

Moms and Daughters

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The mother daughter bond is one of the most intimate and engaging relationships we can enter into. When we say yes to the journey of parenting a daughter we also say yes to profound self reflection (unbeknownst to us). The reason the mother daughter connection is so complex, and even challenging at times, is that *our daughters are a direct reflection of our own life experiences*. From the moment our babies girls are born, they are evoking feelings (often just below the surface) of our own journey through life. Every step along their path ignites deep emotions and buried memories within us of when we were their age, or when we struggled with their same issues. For instance, if we were chubby in childhood, then our daughter's chubbiness will dredge up all those feelings of shame and hurt we experienced, and perhaps we'll feel an overwhelming need to change her. Or, if we feel as if we haven't lived up to our full potential, we may push her to excel and avoid the mistakes we've made.

Many of the memories our daughters evoke in us are pleasant, but there are also those that are painful and even traumatic, and as our girls progress through the years, our personal recollections of past events may cause us to lose our objectivity and neutrality (and sometimes our good sense). Their life lessons and struggles, triumphs and achievements become very personal to us in a way that we don't experience with our sons. Where our sons successes and failures affect our sense of self as parents, our daughters life choices affect our sense of self as both parents and females. If our sons fail to meet our expectations we may question our capabilities as a parent. And it's bad enough that we have this part of our world turned upside down, but throw in questioning our core perception of ourselves as women, when our daughters fail to meet our expectations, and we are left doubly hurt and vulnerable.

Our daughters have the ability to churn up our long forgotten trials and tribulations. They hold up a mirror to us with every milestone they encounter, and the reflection is not always pretty or even welcomed at times! But they also bring to us the gift of *second chances*. If we are awake and aware we can avoid living through them, and instead go within where we can heal the feelings they are igniting in us. We can learn to use the stages of their lives as opportunities to resolve our own unwanted hurts and become more empowered within ourselves. With awareness we can make sure that we don't make their life experiences all about us! To the extent that we see our daughters as separate and distinct individuals from us, we will avoid unnecessary conflict and enjoy their presence all the more.

The Teen Years

This is especially important during the teen years. As our daughters approach adulthood, they are beginning the painful process of individuating or separating from us and making their way on their own. This is not only a scary and confusing time for them, but it can be an agonizing time for us. (It can be even more poignant if our own teen memories of

rejection, awkwardness, self consciousness and bad decisions cloud our vision.) But, if they are making good choices and seem to be managing well on their own, then our job is to *let them go*. And, we can only allow them to move away from us if we're solid in knowing who we are without them, and we're free from the need to live through them. It's our job at this stage to stand on the sidelines and cheer them on; supporting them and encouraging them to fly higher and venture further away from us, thus communicating our trust in their capabilities. It's at this time in our relationship with our daughters that we shift from managing them to supporting them. We stop telling them what to do and we start relying on their ability to handle their lives. The more certain we are of their strengths, and the more at peace we are in letting them grow up, the easier their journey away from us.

Conflict typically arises at this time because we're holding on too tight, or we're failing to see them as the adults they're becoming. The tighter our hold on them, the more pressure they must exert to get us to release them. And, believe me nothing says "let go" more than the antics of a teenager. Who wants to be around the emotional roller coaster ride and drama that teen girls have perfected? And, who wants to feel beaten up by their caustic, nasty and demeaning attitudes? Their nasty behavior towards us leads us to back off and allows them the breathing room they need. If we are giving them a wide enough berth, then they will not need to push so hard to create their space.

Unfortunately, sometimes moms can let go too early. They assume they aren't needed by their adolescent daughter, so they turn away from her thinking they're doing the right thing. No matter how many messages you're getting that you're no longer needed, don't buy it. She still needs you to be there for her. It's a scary world out there and she's just getting her footing. No, she doesn't need you to manage her anymore, but she does need you to be standing on the sidelines in case she calls. *Our daughters need to know that they still matter to us*, and that that even though they're moving away from us, we will be there for them. Remember, whether they'll admit it or not, this is a confusing time for them. And this is the time when many connections are severed between daughters and their mothers, and sadly some never recover.

So, how do we know when to step in and when to back off? There is not a simple, nor an easy answer. It's sort of like a dance you're doing with your daughter. Some days you'll feel in step with her, other days you'll be all over her feet. We certainly have a responsibility as parents to jump in if we see our daughters really floundering or getting too far out in the deep end (they start hanging out with a rough crowd, doing drugs, making bad choices, letting their grades plummet). These signal they're losing control and you've got to get them back on track by stepping in and taking over for awhile. Remember when they were learning to drive? We took the wheel if they were veering too far off the road, but as soon as they were righted again we let go. A little bit of struggling on their part is how they learn, and we should let them have these lessons (while keeping a keen eye on the road). Knowing where they are and how far off path they're wandering is all about communication. If we can maintain our connection to them, we will have a much better picture of when they're in trouble and when they're okay.

So, how do we keep the lines of communication open to them when they're job is to be severing these ties? There are several ways to insure a good connection with our daughters:

- Create time – the average parent spends *17 minutes* a day in meaningful conversation with their teens! This is just not enough time to really tap into their mindset.
- Get away – taking a step away from the pulls of day to day routines allows both moms and daughters to see one another outside of their normal roles (and dramas).
- Validate her –The more valued and validated she feels in your company, the more of you she'll want. Help her see herself purely through your eyes.
- See the adult in her – It's so easy to see our daughters as our "babies". Learning to relate to them person to person rather than parent to child conveys our confidence in them.
- Show up – half the battle of good parenting is simply showing up and letting her know how much she's worth your time and attention.

The mother daughter relationship is undeniably one of the most intimate and powerful relationships we could ever have. Because of this intensity, there is a tendency to push away from one another, especially during the teen years. And sadly, too many of us lose our connection to one another, never to regain it. The good news is that it's never too late to reclaim the love we once had for one another, or heal old wounds. With a strong desire and commitment, we can create a mother daughter relationship of our dreams.

This March 27th -29th in Los Angeles, Ca we are offering a perfect opportunity to solidify the bond in your mother daughter relationship. Spend an entire weekend together at the beautiful Westin Hotel learning from the top experts in their fields, and most importantly *having fun together!* Join hundreds of other mothers and daughters as they celebrate their connections and learn the tools of empowerment!

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