

# 25 Failsafe Rules For Dads Raising Daughters

June 11, 2012

By Marcus Williams and Joanna Schroeder

All daddies with little girls want to raise them “right”, but how the heck are they supposed to know what that means?

If you spend any time on the Internet these days, you’ll quickly learn that pithy numbered lists are the path to enlightenment. It is in that spirit that we have collaborated to develop this list of rules that are guaranteed to guide fathers in the correct way to raise their daughters. This wisdom is universal, proven, and failsafe.

Marcus is raising two toddler daughters, and Joanna *is* a daughter (in addition to being a mother) so we feel we have at least as good a chance as anyone at enlightening others. We are colleagues and friends, and while we find we disagree on many things, one area in which we often find common ground is in raising kids. We agreed on many of these rules, though some only made it in when the other one wasn’t looking. Here’s the list in a nutshell:

Joanna says dads should be girly with their daughters.

Marcus says dads should be manly with their daughters.

It’s okay to be both.

## **1. Tell her she’s pretty, but tell her other good things about herself more.**

It’s not that telling a girl she’s pretty is bad. It’s not. The point is that it shouldn’t be the only kind of compliment she gets, so she doesn’t feel that only her appearance matters. Compliment her intelligence, her resourcefulness, her imagination, her hard work, and her strength. Don’t pretend that her looks will never matter, but teach her not to judge herself or let herself be judged only on looks.

## **2. Teach her that handymen don’t have to be men.**

Checklist of things to teach her: routine car maintenance, how to stop a toilet from overflowing, how to set a mousetrap, how to use the fuse box, how to turn off the water main. (Marcus’s note to self—learn to maintain car, fix a toilet, use the fuse box, and find the water main.) There’s nothing wrong with needing help to get things done, but self-reliance and confidence are handy if you need to change a tire, fix a toilet, or even squish a bug without needing a rescuer to do it for you.

## **3. Let her play in the mud.**

No need to fill their sandbox with only sugar and spice. Mix in some snips and snails and puppy dog tails, too. Be cautious, however, about giving her any nicknames like “Sugar” or “Spice” while she plays in the mud, as it could lead to some uncomfortable career choices down the road.

## **4. Remember that the way you talk about and treat women will have a lasting impact.**

Your daughter will pick up on generalizations you make about women, whether positive or negative. Intentionally or not, you shape her identity about what it is to be a woman, and how to expect to be treated for being one. Say positive things about women without proselytizing. If you can’t be nice, at least be respectful and steer clear of the B-word, C-word, and other words for putting down her entire gender. All this goes double for talking about her mother.

## **5. Teach her the correct names for her genitals, and use them matter-of-factly.**

If she wants to say wee-wee, that’s fine, but make sure that as she grows up, she knows her vulva from her vagina. And whatever you do ... don’t call it a front-butt.

## **6. Indulge her imagination.**

You be the kitty, she’ll be the mommy, then she’ll be the kitty and you’ll be the baby kitty. It’s going to get

boring for you, but it's good for her. Keep doing it. Meow some more. Don't forget to hiss.

### **7. Cry when the family pet dies.**

You don't have to weep if you hated the critter, but the point is to show that it's okay for men to feel and express emotions when they come up, even hard ones like sadness and grief. Sometimes the most comforting thing you can do with a difficult emotion is to share it.

*Pro tip: If she wants to schedule a memorial service for the pet you hated, try to schedule it right after you've watched "Brian's Song".*

### **8. Teach her honesty and integrity in relationships by demonstrating them in yours.**

"Honesty and integrity in relationships" doesn't mean blind devotion. It means living a life consistent with the values you hold dear, and helping the people you love to live consistent with theirs.

Live the integrity you hope she'll choose for herself.

### **9. Read her books with great heroes – both boy and girl heroes.**

Books with girl heroes are harder to find, but they're out there. You can find a lot of recommendations at [A Mighty Girl](#). Also, make up stories on the spot—they don't have to be perfect—starring her as the conquering hero battling the dragon or saving all the kittens in a big thunderstorm.

### **10. Teach her that she has power over her own body and sexuality.**

From when she's small, tell her that her body belongs to her, and she is the boss of it. As she gets older, teach her that her body isn't to be used in the effort to win love or approval, or to manipulate others. Teach her that sex is beautiful, and that choices to have and not have sex both carry power and integrity, as long as she is true to herself.

Allow her to talk to you about sex without getting squeamish, but also leave room for her to have private conversations about sex and sexuality with other people.

### **11. Teach her about male sexuality without fear-mongering.**

It's tempting to tell her that boys are bad, that sex is evil and that guys only want one thing...

But we know from the last 50 years of Sex Education that this tactic simply doesn't work, and it damages both boys and girls in the process. Girls learn to fear boys and see them as one-dimensional, or they learn that their parents have been lying all along.

Teach her that respect is key, and both boys and girls deserve it and are able to give it.

### **12. Share music with each other.**

Play your favorite music and tell her why it's great. Let her do the same for you. Teach her why the bridge in the middle of Van Morrison's *Into the Mystic* is so crucial and really try to understand what's so great about One Direction (and then enlighten us when you figure it out).

Teach her the courtesy of headphones and the wisdom of volume control.

### **13. Dress like a princess if she asks you to... And let her dress like a Power Ranger if she wants.**

Yeah, it sucks a little playing dress-up for those of us not theatrically-inclined, but it makes a child feel important when you play the way she wants to play.

Also, playing 'like a girl' won't make you one and playing 'like a boy' won't make her one. So have fun with both.

**14. Go with her to the nail salon and each of you get a pedicure.**

No, you don't have to get polish! Just enjoy the time with your daughter and the accompanying foot massage. (Unless you have an aversion to emery boards like Marcus does.)

**15. Include her in your favorite hobbies.**

Share with her the things you love, like watching Motocross, cooking dinner or playing the guitar.

Take her with you sometimes when you go to the bowling alley, or for a hike on your favorite trail. Go watch surfers in the ocean. Explain exactly what's happening. Let her get bored after ten or fifteen minutes and then go do what she wants to do for a while.

**16. Let her put on shows for you. Then put on a silly show for her.**

It doesn't take much—a goofy tap dance, armpit farts, standing on one foot—to make a little girl laugh.

**17. Let her choose any color she wants for one wall in her room.**

Yes, any. Then let her help you paint it. We recommend a very sturdy drop-cloth.

**18. Roughhouse with her.**

You won't break her, and rough play is good for teaching confidence and resilience.

**19. Inspire her with women role models who excel in traditionally male-dominated fields or activities.**

She's not going to grow up to be an NFL linebacker, but don't crush aspirations before they begin by telling her what she can't be because she's a girl. The few things she can't do will become obvious on their own, and the rest become possible if she's allowed to dream and has role models who achieved great things without a penis.

**20. Don't shame her for what she wants to wear – but exercise the power to modify.**

This one gets trickier with age, but most wardrobe choices by a toddler or little girl can be made to work. If a skirt is too short, leggings are great. If she picks a Spiderman tee for a wedding, try letting her wear it under a dressy top. If you have to overrule her choice, be pragmatic, not judgmental.

(We couldn't agree on the right approach to this once your daughter hits puberty, so you're on your own.)

**21. Look her in the eyes and have a real conversation at least once every single day that you're together.**

Even if it's just about My Little Pony or Justin Bieber.

**22. As she gets older, tell her the truth about drugs. Don't use scare tactics, be honest.**

Drugs are scary enough without exaggerating. But saying, "If you try drugs, you'll die (or end up homeless, or become a prostitute, etc)" and having that as your "Drug Talk" will fail. Why? Because she will quickly learn that smoking pot doesn't kill you—either from watching her friends or doing it herself.

Instead, try something along the lines of, "Using most drugs is like Russian Roulette... Five out of six times a person may be fine. But you never know if you're going to end up as that one person who won't be okay."

**23. Teach her that "No" means "No", for both herself and others.**

Teach her physical boundaries. Teach her how to say *no* directly, and that her *no* is to be respected, and that she shouldn't be afraid or embarrassed to protect her body.

Make it clear that when someone—a little brother, a friend, or a parent—says *no*, that she is to respect that ... including with boys.

**24. Allow her to be girly if that's her thing, but don't force her to be if she's not.**

Let her wear dresses whenever she wants, but don't force her to. Don't buy everything in pink—unless she's crazy for the color pink. If she loves Spiderman, go with that until she's tired of it.

**25. If she's still little enough, hold her until she falls asleep sometimes.**

You'll miss it when you can't.

<http://goodmenproject.com/good-feed-blog/25-failsafe-rules-for-dads-raising-daughters/>