

# THE COUNSELOR

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## A FATHER'S WORDS: How Fathers Make or Break Their Children

"I love you." "I am blessed to have you as my son." "You can do it Cindy, I believe in you." "I am so proud of you." "I feel happy for you." "Congratulations Natalie, let's celebrate your victory!" Words like these exert a tremendous impact on children, especially when they come from their fathers. On the other hand, fathers can say things that crush and devastate their children. "You're stupid!" "Why would you ever pick something you'd fail at?" "I hate you." "I am too busy, go away." "You'll never amount to a hill of beans." "You're a disgrace!" These words cut like a knife! They communicate animosity, discouragement, defeat, and hopelessness. They pound a child's character. Some words are blatant and downright cruel, while others are more subtle yet undermining. Fathers' words have incredible impact. Most fathers don't realize the depth of their influence on their children. Fathers play a critical role in their children's lives. They literally shape their children. A father has considerable power (Canfield, 1996). Fathers make "unique and irreplaceable contributions" to their children's lives (Horn, 1995). The father-child relationship shapes children's personalities, self-esteem, affects their motivation, academic and vocational success, sexuality, adult relationships and their overall personal effectiveness. A father's words and actions can make or break his children.

### Words of Life

Why do these words have so much power over children? Look at the one delivering them. Fathers are significant. They bear our names, identity, and heritage. Fathers protect and provide for us. Children are part of their fathers. When fathers say things that build up their children, they feel affirmed, significant, special, validated, and loved. They feel connected to someone who loves them. Father's breathe life into their children when they say good things to them. Genuine words, at the right moments, go right to the heart and soul of a child. Good words from a father stick with a child. "You know Jake, I really enjoyed our time together today, we had a lot of fun." "You are so special to me, I love you." These words,

coupled with an affirming, loving, genuine time with Dad, stay with that boy or girl their whole lives. It sounds so simple. It should be natural, but too many fathers are so preoccupied with themselves, their careers or struggle with their own father wounds. They are blocked from delivering words of life to their children. They don't take the time or say things their children long to hear, simple yet



profound words of life. "I like your smile." "You mean allot to me." "I'll never forget this time together." Everyday routine activities filled with meaningful words of life from a father, connect him with his children, and establish a legacy of healthy children to come.

### Words of Death

Some fathers speak words of death to their children. Words can literally kill a person's spirit, especially when combined with negative interactions. Children look to their fathers for love, approval, direction, guidance, support, and protection. Words of death undermine the whole father-child relation-

ship. They often leave children feeling hurt, wounded, insecure, angry and depressed over time. A father crushes his son's spirit when he shouts out angrily, "What's the matter with you, you idiot?" "Can't you do anything right?" "I told you to edge the lawn this way!" He flattens his daughter when he says, "Look at you, you look like a cheap \_\_\_\_\_, take those clothes off and put something else on right now!" There are ways to discipline children. There are firm, loving, ways to communicate your concern and frustration with your children without lowering their self-esteem. Words of death never accomplish anything good. They don't motivate children to do the right things. They usually bring about the opposite result - pain, shame, anger, discouragement, resentment, and rebellion. They destroy relationships over time. Sadly enough, they cripple children emotionally. They carry a living death inside of them. Poisonous words, contaminate children during critical stages of development. They are robbed of validation and love. Words of death coupled with negative actions give birth to father-wounds, father-resentment, and father-hunger. Some words steal rather than kill. Fathers inadvertently say, "I don't know, I don't think you can do it." or "You probably won't be able to \_\_\_\_\_." Words like these rob children of hope and speak doubt into their hearts.

### Words That Heal

A father's words can heal. Father wounds can be healed. The right words and actions can reverse the curse. "I am really sorry Sam, I know I hurt your feelings, today and many times before, please forgive me." When a father says those words and commits to spending quantity time with his child, healing eventually takes place, especially when he involves God in the process. It takes commitment and work. He must be available and approachable. He needs to pursue his children with words of life, healing, compassion, and kindness. He may need to work on himself too. Keep a short account of wrongs. Offer words and actions that move your children toward you. Say

words that are genuine and timely. "I'm sorry, it wasn't your fault, I should never have said that, you mean much more to me than that, I am working real hard on being the dad you need, please forgive me, Mary." These words go a long way. When the actions are there, these words eventually bring restoration in the father-child relationship. Children yearn to be right with their fathers. Fathers also yearn to be loving, good fathers to their children. Words of healing from a father help his children move through the rough times in life. Reassuring words go a long way. "I know this is hard for you, Jimmy, I feel for you, my heart goes out to you, I believe you will get through this." Acknowledge your children's frustrations. This encourages and empowers them to press on. They carry your words and image in their heads when they enter life's battles. Your words help bind their wounds. Your children will experience defeat and grieve losses better, knowing you stand with them. Fathers' words that draw their children to Christ offer tremendous opportunities for healing against any wound inflicted by this world. "Let's pray, son." "Jesus knows exactly how you feel Maria, and He loves you, and will go with you through this difficult time." These words heal and inspire.

## Words That Build

A father's words help him build strong relationships with his children. Children feel their fathers love and commitment when they hear and see dad say words like: "You are really something." "I saw how hard you worked to finish that project." "Good work!" Words don't necessarily have to be tied to performance. It's actually better when fathers behave lovingly and say good things to their children in non performance situations. Fathers strengthen their bond with their children when they say, "I delight in being your dad," or "You make my life so rich, for just being you." These words build character and breathe hope into children. They feel blessed, loved, empowered, and strengthened by their father's words. These children are more prepared to face the world. Encouraging words inspire children to deal with difficult social and emotional situations. They stand tall because they have fathers who step up to the plate and honor God by honoring their children. Children take their father's words to heart. They want their father's approval. They need their fathers to genuinely build them up. "That's okay son, I love you no matter, what." "I always knew you had it in you." "I am so proud to be your dad."

## Our Heavenly Father's Words

God the Father, loves Jesus. He said things that affirmed, blessed, and empowered, Jesus. God spoke when Jesus was baptized, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." God the Father also spoke at the Transfiguration, "This is my Son, with him I



# Epilogue

Good words and loving actions equals solid, healthy father-child relationships. Start with the right words. You may not have a bad relationship with your children. Maybe your relationship with them is okay. Do you want a mediocre relationship? Commit to saying words that give life, build relationships, encourage, heal, and draw your children to God. Look into yourself. What's

blocking you from saying the words and doing the things that make your children thrive? Some men have been deprived of affirming words from their fathers. Some were abused or neglected. Whatever hurt or father wound you have, commit to resolve it. Your grandchildren will be blessed for the courage you take today to examine yourself, and remove those things that block you from connecting with your children. I know this takes work. This is very painful for some fathers. The reward is worth it. Watch your words. Are you saying and doing things that bless your children every day? Fathers, you make a tremendous difference in your children's lives, at all ages. We all have a lot of work to do. We constantly need to go to God and pray for Him to lead us, soften us up, give us the words and actions that love our children into loving Him. There is no greater influence, role, or joy, for me besides my relationship with Christ, than being a father. It moves me out of myself. It allows me to give, love, and cultivate hope and character in my sons. Fathers, your words have clout! They bring life, death, blessings and curses. They make or break your children. Let God help you bless your children. Breathe words of life into your children. Use your words to connect, heal, build, and love them into doing the same for their children's children's children. Fathers, make a difference for God with your words now!

am well pleased. Listen to him!" These words provided Jesus with the assurance, certainty, and power He needed to press on. Jesus and His Father were intimately connected. The Heavenly Father's words spoke life, love, and destiny for Jesus and all mankind. Jesus constantly spoke with the Father. The Father revealed to Jesus time after time His approval, love, validation and guidance. God the Father loves us too. He speaks through the Holy Spirit, and through Christ, words of affirmation, love, direction, encouragement, and blessing to us. The following words demonstrate the Lord Christ's love and commitment to us. "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." (John 15:9). "Love each other as I have loved you." (John 15:12). "But I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last." (John 15:16). "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends..." (John 15:13-14). Jesus blesses and comforts us. He believes in us. He wants fathers to do the same for their children. We should follow His example. Avoid words that tear down or destroy. Use words that bring life, words that lift up the spirit and leave children feeling important, worthy. We are to emulate Christ and our Heavenly Father. The Heavenly Father speaks through His son Jesus to us. Fathers speak through their sons and daughters with their words. What words do you want to speak?

## F.Y.I.

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