

How Do I Teach My Daughter the Value of Modesty?

By Dave Long, Vice President of Operations

As a male author, I think it's fair to say that most men rely on their wives to identify appropriate barriers relating to modest. We feel it's "the women's job" to teach daughters skirt lengths, bathing suit etiquette and all that other birds and bees stuff. But it's not. In fact, a daughter's modesty level may hinge more on her interaction with her father.

Rarely is the core issue the length of the skirt or tightness of the clothes. Usually, the overall issue is how comfortable a young lady feels in her own skin. You see, the best way to avoid a hysterical daughter screaming, "This isn't fair" in the front lobby of your home while her teenage friends wait in the car is to ensure daily deposits of affection and affirmation have been occurring for the previous sixteen years.

A daughter whose fatherly love tank is full is much less prone to seek the approval of peers and acquaintances. So sorry guys, the issue of modesty falls on us. It's certainly appropriate for a wife to handle those sensitive girl topics, but it's the man's job to manage his daughter's emotional bank account.

How Do I Teach My Daughter the Value of Modesty? Part II

By Emily Engel, Corporate Communications Specialist

Will all the parents of teen girls who have fought the modesty battle please stand up? That's what I thought, pretty much everyone right? The constant parent versus daughter clothing battle is tough...for both sides. Trust me, I was somebody's teen daughter once and know what it's like to feel "misunderstood" by parents who I was convinced wouldn't be happy unless I left the house every day in a full turtleneck and sweatpants. (Ok maybe that's an exaggeration, but teen girls can be pretty dramatic too). But you know what parents? As cliché as it sounds, I am now SO thankful that my parents fought that battle with me. And although I don't know your daughter, I can almost guarantee that someday, even if it's five, ten, or fifteen years from now, your daughter will say the same.

But how DO you fight that battle with a daughter whose sole goal seems to be getting male attention...any and all male attention...she can? Although every family is different, in my personal experience and in my conversations with countless other young women and parents, there are a few methods that seem to make a lasting difference across the board.

- 1. Set specific family modesty standards.** And set them early. And stick to them. If all your daughter knows is that you want her to “dress modestly,” it’s easy for lines to be blurred or for her to feel like it will be impossible for her to live up to your modesty standards, and she may subsequently give up. Spend some time talking with your spouse about modesty standards you both agree on and then communicate them clearly to your daughter. Although there are certain modesty standards that it’s safe to say are pretty universal (i.e. no cleavage, no dresses that could pass for a long shirt), when it comes to the “gray areas,” each family will have to prayerfully consider what their modesty standard will be. For example, I know some families that did not allow skirts or dresses above the knee. My parents had “finger-length” rule for skirts and shorts. If a dress, skirt, or pair of shorts did not reach WELL past the tips of my fingers when I put my arms down, it was unacceptable. And there was no negotiation. Whatever the rule is, once it is set, it’s important to never make exceptions or the rule will not be taken seriously.
- 2. Tell your daughter she is beautiful.** Don’t underestimate your role as parents—especially dads—to increase your daughter’s self-esteem by telling her how beautiful she is. Teen girls will have enough insecurity on their own, and as much they may seem to not care about what you think, a father’s approval is crucial to a girl’s self-image. Although stressing inward beauty over outward should be the priority, complimenting your daughter on a specific physical characteristic such as her eyes, hair, or even a specific (modest) outfit can really boost her self-esteem and self-image during an insecure time.
- 3. Model modesty in your own wardrobe:** This may seem like a “well duh” point, but it could be harder than it sounds. As an adult woman, it can be easier to bend the modesty rules for ourselves. But if your 13-year-old sees you walking out the door for date night—even if it’s with your husband—in a dress that breaks the modesty rules you’ve set for her, you lose credibility and may have a harder time winning the next modesty battle with her.
- 4. Know and explain your motives for modesty.** What will you say when your daughter asks you why modesty matters? There are many different answers you can give, but here’s a few to consider. First and foremost, God calls us to modesty and purity. 1 Timothy 2:9-10 says, “I also want women to dress

modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” Now obviously this isn’t God’s way of telling us that we need to stick to ponytails and silver jewelry, but it is pretty clear about the importance of modesty in our role as Christian women. Secondly, how a girl dresses will determine the kind of guys she attracts. Your daughter may think she wants any kind of attention, but does she really want it from the guy looking for as much as he can get, as fast as he can get it from any girl at all? To those kind of guys, it doesn’t matter who a girl is, or even how beautiful she is, as long as he can use her for what he wants. A quick word to teen girls...rejection hurts. A lot. And although dressing modestly doesn’t guarantee safety from it, dressing to attract the guys that are interested in “one night stands” and “hook ups” will almost always end in rejection and feelings of worthlessness when you realize he was only after what your clothing barely covered.

5. **Pray for your daughter daily.** When it comes to your daughter’s modesty, purity, and wisdom in making good choices, don’t underestimate the power of prayer! I firmly believe the prayers of my parents, grandparents, and many others helped keep me from making some bad decisions that would have had serious consequences. Will prayer make your daughter perfect? Of course not. But if earthly parents want purity for their daughter, how much more does our Father in Heaven want it for ALL of his daughters? So give your daughter all the prayer cover you can—God’s in your corner when it comes to modesty!

Other Resources

- *Boundaries* by Dr. Townsend and Dr. Cloud
- *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby
- *Secret Keeper Devotional: A 30-Day Experience with the Delicate Power of Modesty* by Dannah Gresh
- *A Return to Modesty: Discovering Lost Virtue* by Wendy Shalit
- *Bringing Up Girls: Practical Advice and Encouragement for Those Shaping the Next Generation of Women* by Dr. James Dobson
- *Parenting Today’s Teen in a Confusing Culture* by Mark Gregston