topic and discuss it together. Describe emotional and verbal abuse, and talk about how insults such as "bitch" and "whore" are used to hurt females.
- **Foster self-respect.** Help your daughter value and respect herself by not letting anyone—including herself—put her down. Teach her how to set boundaries and speak up when her line is crossed.
- **Promote sisterhood.** Tell her that when one girl is put down, slammed, or held back, all girls are hurt. Foster a spirit of sisterhood in your daughters by discouraging them from competing with and harming other girls. Give them tips for shutting down the rumor mill—such as setting a boundary with the instigator—when a girl is being targeted with a "slut" rumor.
- **Ask questions.** Ask her what message it sends guys when girls put each other down. Note that words have power even when they are used in jest. Help them come up with other clever names for their girlfriends that are endearing, not hurtful.
- **Set the tone.** Don't allow anyone in your home to degrade women or girls. And don't use the words yourself—ever.
- **Set the rules.** From the internet to the dinner table, make your boundaries clear for acceptable language under your roof. And think of a creative punishment when the line is crossed, like having your daughter volunteer with an organization that is fighting for equality or against hate crimes and the mistreatment of people.
- **Spread respect at school.** Encourage your daughter to spread respect at her school by making sure the sexual harassment rules are being enforced, setting up respect contracts in her classes, not tolerating disrespectful treatment of girls, and reporting all harassment.

*Courtney Macavinta is the coauthor of *Respect: A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect and Dealing When Your Line Is Crossed*, which offers how-to advice about self-respect in areas including body image, family, friends, the media, school, and relationships; see [www.respectgirls.com](http://www.respectgirls.com).*

but disappointed when the boy assured her that using words like “bitch” is just the way teens talk to each other now. But Danforth kept talking with her daughter about possible effects. “If on some level this boy can refer to you as a dog, what comes after that?” she asked. “Will he slap you and continue to abuse you?”

Girls—and parents—can often see the connection between disrespectful words and their effects more readily when they consider their effect on younger children. The national YWCA had this in mind when they launched a media campaign last year aimed at teenagers and young adults, which aired in forums such as MTV. One of the ads shows laughing young girls dancing and jumping around in their school uniforms and tutus, all to background music of a medley of rap, hip-hop, pop, and country music: *Just another ho . . . Bitch you know I love you . . . you cheat and you lie . . .* When girls think hard about language’s effect on younger girls, they’ll often reconsider using disrespectful words with their peers.

### Backing up your words

Some parents might be tempted to censor the music and shows that are suffused with hurtful language. But Macavinta believes that a better skill is teaching teens how to filter their own media. “When they are listening or watching things, ask them about the intentions of the lyrics of a song or a specific dialogue on the television,” she advises. “How does it make them feel? What does it say to the world when they are emulating that media?”

Parents should consider instituting clear language guidelines from early on, Danforth says. Girls may resist, because they fear it will make them “stick out” from peers. But some parents find that setting language limits is not so difficult. One mom of two teenage girls believes that when parents make themselves the “scapegoat” for rules, girls find it easier to enforce the rule around their friends. “I make a point of telling her whenever I hear her use language I don’t like,” she says. “She is able now to tell her friends (such as when I’m the designated driver) that I’m kind of obsessed with language and can they please watch what they say. And nine times out of ten, the friend says, ‘Yeah, my mom freaks about that, too,’ and they monitor themselves from then on.”

Danforth suggests that parents also encourage their daughter’s school to address the topic. In Greenville, South Carolina, a school-district-wide Profanity Awareness Week had kids discussing the effects of using disrespectful language and wearing bracelets that said, “Think before you speak.”

Of course, parents need to examine their own use of derogatory words. If Dad uses “SOB” and Mom calls a frustrating female coworker a “witch,” girls may find a proscription on the use of “bitch” puzzling. And while surveys report an increase in disrespectful language among kids of elementary-school-age on up, surveys also show that most adults now swear in public—over 60% of us do, according to a recent report.

Bottom line, we can help girls see that using clear and respectful communication is a valuable lifeskill that will serve them well in the future. If there’s a conflict to be worked out, she should learn how to dialogue, not diss. And when she wants to kid around with or even compliment a friend, there are plenty of fascinating adjectives and nouns she can use instead. “Girls have so much creativity in their language and they are amazing communicators,” notes Macavinta. By putting their language power in a positive context, “we can help them see that they are powerful young women who deserve to have the world see them for who they are and what their contributions are.” ★

*Kristal Leebrick is a writer who lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, with her teenage daughter, preteen son, and husband.*

## RESOURCES

**www.jeankilbourne.com:** Resources to talk with your daughter about the effects of media on her language and behavior from Jean Kilbourne, the author of *Can’t Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*.

**www.mediaandwomen.org:** Check out activism tips at “What Can I do?” at The Girls, Women + Media Project

**www.beyondmedia.org/catalogue.html#respect:** A girl-made video addressing the negative effects of disrespectful music videos

YWCA video: <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djlS16PIKpG&b=297112>

Courtney will answer your question about girls’ words during May and June—she’s at the *Daughters Community Forum* at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com). And check out her website and blog at [www.RespectRx.com](http://www.RespectRx.com), which includes Q&A advice for girls and adults as well as information about trends and ways for a girl to feel respected in all aspects of her life.

## FREE TIME

# Volunteering: Summer fun

By Susannah Sheffer

The summer I was 14, I volunteered at the Museum of Natural History. It was thrilling to go behind the “not open to the public” doors and to memorize the layout of the exhibit halls so that when someone came up to the information desk and asked me where the dinosaurs were, I could tell them.

As girls enter the years when self-esteem can be embattled with all the uncertainties of puberty, school, and the social scene, volunteering can provide a safe and enjoyable haven. “When a girl volunteers, she’ll meet a new group of kids who aren’t in any clique at her school, as well as more caring adults,” says Rebecca Greene, author of *The Teenager’s Guide to School Outside the Box* (Free Spirit, 2000). Being around people who respect and depend on her boosts self-confidence, says Greene. And having a daily or weekly commitment will hone her sense of responsibility.

Summer is an ideal time to set up a regular volunteer experience that could be a valuable alternative to camp or other more familiar summer activities. With a little digging and creativity, you can help her find a volunteer opportunity that allows her to explore her current interests. She’ll gain some real-life experience, which could also spark interest in further studies or a future job.

Established volunteer programs for youth are easier to find, such as museums and libraries. Encourage her to pursue whatever intrigues her. Twelve-year-old Vallie participated in the docent program at a marine science center; 13-year-old Emily dressed up in costume with other girls and gave tours at a historical house. With established volunteer programs, adult leaders are already

familiar with integrating young people into their work, and your daughter will likely have a peer group of other young volunteers.

But it’s important to brainstorm beyond programs, too. Many families have created unique volunteer opportunities tailored to a girl’s specific needs and interests. Parents often discover that people who aren’t equipped to supervise a whole crew of kids will consider taking on one or two. Independent volunteer efforts can open more

options for younger girls, since official programs often require volunteers to be 14 or even 16.

Through my



work with teens, I’ve gotten to know girls who have worked with veterinarians, artists, newspaper reporters, and other professionals—all without any official program.

How to find such opportunities? Think creatively, talk to everyone you know, and don’t give up if the first call doesn’t yield anything. Caitlin, age 13, got the chance to clean cages and observe veterinary surgery because her father played racquetball with a veterinarian and mentioned Caitlin’s interest. Chrissy, 15, found a similar opportunity by simply approaching her own animals’ veterinarian.

When I helped 16-year-old Julie

look for a way to volunteer with an artist, we put a notice in the newsletter of a local art college and put up a sign at a store that features local artists’ work, which ultimately led to a call from a photographer who was delighted to have Julie help out. School counselors or teachers who coordinate service learning programs can help point to volunteer opportunities, Greene notes.

For younger girls who may need more supervision, an ideal situation is pairing her with an adult friend or relative who is already volunteering somewhere. At age eight, Amanda joined a family friend who volunteered at a nature center. It was easier for the center staff to take on such a young volunteer knowing that an adult would be looking out for her.

For families with scheduling flexibility, volunteering can also be a great activity for a parent and daughter to do together, as it was for seven-year-old Zoe and her mother when they delivered Meals on Wheels.

Having a young volunteer around can be rewarding for adults, too. As a wildlife biologist who took on a 14-year-old volunteer assistant says, “Knowing that she would be with me actually helped me keep up my own interest and enthusiasm each day.” ★

*Susannah Sheffer is the author of A Sense of Self and, most recently, In a Dark Time (www.stonelionpress.com). She teaches writing at North Star: Self-Directed Learning for Teens, a resource center for home-schoolers.*

Find more volunteering resources at the *Daughters Community Forum* ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)) in the Education area.

## BODY

### *Helping her with hairy issues*

By Margaret Willey

It doesn't get much attention, but girls' growing obsession with body hair removal is resulting in some shocking trends. Moms tell of girls as young as six who insist on shaving their legs. So many younger girls are getting "Brazilian waxes" that denude their pubic regions that last year, one state, Missouri, proposed legislation that would forbid those waxes to under-16 girls without parental permission. Girls and women are turning to techniques such as laser hair removal (the most popular cosmetic procedure for under-18 girls) with little safety education—last year two college students died from the side effects of the pain-numbing cream applied before treatment.

It's hard for girls to escape rising cultural expectations that truly "feminine" girls and women should be hairless everywhere but on their heads. Ubiquitous media images make body-hairless females the "norm," and marketers find ever new tactics, such as salons that offer brow-waxing parties for girls aged 8 and up. Parents may feel powerless to battle cultural and peer pressures. And those of us with girls who have darker, thicker body hair can feel torn between our desires to help them not feel "ugly" and our hope that they will accept the body hair all female bodies have to keep skin healthy and protected.

A good first step is talking with girls about why "norms" aren't always normal and healthy, advises Shushann Movsessian, who wrote *Puberty Girl* (Allen & Unwin, 2004) and holds groups on puberty for girls in Sydney, Australia. Discuss how attitudes about female body hair have changed in your lifetime. During many moms'

girlhoods, girls weren't expected to shave, so they were content about that body aspect. Holding a mom-daughter group discussion could provide a fun trip down memory lane that gives girls a close-up of adult females who are content with some body hair. Remind girls how they're manipulated by the beauty industry, says Movsessian. When girls and women are unhappy about body hair, "product sales go up!"

If your daughter is anxious to begin hair removal and argues that "everybody" is doing it, find out who everybody is, and how girls who don't remove hair fare. "One 12-year-old girl I know made a decision not to wax or shave her legs, even though all her friends were having a hair-removal party," says Movsessian. "Her friends ended up respecting her for her stand."

If your girl's determined to remove hair, research possibilities together. Help her find out the effectiveness of all techniques, including shaving, chemical hair removal, electrolysis, laser, and androgen-blocking medications often prescribed along with oral contraceptives to inhibit body hair in females. (See the Health area of the *Daughters* Community Forum at [www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com) for more information.) Make sure to determine possible side effects. Chemicals can cause rashes; lasers can result in inflammation and scarring; and drugs can produce harmful



interactions, such as acne medications making the skin too sensitive for waxing and laser hair removal. Check into hair removal blogs and chatrooms with her—she might be surprised to know that many procedures fall short of hopes.

Keep in mind that girls can be oversensitive to peer remarks. One mom suddenly realized why her daughter, a 12-year-old with thick brown hair, had for months refused to wear shorts or anything short-sleeved. "She came to me in tears and asked to get her arms and legs waxed," she says. "She called herself a hairy beast." A classmate had made a comment in jest, and this girl felt unable to accept her body hair anymore. Body hair gives us a chance to offer tactics that keep body comments—whether it's about hair, weight, or whatever—from devastating her.

Finally, help girls recognize that body hair acceptance—and a reality check—can give her some body anxiety relief. Looking back on my own efforts to assist my daughter, who has the coarse dark hair of her French-Canadian heritage, I sometimes wonder if it was a mistake to constantly reassure her that we would soon find the right product. I tried to be optimistic; she seemed to need to believe that there was something out there that would bring back her little-girl lack of body hair. Perhaps I should have given her the more realistic message given by the mom of the 12-year-old girl: "Having hair doesn't mean you are unfeminine or unattractive—it means you're alive." ★

*Margaret Willey is the author of the Clever Beatrice picture books (Atheneum) and many young adult novels. She lives in Grand Haven, Michigan.*

## FATHERING JOURNEY

# Making peace with deferred dreams

By Matthew Morris McCormick



Ellie and Matt

As dads of daughters, we wish nothing but the best for our girls. We want to help them develop a strong sense of emotional and physical self-worth and to teach them that with that foundation, their possibilities for success are limitless. As 21st century fathers, we naturally encourage our daughters to dream big and to never lose sight of their goals.

Remember when we were told that? How many of us climbed aboard our dream star before we became dads, only to allow our vision to get waylaid when we became fathers? In his 1951 poem “Dream Deferred,” Langston Hughes questions the life and path of a dream deferred, offering in the end a set of rather corrosive and terminal answers. Does fatherhood require so much attention that we must allow our youthful ambitions to decompose as we age?

Fourteen years before I became a father, I embarked on my own dream of working as an actor in Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. While I waited tables and worked as various department store holiday characters by day, I spent my nights and evenings in acting classes and theatres rehearsing and performing

everything from children’s theatre to Shakespeare. Though I wasn’t earning my sole living from my craft (icing on the cake for those able to manage it), I was living the dream that had inspired me as a child.

One morning in the restaurant, I served the charming woman who became my wife and bore our child, Ellie. Thus began my proud years as “Daddy” and the tug-of-war (tug-of-love, really) between my passion for performing and my paternal instincts.

After Ellie was born, I allowed my Dad time to progressively supplant my theatre life. Ever persistent, I asked Melinda to consider enrolling infant Ellie (a dead ringer for Dakota Fanning, thank you very much) into some high-powered Kids-on-Camera classes, which Melinda politely and wisely declined.

For months after Ellie was born, between half-hour stories of Little Bear and Teletubbies, I would stare at old episodes of James Lipton’s *Inside the Actors Studio* with the same intensity I brought to my acting, as if to somehow cling to that great familiar, focused part of myself which was so skilled on stage or in front of the camera. I also kept all of my theatre books close at hand; my Shakespeare’s *Complete Works* still sits next to my Webster’s *Third New International*, the *Bible*, and Strunk & White’s *The Elements of Style*. And yes, I also held on to fantasies of getting that cute little girl of mine on national television. Come on, one Baby Gap commercial; what’s the harm?

As time marched on, I found myself not only reveling in the corporal pleasures of fatherhood—the diapering, feeding, and clothing of Ellie—but in the pure joy of play-

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

ing with her and acting with her. I had learned how to satisfy that yearning to pass on my wisdom and love to the next generation. I had made it through the dark tunnel of my “dream deferred.” I discovered that our dreams do not have to decompose with parenthood: they can be integrated into life as Dad, along with all the other sea changes which accompany the rites and increased responsibilities of fatherhood.

I now take care of my theatre itch by sharing my collection of inner characters with Ellie, teaching religious education classes at church, and picking up radio voiceover work. When Ellie grows older, I will probably work in the theatre. My inspirations for living The Dream are my two artistic buddies: a storyteller and a musician, both practicing their crafts. They are happily married fathers of multiple daughters and proof that dads can integrate their passion and their parenting.

No matter what our Big Dreams are—artistic, financial, corporate, geographic—integration of the passion, not rejection of the dream, is the ambitious father’s most useful tool. It teaches our daughters the important lesson that family truly does come first, and that it need not displace Dad’s dreams. ★

*Matthew Morris McCormick is a student, educator, waiter, and Unitarian Universalist religious education teacher who lives in Otsego, Michigan. He plays with his daughter Eleanor every day, which helps him to satisfy his artistic needs.*

## CONSIDER THIS

### *Watching Liz, seeing me*

By Harriet S. Mosatche, Ph.D.

"They were good," my 16-year-old daughter Liz answered matter-of-factly when I asked how the morning's biology and American history SAT exams had gone. No hedging her bets about the outcome; no false modesty about her performance. She was simply confident that she had done well.

How different from what I was like at her age. I would have been so unsure, no matter how often I'd gotten great previous test results. I began to ponder how Liz had gained the self-assurance that had taken me decades to develop. What role had I played in the development of her self-confidence?

As I mused, I wondered how Liz sees me, now and over the years. I know that our daughters are watching us all the time, even when we'd rather they not. They analyze our good choices and our bad ones. They learn from what we think of ourselves and what we do—so much more than from what we tell them. And they hear our comments about ourselves, even when we hardly know we're making them.

They listen, for example, when we talk of how our lives would somehow improve dramatically if we could lose five pounds. What's a daughter to think about that? That minor physical imperfections result in a dismal life, I'd guess. I don't ever want to pass that message on to Liz. She's a dancer and has the classic slim build of one. I have the body of an overweight, middle-aged mother—but one who loves to dance and wear eye-catching clothing, and one who wants her daughter to know that life is not about losing those five or even twenty extra pounds.

I decided to ask Liz directly about her perception of my influ-



ence. Liz was not taken aback by my probing questions. She's used to being the daughter of a developmental psychologist who wants to know the why and how of everything. In fact, she seems to welcome my questions, at least some of the time. "You don't tell me what to do," she tells me, "but you ask me good questions, the kind that help me work things out on my own." When she says that, I see how alike we are. I've always hated anyone directing me. Even when I was very young, I had to make my own decisions and my own mistakes.

Liz, too, has always needed to figure things out independently. Yes, our shared genes might play a role in our similar styles, but my guess—and maybe my hope—is that Liz has learned from watching me think through again and again how to mesh my passions with the reality of my life. Work, for me, has never just been about holding a job. Work is a part of my soul, part of what makes me unique.

When Liz questions me repeatedly about what kind of work she might do when she gets older, she's trying to discover how she can stay her own person, true to what she loves doing, and get paid for it. She has always been

intrigued by the different jobs I've held, including a whole career in the academic world that happened before she was born. Liz knows firsthand that I stand up for what I believe, and now I see her conquering her natural shy-

ness to speak up for what's fair and right.

Still, in the end, I know that what I say will have far less of an impact on Liz than how I live my life. So that means she'll see me wearing bright red (my favorite color) sweaters, getting excited about a scientific breakthrough, enjoying time with the people I love, and working out at the gym several times a week because it's good for my physical and mental health. But then I have to remember that although a part of Liz comes from what she's seen in me, there's a big part that's hers alone. Blue is definitely her favorite color. ★

*Harriet S. Mosatche, Ph.D., is vice president of Program Collaborations and Initiatives at Girl Scouts of the USA. She and her daughter Elizabeth K. Lawner (Liz) are the authors of Getting to Know the Real You: 50 Fun Quizzes Just for Girls and Girls and What's So Bad About Being Good? How to Have Fun, Survive the Preteen Years, and Remain True to Yourself. Together, they also write two online advice columns for the national Girl Scout organization: [www.gogirl-sonly.org](http://www.gogirl-sonly.org) for girls 6-12 and [www.studio2b.org](http://www.studio2b.org) for teens.*

## DAD'S DESK

# Taming toxic media

By Joe Kelly



Last year, a coalition of entertainment companies and interest groups loudly launched an initiative called “PauseParentPlay.” The coalition (including Fox, Time Warner, Viacom, Comcast, and NBC Universal) claims it wants to show parents how to shield their kids from violent and exploitative TV, music, movies, and video games. Among its “tools” are industry-created ratings systems for TV, movies, and video games—rating systems that are inadequate to the task, unevenly administered, widely ignored, and largely discredited.

I see PauseParentPlay as one more example of the entertainment industry’s success in marketing the idea that families hold all responsibility for handling the damage from the children’s entertainment industry’s own output. This program is a whitewashing attempt to divert us from the fact that exploitative media hurts kids, particularly girls, who are so often

depicted in sexualized and disrespectful ways in shows and games.

Remember Love Canal, where Hooker Chemical dumped poisons that sickened upstate New York families and forced them to leave their homes? No one suggested that the families held no responsibility in the ensuing crisis. Those parents were responsible for taking themselves and their children to the doctor, taking the medicine that could help them survive, and packing up their belongings to move away from Love Canal. But no one suggested that these parents were responsible for Hooker’s actions, or that Hooker could absolve itself by mailing neighboring families a list of oncologists while continuing to dump benzene in the groundwater.

It’s time that we held the children’s entertainment media to standards akin to the ones chemical companies must observe—for the common good. Yes, parents should pause the media, parent

their children, and then play with their kids. But the entertainment industry must do its part by stopping its contemptuous dumping of cultural toxins—and its stance of no responsibility.

We parents and our leaders—most of whom are parents as well—should find ways to hold the entertainment industry liable. The nonprofit Dads and Daughters sponsors grassroots parental activism—participate by clicking on “Take Action” at [www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org). It’s time to add your voice. ★

*Joe Kelly (publisher@daughters.com) is cofounder of Dads and Daughters.*

**DADS is releasing startling new research on female and male portrayals in G-rated movies and how they affect young children. Go to [www.seejane.org](http://www.seejane.org) for the latest.**

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