

Dear Dads

10 Important Lessons to Teach Your Sons

BY CASSI DENARI

At some point during my six years as a mother, I realized that no matter what I say or do or teach, my two boys will inevitably, instinctively even, look to their father on how to react to any given situation in life. Simply because he is a male.

Fathers, you share those male chromosomes, the extra testosterone and the same anatomy. You play such an important role in your sons' lives.

So, dads, teach your sons about:

1. Love. Tell them you love them (even if you didn't hear it growing up). Tell them why you fell in love with their mother. Let them see, from you, that love is a powerful thing and that it's okay to feel such a strong emotion. "Our sons need affection from us just as much as our daughters. They need to feel we love and care about them, and we need to show it through affection," says Jeremy G. Schneider, marriage and family therapist.

2. Respect. Teach them to have respect for others: their mother, other children, the wait staff and their possessions. Help them to have respect for nature, money and animals. Teach them to respect themselves.

3. Sports. Teach them about every sport you know. Show them the fun side of the sport - not only the competitive and strategic side - but the side that made you love the sport to begin with. Go to a park and kick a soccer ball around. Have a catch or teach them what a lay-up is. Keep it fun.

4. The great outdoors. Take them camping and sleep under the stars (even if it's just in your backyard), go for nature hikes (find a walking stick along the way) and look for birds or trees you can identify. Go fishing!

5. New experiences. Let your son see you being open to trying new things. Everything from new food, new places, new adventures - go kayaking, go to a ball game, a museum, eat purple carrots. Help your boys grow and become well rounded by having many experiences. Knowledge is confidence; seeing other ways of life and

other points of view make us all a little more understanding.

6. Health. Teach your sons the importance of his health: taking care of his teeth, eating right, exercising and keeping up with doctors' appointments. Set the example for them. Show them how to take care of themselves.

"A critically important lesson fathers need to be teaching their sons is about their health. Boys have serious health risks, especially relative to girls. And these risks dog them for a lifetime. Boys and men are more likely than girls and women to engage in over 50 behaviors that increase their risk for disease and injury. These behaviors can have lifelong consequences. Boys are less likely to wear safety belts or bike helmets, use sun protection, are more likely to use tobacco and drugs, and to drink alcohol heavily, for example. Boys also eat more fat and salt, fewer fruits and vegetables, and drink more soda. Consequently, more boys are overweight and have pre-diabetes, abnormal cholesterol levels and a cluster of factors linked with heart disease. These unhealthy behaviors typically continue into adulthood. As parents, we unwittingly teach boys the very attitudes and behaviors that increase their health risks," says Dr. Will Courtenay, a psychologist and the author of *Dying to Be Men*.

7. Being social. Teach your sons the importance of being social. Even if you're not social, teach them that the key is to ask questions. Keep the conversation rolling by letting the other person do the talking.

Wes Yoder, author of *Bond of Brothers: Connecting With Other Men Beyond Work, Weather, and Sports*, says, "Fathers play a significant role in shaping their sons' abilities to communicate openly." Being able to carry on a conversation and communicate effectively can make life easier and more successful.

8. Being present and showing up. Andy Norwood, author of *Thirty Life Lessons My Boys Learned from*

Baseball, says, "The number one piece of advice I have for a father is to be involved in your son's life. That may be trite or seem obvious, but it's harder than it sounds. The hardest thing for many busy dads to find is time. And that's exactly what your son needs. You don't have to run the league or coach the team, but you need to help practice at home and go to the games, for example. You don't have to go to the guitar lessons, but if he wants to play you a tune or invite you to a recital, make it happen. He'll be better for it and so will you. There are far too many kids out there whose dads are absent from their sons' lives - and some of them are absent, even though they are living right there in the same home."

Connect with your sons. Listen to what they have to say. Make sure they know that what they say matters. Put the paper down, ignore the phone and stop the texting for a few minutes. Turn off the TV, and listen. Make eye contact. Let them know they are important, so they will feel confident that they matter. As an unknown author wrote, "Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his examples instead of his advice."

9. Being self-sufficient. Give them the power to be able to take care of themselves. Help them to realize they are in charge of their own happiness.

"Our job in life is not to control the rest of the world, but to take ownership of our emotions and well-being in the moment. Demonstrating your own resilience after a fall by moving along with your own life and enjoying all

"Being a great father is like shaving. No matter how good you shaved today, you have to do it again tomorrow."

— Reed Markham

that life has to offer is key to teaching kids how to get back up quickly," says Kim Ades, President and Founder of Frame of Mind Coaching.

Teach them how to do their laundry, clean up after themselves and how to cook at least one meal. All you know is PB & J? That's okay. Teach them and then learn how to cook something new together.

10. Finding their purpose. Buddha said, "Success is not the key to happiness, happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful." Help them find their passion. Guide them to something they are good at. With knowledge comes confidence and self-worth.

Give your support. Hug freely. Love unconditionally. When you're wrong, admit it. When an apology is needed, say you're sorry. Show that no one is perfect and everyone makes mistakes. Those boys are watching you.

The author Toni Morrison posed a question to all parents, "When your child walks in the room, does your face light up?" Be aware of your face when you see your child and make it light up like you've just won the lottery. Help him to know that he matters, more than anything.

And much like shaving, you'll need to do it again tomorrow. Remember: each day is a new one.

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