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## Fathers: An Instruction Manual -- Who Is This Man? If You Think You Know Dad, Think Harder

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### RULES OF A NEW RELATIONSHIP

- Just because he raised you, don't assume you know him.
- Bonds are built on trust. Trust comes from understanding. And understanding takes work.

Don't be afraid to blow up the old assumptions about what you mean to your father and your father means to you

- Accept -- no, embrace -- the chance to build the relationship with the first man in your life.

Do you really know your father?

Or do you know the man that fathers are supposed to be?

Maybe you know the man you wish he would be.

If you're like most women, you probably don't know as much about him as you think you do -- and not as much as the opportunity to tap into a mentor and cheerleader and friend as you should.

Confusion is natural. And widespread.

*Turn off the auto-pilot:*

The father-daughter bond is a constant process of in-flight corrections

All relationships take work -- especially this one.

If the relationship you want isn't there, build it

Understand that relationships are two way: be as involved in his life as you want him to be in yours.

The bond between fathers and daughters happens in different ways. Sometimes it flowers of its own accord. Sometimes it takes work.

*Forget the fantasy. How to accept dad for who he is, who he isn't, and who he's never going to be:*

Don't expect more from your father than you do from your friends.

Any relationship based on an ideal is bound to fail because ideals are often perfect; fathers never are.

Be honest about your conflicts, but don't destroy what is good in the relationship in the attempt to surgically remove what is not.

Many women idealize their fathers and are crushed when they fall short of ideal.

Most of us don't expect perfection from ourselves or even our friends, so don't hold dad to a standard that is impossible to meet.

*Dealing with MIA dads: the departed, the distant, and the damaged How you can cope with the man who isn't there:*

Sometimes the father you want is never going to be there for you. As hard as it is, accept that and move on.

A missing father -- for whatever reason -- does not mean that the missing piece can't be filled in by others -- even later in life.

If your dad is not there to be a mentor -- find one. You will quickly see that many are happy to give advice and guidance.

Sometimes -- fantasy is all there is.

*Who's life is it? Walking the line between devotion and domination:*

Let your father into your life, but don't allow him to control it.

The connection is stronger than you think. You won't break it by marking your territory

Ironically, many women who have the strongest relationships with their fathers also have the hardest time finding their own place and voice.

It's a fine line between unconditional support and overwhelming direction. He wants the best for you. But you have to define what best really means.

Little girls love to please dad -- make him happy, make him laugh, make him proud. There is little of the competition that often creates an edge to relationships between fathers and sons.

But little girls grow up. They become women who want to make their own decisions and make their own mistakes. When dad stays involved -- particularly as a mentor and guide - - independence can turn to alienation.

*You won't marry dad -- Why personal reality beats persistent myth:*

Maybe the man you pick will be just like dad; maybe not like him at all. Don't worry about it -- it's not your unconscious talking, it's your heart.

Understand that -- for good or bad -- dad is not the only role model for what you want in a man. He's just an influence -- although an important one -- that will help you make your own choices.

A daughter's relationship with her father was once a "dress rehearsal" for her relationship with men. Women, experts said, typically wanted -- consciously or not -- to marry men like their fathers.

In theory, a father was the determining influence on a girl's relational and sexual development. Psychologists even linked a woman's ability to be highly orgasmic to her father's encouragement of her "feminine" traits and identity.

In fact, women have always been more independent in their choices than assumption (or hope) would have it.

*Time for your checkup -- Something to share with dad:*

Take this quick quiz to see if you and dad have made a new-age connection. It's easy. You don't even have to write down any answers. Just think about the questions. You'll know what the answers tell you. The question is -- what will you do about it?

For starters, you can share it with dad. Where you don't know the answers, ask. Where you do know the answers, learn more. It can be a great conversation starter. And those conversations can take you to some wonderful places.

Understand: it might take work. You are dealing with hundreds of years of history -- and for most of it, the conversations between dad and daughter have been carefully scripted and clearly boundaried. This list can help you take the initiative -- recognizing that like all relationships, this one unfolds in steps.

Where was he born?

Where all has he lived?

What the favorite job he ever had?

Does he like the job he has?

What was his relationship with his parents?

How close is he to brothers, sisters or other family members?

What would he be doing for a living if he wasn't doing what he's doing now?

What are his five favorite movies?

If he is a sports fan, what are his favorite teams?

What is the favorite present you ever bought him?

What is his favorite sports team?

What is your favorite memory with him?

How would he answer that same question?

What is your worst memory with him?

Have you ever talked about it?

What is the funniest thing you ever saw or did together?

What is the saddest?

How are you alike?

How are you different?

What have your similarities and differences meant to your life?

What has he meant to you growing up?

Have you ever told him?

What do you think about him that might surprise him most?

When is the last time you talked -- more than an hour, and just the two of you?

What would he say if you said: let's go for a walk?

What would he say if you said: "Tell me something you've never told me about yourself"?

What would you say if he asked you the same question?

What could he mean to your life that he doesn't mean now?

How would you change that?

In choosing a mate, what parts would be like your father; what parts would be different?

What kind of man does he want for you?

What do you do if he says something -- particularly about your life -- and you are in total disagreement?

What happens if that situation is reversed?

If he makes you mad -- do you tell him?

Please let me know if this worked for you and/or you and your dad.