

INSIGHTS

Common sense strategies for raising girls



As a father of six girls I'm often asked for strategies for raising girls to be happy, responsible and strong. Here are my top five strategies that are relevant for parenting girls of any age.

Help her feel connected

When you connect with your daughter you help her to feel seen, heard and valued, which are vital psychological needs. You connect by helping her feel your delight when she walks into the room. You connect by stopping what you're doing and really listening when she speaks to you, and by ensuring she feels truly worthy and loved.

Help her feel she's enough

On Father's Day 2020, a 12-year-old girl completed a quiz about her dad, answering questions such as "What's your favourite thing to do with your dad?" "What's your favourite memory of your dad?" "What's your favourite song to sing with your dad?"

One question asked her to complete a sentence: "I know my dad loves me because..." His daughter wrote, "Because I'm me, and that's all he wants me to be." Help your daughter feel that she's enough because she is.

Help her navigate friendships with grace

Research highlights that girls have more friendship challenges and experience more relational issues than boys. Girls are more socially oriented. They fight more with words and emotions than boys who tend to fight with their bodies. Girls also ruminate more than boys. While fitting in is important for both genders, girls use social exclusion and relational aggression in unique ways that can really hurt.

If your daughter struggles with friendship issues there are no easy answers, however your attitude will make a huge difference. Gentle conversations that emphasise her value and worth, reinforcing your relationship are important when girls struggle. At some stage ask your daughter to reflect on these questions, "Do I like myself when I'm around those people?" and "Do I feel like I'm being true to who I am when I'm around these people?"

Help her love her body

Most girls want to feel beautiful. It's a parent's job to let them know they are – always. And that beauty comes from the inside. Never talk negatively about your daughter's body. Body shaming doesn't encourage healthier behaviour. It just makes girls want to disappear into the black hole of unworthiness. Remind her that it matters more what she can do with her body than how it looks.

Remember to let go

A parent's job is to prepare them for life without them. You're playing the long game, so the quality of your relationship really matters. Raising them to let them go is hard. But that's just how it should be.



Dr Justin Coulson

Dr Justin Coulson is a dad to 6 daughters. He is the parenting expert and co-host of Channel 9's Parental Guidance, and he and his wife host Australia's #1 podcast for parents and family: The Happy Families podcast. He has written 6 books about families and parenting. For further details visit www.happyfamilies.com.au.