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A Fathers Instruction Manual: Accepting Dad For Who He Is; And Who He's Not

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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 their friends, so don't hold dad to a standard that is impossible to meet.

All relationships are works in progress, and the progress often depends on the quality of the work. Inadequate fathers and damaged relationships can be made whole with effort and patience.

Sometimes, fantasy is all there is. Idealization often fills an aching and often frightening void when dads are absent or unreachable.

Women invent "fantasy fathers" -- strong and dependable men who can be what there fathers are not. When dad has departed the man that is invented to take his place is uncannily similar: strong, protective and tender.

Do fantasy fathers help? Are they healthy? Do they leave room for another man in your life who must compete with a fantasy?

When dad is distant:

Women with distant relationships with their fathers create a kind of emotional choreography - in which both fathers and daughters play a part, but seldom depart from their practiced steps to find real connection.

One of the most painful and confusing passages in the lives of women is when dad is there, but changing. Whether mental, physical or emotional, the rock in their lives and the person they desperately want to please is suddenly different -- and so is the bond they shared.

Many women understand -- on one level -- at least that the change in their father has nothing to do with them. But on another level, it has everything to do with them. They see their father in pain and acutely feel the role reversal, where daughter must become the stable center, and figure out how to fix things, when they don't fully understand what is broken. Often, it is simply too much, and rather than continue the pain and confusion, they sever all ties.

Parting thoughts ...

- When was the first time you realized your father didn't know everything, and wasn't perfect?
- Do you find it harder or easier to accept flaws in your father versus your friends?
- Do you picture your father as he is, or how you want him to be?
- If your father chronically lets you down or is a habitual disappointment, can you write him off as bad luck and move on?
- Can you accept the bad in your father without losing sight of the good?
- When were you the angriest with your father? How did you handle it? How did it affect you? How did it affect him?
- Do you ever look for what you wanted in a father -- but didn't have -- in the men in your life?
- If you had to write a one page description of your father today, how would it be different from one you would have written when you were ten?
- If your father is not in your life, how would your life be different if he were?