One Girl's Dream-Come-True Dad

Contributed by the dads @ fathers.com
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Every year, we get to judge children's essays as part of our Father of the Year Essay Contest. And just when we think we have read just about every possible insightful and inspiring expression from a child to his or her father, kids come up with things that impress and amaze in some new way.

These essays could make up a year's worth of articles, but here's one we definitely want to share -- one of the top entries at the 9th grade level, from a girl named Megan:

A Dream Come True

I wake up in the middle of a dark, lonely room, hot and sweaty, knowing that it is the middle of the night. A glance at the clock confirms my suspicion and that's all it takes for the nightmares to return to haunt me. Dictated by fear, I pull my covers over my head to conceal myself from the monsters I know are lying in wait. The house shifts and I let out a frightened, whimper of cry, hoping that it will reach my father's well-trained ears. Answering my prayers, he comes into the room, yawning and stretching. After four years of practice, this is routine, so he sits me up, grabs the book from my bedside table and reads until I no longer remember my nightmare. Then he kisses my forehead, whispers "I love you," and I drift back to sleep.

Ten years later, my dad is waking up to a nightmare of his own: teenagers. Enduring my mental breakdowns while trying to help me with my physics homework, he waits patiently before explaining it again until I understand. When I want to feel the rush of driving a jet ski as fast as I can, he gives me the trainer key so that I am restricted to thirty miles per hour. He has also dressed up in various, ridiculous costumes to star in his daughter's homemade movies, he has taken us on adventure walks through the rain, and he has been there for us whenever we've needed him. At the end of the day, when we've both had enough of teenage hormones, I catch him falling asleep in front of the television, hand him the book I brought for him to read, kiss his forehead, whisper "I love you," and leave him to fall back asleep.

As Megan's essay demonstrates, our children can find great comfort in our presence, our everyday involvement, and even the boundaries we set for them. In many situations, children will seek out their mothers for comfort, and that's not surprising since moms are great at providing that.

But we dads need to be available too. During times of worry or crisis, we need to be available to hold our children tight and whisper in their ear, "I'm here. It's gonna be okay." Then, we have to be willing to stay there as long as it takes and help them through the challenge.

Would your child call for you during a nightmare or another time of need? If not, you can build that kind of relationship during everyday interactions where you simply have fun together, share about your day, and deal with day-to-day issues of life. If you show genuine concern and patient understanding during those times -- and if you're reliable in other ways and aren't quick to criticize or fly off the handle -- then in time your child will learn that you can be counted on when he or she needs you.ACTION POINTS

- Just in case your child doesn't realize it, tell him clearly: "I'm here for you, and you can count on me. If you ever need something, you can call me anytime."
- Exercise great patience with your child when she struggles with a task or doesn't understand something. Stay focused on what's best for her.
- Work to stay up-to-date on what's going on in your children's lives -- what brings them joy, what makes them nervous, and so on, so you're more aware of what they need from you.
- Work on improving your listening skills, and use those skills to help convince your child that you really are concerned for her well being. Here are some tips.
- Try something your child enjoys but that's new to you, even if it's a little bit out of your comfort zone -- like playing dress-up or video games, or participating in a hobby or sport.

Recommended Resources:

- How to Really Love Your Child by D. Ross Campbell, M.D.
- How to Really Love Your Teen by D. Ross Campbell, M.D.