



# Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 Secrets Every Father Should Know

By Meg Meeker

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Drawing on her thirty years' experience practicing pediatric and adolescent medicine, teen health expert Dr. Meg Meeker explains why an active father figure is maybe the single most important factor in a young woman's development. In this invaluable guide, Meeker shows how a father can be both counsel and protector for his daughter as she grows into a spiritually and mentally strong young woman.

From cradling his newborn to walking her down the aisle, a father must relish his paramount responsibility—guiding the course of his daughter's life. Meeker reveals

- how a man can become a "strong father"
- how a father's guidance influences every part of a woman's life, from her self-respect to her perspective on drugs, alcohol, and sex
- how to lay down ground rules that are respected without creating distance in your relationship with your daughter
- why you need to be your daughter's hero
- the mistakes most fathers make and their serious consequences
- how to help daughters make their own good decisions and avoid disastrous mistakes
- how a father's faith will influence his daughter's spiritual development
- how to get through to your daughter, even during her toughest don't-talk-to-me years
- true stories of daughters who were on the wrong path—and how their fathers helped to bring them back

Learn how to grow, strengthen, or rebuild your relationship with your daughter to better both your life and hers in the bestselling *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 Secrets Every Father Should Know*.

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### Editorial Review

#### From the Inside Flap

The most important person in a young girl's life? Her father.

Teen health expert Dr. Meg Meeker has the data and clinical experience to prove it. After more than twenty years of counseling girls, she knows that fathers, more than anyone else, set the course for their daughters' lives.

Now Dr. Meeker, author of the critically acclaimed *Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*, shows you how to strengthen--or rebuild--your bond with your daughter, and how to use it to shape her life, and yours, for the better.

Directly challenging the feminist attack on traditional masculinity, Dr. Meeker demonstrates that the most important factor for girls growing up into confident, well-adjusted women is a strong father with conservative values. To have one, she shows, is the best protection against eating disorders, failure in school, STDs, unwed pregnancy, and drug or alcohol abuse—and the best predictor of academic achievement, successful marriage, and a satisfying emotional life.

*Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters* reveals:

- The essential characteristics and virtues of strong fathers—and how to develop them
- How daughters take cues from their fathers on everything from drug use, drinking, smoking, and having sex, to self-esteem, moodiness, and seeking attention from boys
- Why girls want you to place restrictions on them (even though they'll complain when you do)
- How to become a hero to your daughter—and why she needs that more than anything
- The one mistake fathers make that is the primary cause of girls "hooking up"
- Why girls depend on the guidance of fathers through, and even beyond, their college years
- Recipe for disaster: the notion that girls "need to make their own decisions and mistakes"
- Why girls need God—and how your faith, or lack thereof, will influence her
- How to communicate with your daughter—and how not to
- True stories of "prodigal daughters"—and how their fathers helped bring them back

Dads, you are far more powerful than you think you are. Your daughters need the support that only fathers can provide—and if you are willing to follow Dr. Meeker's advice on how to guide your daughter, to stand between her and a toxic culture, your rewards will be unmatched.

#### About the Author

MEG MEEKER, M.D., has spent nearly thirty years practicing pediatric and adolescent medicine and counseling teens and parents. Dr. Meeker is a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a fellow of the National Advisory Board of The Medical Institute. Dr. Meeker is a popular speaker on teen issues and is frequently heard on nationally syndicated radio and television programs. She lives and works in Traverse City, Michigan, where she shares a medical practice with her husband, Walter. They have four children.

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## Chapter One

### You Are the Most Important Man in Her Life

Men, good men: We need you. We—mothers, daughters, and sisters—need your help to raise healthy young women. We need every ounce of masculine courage and wit you own, because fathers, more than anyone else, set the course for a daughter’s life. Your daughter needs the best of who you are: your strength, your courage, your intelligence, and your fearlessness. She needs your empathy, assertiveness, and self-confidence. She needs you.

Our daughters need the support that only fathers can provide—and if you are willing to guide your daughter, to stand between her and a toxic culture, to take her to a healthier place, your rewards will be unmatched. You will experience the love and adoration that can come only from a daughter. You will feel a pride, satisfaction, and joy that you can know nowhere else.

After more than twenty years of listening to daughters—and doling out antibiotics, antidepressants, and stimulants to girls who have gone without a father’s love—I know just how important fathers are. I have listened hour after hour to young girls describe how they vomit in junior high bathrooms to keep their weight down. I have listened to fourteen-year-old girls tell me they have to provide fellatio—which disgusts them—in order to keep their boyfriends. I’ve watched girls drop off varsity tennis teams, flunk out of school, and carve initials or tattoo cult figures onto their bodies—all to see if their dads will notice.

And I have watched daughters talk to fathers. When you come in the room, they change. Everything about them changes: their eyes, their mouths, their gestures, their body language. Daughters are never lukewarm in the presence of their fathers. They might take their mothers for granted, but not you. They light up—or they cry. They watch you intensely. They hang on your words. They hope for your attention, and they wait for it in frustration—or in despair. They need a gesture of approval, a nod of encouragement, or even simple eye contact to let them know you care and are willing to help.

When she’s in your company, your daughter tries harder to excel. When you teach her, she learns more rapidly. When you guide her, she gains confidence. If you fully understood just how profoundly you can influence your daughter’s life, you would be terrified, overwhelmed, or both. Boyfriends, brothers, even husbands can’t shape her character the way you do. You will influence her entire life because she gives you an authority she gives no other man.

Many fathers (particularly of teen girls) assume they have little influence over their daughters—certainly less influence than their daughters’ peers or pop culture—and think their daughters need to figure out life on their own. But your daughter faces a world markedly different from the one you did growing up: it’s less friendly, morally unmoored, and even outright dangerous. After age six, “little girl” clothes are hard to find. Many outfits are cut to make her look like a seductive thirteen- or fourteen-year-old girl trying to attract older boys. She will enter puberty earlier than girls did a generation or two ago (and boys will be watching as she grows breasts even as young as age nine). She will see sexual innuendo or scenes of overt sexual behavior in magazines or on television before she is ten years old, whether you approve or not. She will learn about HIV and AIDS in elementary school and will also probably learn why and how it is transmitted.

When my son was in the fourth grade at a small parochial school, the teacher gave his class a science assignment. Each student was to write a report on any one of the infectious diseases from a list she gave them. My son chose to write about HIV and AIDS. (This was a popular choice because it is so widely talked

about.) He learned about the virus and about drug injections and medications used to battle it. After I picked him up at school, we stopped by the grocery store. As I pulled into the parking lot, he was telling me about his findings. Then he said, “Mom, I just don’t get it. I know HIV is really dangerous and that people who get AIDS die. And I get, you know, how men and women give it to each other, but what’s this stuff about men giving it to other men? I just don’t see how that can happen.”

I took a deep breath. Now, I am not a squeamish person. I am a doctor. I’m used to talking to patients about sex-related health risks. And I believe strongly in treating all patients the same, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. But here’s what grieved me: I know from child psychology that it was too soon to detail specific sexual acts (beyond simple intercourse) to my son. It was one thing to teach him how children are conceived. It was quite another to talk about sexual acts that he cannot understand and should not be confronted with at his age. I felt as though his right to innocence had been invaded. I never withhold information, because knowledge is important, but timing is crucial. Shocking young children breaks their healthy sense of modesty. That modesty serves a protective function. There, in the grocery store parking lot, I spoke as gently as I could, but my son was rightly upset. This knowledge and the mental pictures it drew for him taught him something he didn’t want to know, and was not and could not be prepared to know at his age. In today’s world, we adults do a terrible job of letting kids be kids. Our children are forced prematurely into an adult world that even our own parents or grandparents might have considered pornographic.

When your daughter hits fifth or sixth grade, she will learn what oral sex is. Before too long, she will have a pretty decent chance of seeing someone engaged in it, as the new trend in sexual behavior among adolescents is public display. She will feel comfortable saying the word condom and will know what they look like because she has either seen them on television or at school. Many well-meaning teachers will pride themselves on speaking openly and honestly to her about sex, determined to break the taboo about adults talking to kids about sexual activity. The problem is, many health (sex) educators are woefully behind in the information they use—and this isn’t their fault. Their materials are often outdated. And many celebrities don’t help. Sharon Stone, for instance, recently remarked to the teens of our nation that they should participate in oral sex rather than intercourse because, I guess, she believes it to be safer. Does she understand that any sexually transmitted disease (STD) a kid can get from intercourse, she/he can get from oral sex? I doubt it. Sure, she probably felt that she was on the cutting edge of the new era of sex education, but the problem is, her assumptions are outdated and she hasn’t taken the time to learn the scientific facts. She doesn’t see what we doctors see. Yet she and celebrities like her reach millions of teens with their various messages of “safe sex,” which unfortunately aren’t safe.

Teachers in most schools are no better informed. They know that a high proportion of kids are sexually active, and that many parents don’t know what their kids are up to. But the teachers rely on government-mandated curricula, and government bureaucracies move slower than our knowledge about medicine. Moreover, the government’s standards are not based entirely on science but on principles that many parents might not share.

Sex education curricula generally follow the guidelines of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. SIECUS is a nonprofit advocacy group that proposes to “assist children in understanding a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information and skills about taking care of their sexual health, and help them acquire skills to make decisions now and in the future.” Let’s review just a few of the guidelines written in the manual so that you can make your own decision about what your daughter is learning at school.

For children ages five to eight (kindergarten through second grade):

8Touching and rubbing one's own genitals to feel good is called masturbation.

8Some men and women are homosexual, which means that they will be attracted to and fall in love with someone of the same sex. (This is in the manual for the older children.)

For children ages nine to twelve (third through sixth grade):

8Masturbation is often the first way a person experiences sexual pleasure.

8Being sexual with another person usually involves more than sexual intercourse.

8Abortion is legal in the United States up to a certain point in pregnancy.

8Homosexual love relationships can be as fulfilling as heterosexual relationships. (This is in the manual for the older children.)

For children ages twelve to fifteen (seventh through tenth grade):

8Masturbation, either alone or with a partner, is one way people can enjoy and express their sexuality without risking pregnancy or STDs/HIV.

8Being sexual with another person usually involves different sexual behaviors.

8Having a legal abortion rarely interferes with a woman's ability to become pregnant or give birth in the future.

8People of all genders and sexual orientation can experience sexual dysfunction.

8Some sexual behaviors shared by partners include kissing, touching, caressing, massaging, and oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse.

8Nonprescription methods of contraception include male and female condoms, foam, gels, and suppositories.

8Young people can buy nonprescription contraceptives in a pharmacy, grocery store, market, or convenience store.

8In most states, young people can get prescriptions for contraception without their parents' permission.

8Both men and women can give and receive sexual pleasure.

For children ages fifteen to eighteen (tenth through twelfth grade):

8Some sexual behaviors shared by partners include kissing, touching, talking, caressing, massaging, sharing erotic literature or art, bathing or showering together, and oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse.

8Some people use erotic photographs, movies, or literature to enhance sexual fantasies when alone or with a partner.

8Some sexual fantasies involve mysterious or forbidden things.

8People can find creative and sensual ways to integrate contraception into their sexual relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Now let me be very clear here. I don't care what adults do regarding their sexual behaviors. But I'm a kid advocate and these guidelines bother me, as I hope they do you. First, they are scientifically illiterate. Kids can and do get STDs through mutual masturbation and oral sex. Herpes and human papillomavirus (HPV), for example, are transmitted through touch. Second, these guidelines normalize the bizarre. Sexual fantasies with mysterious things? Are we talking porn-shop stuff here? Third, they lead kids. Note the position of the later statements, which imply that if you want to enjoy pleasure, here's how to have it. Fourth, they encourage behavior (such as anal sex) that is inherently dangerous. Fifth, whatever one thinks about controversial issues like abortion, it is misleading, to say the least, to downplay the seriousness of the procedure on not only a girl's body but also on her mind and emotions.

In elementary school your daughter will learn about drugs, the dangers of sniffing glue, why she shouldn't smoke marijuana, and how bad cigarettes are for her. She will meet her friends' mothers' boyfriends. Some will be nice and some won't be. She will be taught to let someone know—a teacher, a parent, a police officer—if an adult man touches her pubic area or breasts (even if they haven't developed yet). She will be taught why her friend Sarah has two moms, or two dads, or two moms and one dad, or no mom or dad and only grandparents or foster parents. Most of this she will learn before sixth grade, while you're at work trying to get through the day and fighting your own battles.

You drive home at the end of the day, walk into your house, and there she is. Twelve years old, chasing her nine-year-old brother, screaming because he took her iPod. Then she sees you and either stops screaming or runs away, because she doesn't want you to see her ugly behavior.

Or you come home and see her watching television. Chances are, the minute you walk into the room she will grab the channel changer and flip through numerous stations. Why? Because she doesn't want you to see what she is watching—she's afraid you will be either angry or disappointed in her. Why? Because the shows aren't Bewitched or The Cosby Show. They aren't like the shows you watched growing up. The programs on television have changed right under your nose. Studies show that the amount of sexual content increased from 67 percent in 1998 to 77 percent in 2005.<sup>2</sup> If you grew up in the 1960s or 1970s, the amount of sexual content was, comparatively, virtually nonexistent. We'll look at this in greater detail later, but imagine: three-fourths of the shows your little girl sees have sexual content (unless she still watches Dora the Explorer at age twelve, which I doubt). In addition to this, the intensity of the sexual content has gotten worse.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s, sexual content was Barbara Eden showing her navel on I Dream of Jeannie. By the 1980s, prime-time television was up to heavy kissing or allusions to petting. But that's become boring. Now, prime time offers numerous allusions to intercourse and oral sex.

For young kids—particularly early preadolescents—such sexualized images and talk can be nothing short of traumatizing. Remember, your daughter will most likely begin puberty before her male friends. This means that from about the third grade on, you need to be very careful about what she's exposed to. While you and I might not even notice a scene of two people heading beneath the sheets, you can be sure that it raises all sorts of questions in her mind. She is forming her impressions about sex and about how teens and adults behave. If she is forced to form these impressions too young, more often than not, they will be overwhelmingly negative.

that she had recently been acting very antagonistic toward her dad. Her mother had no clue why. Anna's father had had long talks with her and went out of his way to be kind and attentive. This didn't help. Neither her mother nor I could figure out what was going on. Anna just shrugged her shoulders when I asked why she was so angry with her dad. Perhaps she was just having early pubertal "rebellion," her mother and I concluded. (Be careful when you hear this term, because nine out of ten times, this isn't normal. More is brewing beneath the surface of her behavior.)

Two more months went by, and Anna and her mother reappeared in my office. Things had gotten worse at home. Anna didn't want anything to do with her father, and her mother felt crazy. Was she missing something? Was he abusing her? The very thought made her feel guilty and nauseated. But she was so worried about Anna's behavior that even such terrible possibilities had passed through her mind. After the three of us chatted, I spoke with Anna alone. We retraced recent events in her life to try to pinpoint when the anger had started. School was okay. She had gotten along fine with her dad and brother. She hadn't gotten into a tangle with anyone at school. I gently probed for evidence of physical or sexual abuse from anyone. Nope, she said. I believed her. Finally she fell forward and her head dropped level with her shoulders. "I saw this show," she started. My ears perked up. "Well, I didn't want my parents to know because they would've been really mad at me."

"Anna, what kind of show was it?" I asked.

"I don't know the name of it or anything. I was just waiting for dinner. I had finished my homework and Mom said that I could watch TV, so I did. While I was flipping through the channels, I just saw this stuff happening. I knew I shouldn't watch, but I just kind of couldn't help it." She stopped, hoping that I would allow her to stop there. Clearly she was upset. She felt guilty, angry, and sick. I waited. She wasn't going to talk, so I did. "Anna, who were the people in the show?"

"I don't know, just this guy and this lady. Yuck. She was kinda, you know, like, naked."

"I see. What were they doing?"

"Uh. Um. I'm not really sure, but I didn't like it at all. She had really big boobs showing and this guy was on top of her. But, see, I know all about that stuff 'cause my mom's told me. But, it was just so weird. I mean, this guy ripped her shirt and he had her pinned down. She wanted to get up and he wouldn't let her. He was really strong-looking and he was holding her hands down really tight."

"Anna, I'm so sorry you saw that. That must have made you really upset."

"I dunno. I guess so. I mean, it's just a show and all. You're not gonna tell my mom and dad, are you? They wouldn't let me watch TV for a long time."

I changed the subject, knowing that her parents had to know if they were going to help her. "Anna, why did you get so mad at your dad? Does this have anything to do with the show?" I knew, but I wanted her to see the connection.

"Well. I guess I never really thought of it that way. I mean, I know my mom and dad had to have sex once—you know, to have me. Do you think that my dad was like that to my mom? I was just thinking that she had to put up with him being mean and stuff and if she did, it would be my fault. Because if they didn't have me, then my dad wouldn't have been mean to my mom. Do you think he hurts her like that?" She looked terribly worried.

“No, absolutely not. Your dad would never do anything like that to your mom. Honey, that’s not normal. That’s television. Sex is really wonderful and is nothing like that at all. I’m sure that your dad would never in a million years hurt anyone that way.” I had to repeat myself to help her believe me.

Anna was having a tough time, but think about her poor dad. For the last two months, in her mind, he had been a sex-crazed, woman-abusing rapist. And he didn’t have a clue what was going on. Does television have an effect on your little girl? You bet it does. But you hold all the power.

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