

The Down To Earth Dad™

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Dedicated to providing parents with tools to build stronger bonds with their kids.

Advice For Dads

... “Don’t Give Any!”

By Patrick Mitchell

...So you’re saying that, at age 16, you feel you should be able to just drive five hours to Seattle with your friends for the weekend, you don’t know who’s driving, and you have no idea where you intend to stay when you get there, and you only have \$40.00? My advice is that this is a bad idea. What? You don’t want my advice? Well, tough beans. What makes you think you’re

**“Your teen
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— Mark Goulston, M.D., Psychiatrist and
Author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to
Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*
www.MarkGoulston.com

M.D., psychiatrist and the author of *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*. The hostage trainer to police and the FBI shares tips for parents to talk to their children.

old enough to go on a trip to Seattle anyway? Here’s what you need to do instead of going to Seattle.... What?! Well, I suggest that you DO listen to me, because I know what I’m talking about....”

Got a teenager at home? Is it challenging to impart your wisdom in a way that gets through to your child? Perhaps the last thing they want from you is advice. Instead, try listening and give strategic feedback.

Will it work? Maybe not, but the alternative—rampant advice-giving—is often a dead-end road for parents. That’s the advice of Mark Goulston,

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Dad
to
Dad...

Dad
The
Spy

The Down To Earth Dad monthly newsletter, circulated to schools, programs, and parents for over 10 years, inspires, informs, and entertains with parent-involvement information gleaned from primary-source (often exclusive) interviews with leading researchers, child development experts, MDs, university professors, brain-development specialists, and authors. The newsletter shares insights on increasing “significant male” involvement at school and home, and in communities, for the sake of children’s enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional development. To learn about additional Down To Earth Dad® services, tips, and tools -- including on-site staff trainings and parent-involvement events, visit www.DownToEarthDad.org.

At what age are parents supposed to stop worrying about their children? Some parents of adult children in their 30’s say they still worry, so there’s one point of view, and at the other end of the spectrum we have parents who don’t worry much at all, and who let their kids do practically anything. (And the kids survive!)

My youngest children are now seven, and they’re hungry for independence to do reasonable things on their

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Advice For Dads

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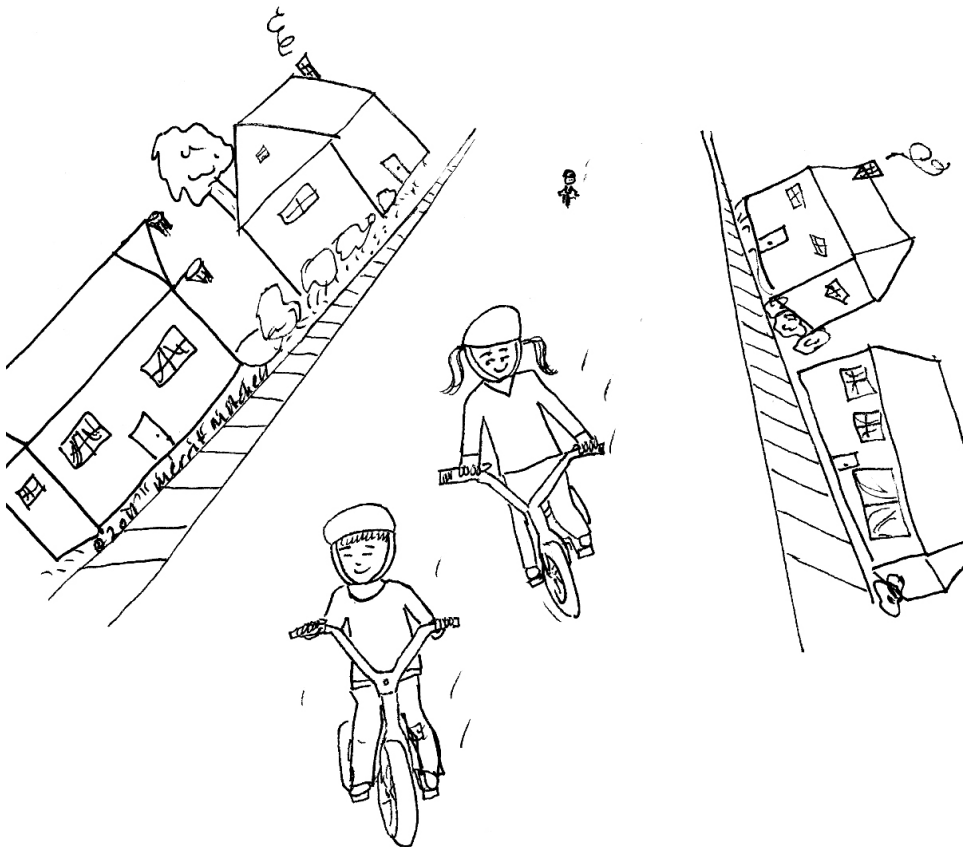
The Hidden Anger Factor

“One of the things that holds dads hostage in dealing with their teenagers is that there seems to be an almost chilling level of rage inside teenagers sometimes, and neither the child nor the dad knows where it comes from. Often, the dad will react by walking on egg shells when approaching his teen, or he decides to be controlling or, if the dad has sort of an angry streak himself, then he might unwittingly escalate the conversation to an all-out hostile confrontation,” Dr. Goulston told THE DOWN TO EARTH DAD. “If the dad wins the battle of who is the most angry, then the teenager will often shut down and then become prey to his own imagination—which is not going to take him to a good place.”

“One of the main things that dads need to manage is to not take personally some of the anger, verbiage, and temperamental attitude that he observes in his teenager. He needs to not react personally,” he said. One of the challenges for dads is to “learn to manage your own reactivity. This means managing your tone.”

“One of the things that I’ve discovered is that you can’t be both empathic and angry at the same time. Empathy means putting yourself into someone else’s shoes and feeling what they feel. Anger is a motor (physical) function. I like to say, ‘You can’t walk in someone’s shoes and step on their toes at the same time.’ Tone appears to be 80 or 90 percent of how communication

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Dad The Spy

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own, like riding their bikes to school five blocks away. I let them ride alone, but I follow them. Yes, it’s true: I tag along on my own bike, and I follow them to school. I let them do it because, each time they stretch their wings just a little bit more than the last time, they grow because of it. I’m not a big fan of stereotypes, but there’s one I tend to agree with, and research backs me up: Dads tend to be “encouragers” while moms tend to be “protectors.” Of course, dads are great protectors, too, and moms can be encouragers. Still it’s dads, by and large, who keep push-push-pushing their kids to do new things, while moms generally take the role of being relatively cautious. There’s some “encourager” in me, as well as some “protector” in my wife.

I guess my child-safety instincts are pretty much ingrained (I follow my kids to school, after all). So much so that protection has become part of my dreams. Just last night I dreamed that, while swimming with my son in a lake, I had to swim out to where he was to lift him up out of the water because, unbeknownst to him, he’d swum out too far.

So, in my mind at least, there’s definitely a battle going on between giving him some slack in the rope, so to speak, and then making sure he doesn’t get tangled up in the rope and injure himself!

is perceived. So, if you take what they say personally and react with the same (angry) tone, then the conversation might go negative,” he cautions. Dr. Goulston offered what he called an extreme example of the effect of long-simmering unresolved anger associated with father-child conversations gone awry: “A dad in his 50’s and his son in his late 20’s came to me, and during the session the son said, ‘My dad has really been cold to me for 10 years. My mother would say to me, ‘that’s just the way your father is; that’s his way, he’s busy.’ The dad said to the son during the session, ‘You know, 10 years ago, we had a confrontation and you told me, ‘Get the (bleep) out of my life!’ And so the father said to the son during the session, ‘I was waiting to be welcomed back. I’ve been waiting to be invited back. I was waiting for the coast to be clear.’ The son said, crying, ‘I don’t even remember saying that or when I said it.’”

So the stakes are high, when parents talk with their kids. Good listening can remove much of the conflict. Dr. Goulston offers these tips: 1) Listen without giving advice, and 2) give them an opportunity to go from venting to exhaling.

“Generally speaking, your teen doesn’t want your unsolicited advice or solutions—and neither does your spouse. As a dad or husband, when you show caring by providing advice and solutions, and you’re not being welcomed with opened arms, then they (your child or spouse) is not getting what they want and need. What they need is to be able to vent without you taking it personally or giving them advice they don’t want,” he said. “And then, they need to cross over from venting to exhaling: Think of a movie where a husband and wife are talking, and they’re angry, and then there’s a breakthrough moment where you see one or the other exhale and they make up,” he said. “What your children want and need is to just be listened to, and to be able to go from venting to exhaling.”

Strategic Communication Steps

(For When Things Start to Boil Over)

“Say firmly, not angrily, ‘What you’re saying is much too important for me to get frustrated or ticked off about, so tell me exactly what happened.’ A lot of times people vent because they feel unimportant. Also, if they are given the chance to experience the details of the event, their emotions about the event will diminish somewhat. You might say, ‘Tell me more about that,’ and they might tell you, ‘Well you never do this or that... and you might then say, ‘Tell me more about ‘never.’ Or they might say, ‘You always do this or that... and you might say, ‘Tell me more about ‘always.’

After this, they may point their finger at you. Let them express all of that frustration. Next, shift from ‘reacting’—which you’ll probably feel like doing—and become tender instead. You might say, ‘Hey, what’s really going on?’ Their hands will go palms up, and they’ll say, ‘I don’t know what to do’ or ‘I’m scared at how angry I get.’”

“Next, use feeling words. You paraphrase them, and you might say, with feeling words, ‘...and because of that you’re frustrated, hurt, angry, or what, exactly?’ You summarize how they feel. By the way, when you get someone to attach the correct word to an emotion it lowers the emotional reactivity in the brain. You might ask them, ‘Is it anger that you’re feeling?’ or, ‘Are you pissed off?’ They will further calm down and be more receptive to a connection with you,” Dr. Goulston explained. “To drain all the pus out of this angry wound,” he added, “You might then ask, ‘How pissed off are you, and how bad does it get when it’s really bad?’”



Getting Ahead of the Curve

A great way to lay a foundation for good communication is to talk with your child when there are no problems. Dr. Goulston suggests key strategies to do this.

Don’t Give Advice (Ask Questions Instead)...

“Take advantage of an activity together, such as when you’re driving somewhere together and you’re both looking at the horizon and not directly at each other. Don’t tell your kids what to do; instead, nurture judgment in them—how to make decisions when you’re not around. The more you have confidence in their decision making and judgment, the less controlling you will be as a parent,” he said. “You might say, ‘How could you tell which of your friends are going to go over the deep end this year, and why?’ or, ‘Is there someone you know who will excel? Who would that be, and why would you say that?’ or, ‘Let me ask you, regarding your classes, which class is one that you could get away with not doing anything for until the last minute?’ and, ‘Which class, if you fall behind, would cause you problems, and why?’ and then in response to their answer, say, ‘that’s fascinating,’ or words to that effect.”

Learn to Recognize When You Are ‘Reacting’...

To diffuse your own responses during potentially heated moments, parents need to “recognize when you are reacting. Reacting is not productive. Say to yourself, ‘Stop reacting.’” Ask yourself the question, ‘What’s it like for the other person right now?’ Because you can’t be angry if you’re being empathetic. Inside people who love each other is a desire to not hate each other,” he said.

Father And Family Activities

If you're a dad who worries about his children, there's a word to describe you: Normal. I'm constantly on the lookout for ways to keep my kids safe. But at the same time, I'm also looking for ways to give them new experiences away from my watchful eyes. After all, it's a big world, and they're going to have to get used to living in it.

There's a sort of push-and-pull thing that I do with them, where I encourage them to go off and do something so they can spread their wings and try new things—thus becoming stronger, more independent people over time. (But then I pull them back if they go too far.) I've done this ever since they were quite small.

Getting Started...

You're already doing this. In fact, you've loosened the reins on your kids quite a bit already, as they've grown. Think of how you treated them a year ago compared to now. Just keep giving them the chance to take bigger and bigger strides. Specially (and especially if you feel you might tend toward being overly protective), consider letting your kids walk a bit farther out in front of you—on the street, sidewalk, and around the block. This will give them some extra “slack” in the rope, and you'll still have them without shouting distance. Chances are, your children want you around anyway, so they're aren't going to go too far!

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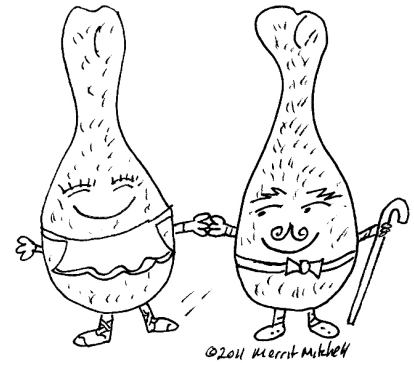
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Dad's Delicatessen



Tasty Chicken Legs

If you love fried chicken but you don't like the calories, you'll love this month's healthy recipe. Dipped in flour, eggs, and bread crumbs, this tasty chicken will disappear before your eyes. Make sure you make a big batch and have some for lunch, too! (HINT: It's not fried, it's baked, but it tastes like it's fried!)

Ingredients:

12-18	Chicken Legs
1 ½ cups	Flour
½ tsp.	Salt
2 cups	Italian bread crumbs
3	Eggs
3 Tbsp.	Water

Preheat oven to 400°F. Take skin off chicken and discard. Beat water and eggs in a bowl. Place flour and salt inside a disposable bag, and mix. Place chicken—a few pieces at a time—into the bag, and shake.

Take one floured piece of chicken at a time and dip into egg mixture, then roll it in the bread crumbs. (A pie works great to hold the bread crumbs for dipping.) Place chicken on lightly-oiled shallow baking pan. Bake for about 40 minutes until brown on the bottom. Turn chicken over and bake another 20 - 30 minutes until lightly brown on the other side. Serve hot with potatoes, steamed green vegetables, corn, and French bread.

By the way, this chicken is GREAT the next day, cold, for lunch, and/or re-heated in the over for dinner. Enjoy!