The Secret to Loving Your Child

Contributed by the dads @ fathers.com
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Recently, we presented a simple but creative idea from a dad about how he expresses love to his children, and we asked you to write in with more ideas. We received some great ones, and you will benefit from these. We'll share a few here and more in the future.

As dads, we can never get enough reminders of how much our children need our love! Loving them is a key fundamental of Championship Fathering. Also, what works well for one dad might not be a great fit for another, so the more ideas, the better. Maybe one of these ideas will speak to you and give you a new way to let your child know how special he or she is to you.

Several dads talked about favorite bedtime routines. One dad says he and his kids think of the biggest amount of something to express their love. "I love you more than all the sand on the beach." "I love you more than all the stars in the sky." "More than all the grass on the ground." "More than all the cars on all the roads in the world." And, "More than all the toys at Wal-Mart."

Another spin on this is the dad and kids who try to outdo each other. "I love you from here to the moon and back." "Yeah? Well I love you from here to the moon to the sun and back." "Okay, I love you from here to heaven, to the stars, back to the moon, then to the sun, back to heaven a million times and back."

Then, there's the dad who carries out this routine at bedtime with his twin daughters. He starts by saying, "Good night, I love you." Then one girl will say, "I love you too." Dad responds, "I love you three." The other twin follows with, "I love you four." Dad says, "I love you infinity and beyond." Then one of the girls says, "Plus one ...."

One single dad really gets creative. He had his own notepads made, using an image he drew himself that says, "Dad loves you," -- followed by his daughter's name. Recently he gave her one with a message he had written: "I love you and will always be here for you." He also used that artwork on a special website, on envelopes, sticky notes, pens and more. Do you think his daughter is getting the message?

Another dad named Paul uses some of the ideas we have mentioned. He and his kids go camping and boating a lot, so he'll tell them, "I love you to the moon, to the lake, and to the stars and back." He says that when their friends or their cousins are spending the night, sometimes they'll say, "Your dad is weird." But he just smiles. He has no intentions of stopping his antics.

Great ideas. And don't you know how much those kids feel loved? There are countless ways to say, "I love you" without getting caught in a rut. Paul sums this up quite well: "You have to show your kids a lot of love. I want to show my kids that whenever they think something is missing from their lives, they can look for it at home with the family rather than somewhere else they need not be looking."

And remember, as a father, often you're asked to do things that aren't fun or convenient, and don't feel like love. We help with homework. We help care for a sick child. We have that hard talk with our teenager. We drive and drive and drive some more. We change a child's diaper. The secret to loving your child isn't waiting until the feeling arrives and then acting. It's knowing what's right, knowing what your child needs, and doing it. Love is more about commitment and determination than feelings. One of the best messages a father can give his kids is, "I love you just like you are. You don't have to prove anything to me." Dad, maybe it's time to take your kids to the moon and back by speaking and demonstrating your love for them in a new way.

ACTION POINTS

- With your daughter, think "face-to-face" love -- a direct approach. With your son, think "shoulder-to-shoulder," although he needs some "face-to-face" love too.
- When you're correcting or disciplining your child, remind yourself that you need to express your love for him even in that situation.
- Express your love for your children verbally. Talk about the pride that swells in you when you see them in particular situations. Praise a character trait or an accomplishment. Or just look in their eyes and say, "You know, it's really great being your dad."
- Do your kids ever say, "If you loved me, you would ..."? Don't get dragged into those arguments. Just keep loving him or her, and let your actions speak for themselves.
- Count the number of affirming touches you give your kids in a day, then seek to double it the next day ... and again the next.

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.
- Championship Fathering by Carey Casey