The Other Terrible Toos

Recognizing Virtue and Character in Your Children



As a father, grandfather, or stepfather, you probably are familiar with the Terrible Twos, a stage of child development that usually begins in the toddler years. During the Terrible Twos, which could start even before the first birthday, children often have frequent mood changes and temper tantrums and offer "No!" as a reply to just about every question you ask or suggestion you make.

The Terrible Twos are a normal phase and children are not trying to be defiant or rebellious on purpose. They are simply trying to show their growing independence and do not have the language skills to easily express their needs. During the Terrible Twos, parents have the opportunity to learn patience and perseverance, knowing that this phase likely will end by age 4.

But although children eventually grow out of the Terrible Twos, they—and their fathers—face another developmental stage that can present similar challenges. In the pre-teen and teen years, the Other Terrible Toos can strain a dad's tolerance for his child's increasing desire for independence. In addition, the Other Terrible Toos can be a struggle for young people as they enter new environments and new relationships that test their values and self-discipline.

The Other Terrible Toos often begin slowly and early. Your 12-year old daughter is getting ready for school and you shout through the bathroom door, "You take TOO long in the bathroom. Other people have to get ready in the morning TOO." Or you see the outfit she has chosen and you bark, "That skirt is TOO tight to wear to school."

As your child becomes a teenager, the Other Terrible Toos can become routine: "No, that costs TOO much money." "That's TOO loud, turn down the music." "Those pants are TOO loose on you, pull them up." "You spend TOO much time texting." "Don't you think that's TOO much makeup?" "No, that's TOO late to be out on a school night." "TOO bad, that's the rule. No TV until you finish your homework." "Is it TOO hard for you to put your dirty clothes in the hamper?" "Is it TOO much to ask you to clean your room once in a while?" "You already own TOO many pairs of sneakers."

While the Terrible Twos tend to begin and end within a few years, the Other Terrible Toos can have a greater lifespan, possibly beginning at age 10 and continuing through young adulthood. Yet however challenging the Other Terrible Toos are, they are an important part of how we, as fathers, can help our children learn to become responsible adults. We can succeed if the Other Terrible Toos do not force us to focus only on what our children do so that we lose sight of who they are.

One father remembered that during their middle school years, his two daughters were on opposite sides of the fashion spectrum. One dressed in conservative, buttoned-up paisley and flowered prints, while the other sported only black clothes with Goth-inspired styling. At first, the dad wanted to "fix" the problem by insisting the girls dress according to his standard of what was appropriate. Then he remembered his own teenage years and how he argued with his mother when she would make him change an outfit she thought was not correct for school or work.

By continually judging his daughters by their clothing choices or other unimportant behaviors, the dad risked breaking their spirits. So instead of focusing on what the girls wore, he tried to speak to the character of the young women inside the clothes. He considered the virtues he had nurtured in them since they were little. Despite their outward appearances and sometimes odd fashion statements, at heart these young ladies still possessed the personal strengths that would enable them to become outstanding women.

When his Goth-styled daughter asked him what he thought of her outfit, he simply said, "It's not something I would wear, but you are a smart young woman. I trust your judgment in things like this. Just don't take it too far. Besides, buying you gifts is easy…I just pick something black." He used words such as "smart" and "trust" to express that he knew she was intelligent and her fundamental character traits would stay with her long after her current fashion phase did.

When your children go through the Other Terrible Toos, try to think about their virtues and character and offer words of encouragement: "I am really proud of how patient you were with your noisy cousin last night" or "You showed a lot of dedication to your team despite not having a great season." Using words such as "patience," "dedication," "generous," "kind," and "caring" will let your kids know you recognize the positive aspects of their spirit and will confirm to them that they are on the right track to becoming decent, morally responsible adults.

Experimenting with fashion, friends, hobbies, sports, and potential careers is a normal part of the Other Terrible Toos. And although we can be frustrated at times, we should never forget the depth of our children's character or the virtues that will guide them into adulthood and make us, as fathers, very proud.

Defining Virtue and Character

Virtue: a healthy character trait valued as being good

Our virtues or character traits reflect our core values. Every individual has a core of underlying values that are revealed by how we think, speak, and behave. Being aware of and true to your core values ensures consistency in living life according to your beliefs.

Virtues and healthy character traits include:

- ☐ acceptance
- ☐ appreciation
- ☐ assertiveness
- ☐ balance
- ☐ benevolence
- ☐ charity
- ☐ chastity
- ☐ cleanliness
- ☐ commitment
- ☐ compassion
- ☐ confidence
- ☐ consideration
- ☐ cooperativeness
- ☐ courage
- ☐ courteousness
- ☐ creativity
- ☐ curiosity
- ☐ dependability
- ☐ determination
- ☐ diligence
- ☐ discipline
- ☐ empathy
- ☐ endurance
- ☐ enthusiasm
- ☐ fairness
- ☐ faith
- ☐ flexibility
- ☐ forgiveness
- ☐ fortitude
- ☐ friendliness
- ☐ generosity
- ☐ helpfulness
- ☐ honesty
- ☐ honor
- ☐ hopefulness
- ☐ humility
- ☐ humor
- ☐ idealism
- ☐ imagination
- ☐ impartiality
- ☐ independence
- ☐ integrity
- ☐ intuition
- ☐ inventiveness
- ☐ joy
- ☐ justice
- ☐ kindness
- ☐ lovingness
- ☐ loyalty
- ☐ manners
- ☐ mercy
- ☐ modesty
- ☐ nonviolence
- ☐ nurturing
- ☐ obedience
- ☐ optimism
- ☐ patience
- ☐ perseverance
- ☐ respectfulness
- ☐ responsibility
- ☐ sacrifice
- ☐ self-discipline
- ☐ self-esteem
- ☐ self-respect
- ☐ sensitivity
- ☐ sharing
- ☐ sincerity
- ☐ spirituality
- ☐ sympathy
- ☐ thankfulness
- ☐ tolerance
- ☐ trustworthiness
- ☐ truthfulness
- ☐ understanding
- ☐ unselfishness
- ☐ wisdom

Your Child's Top 10 Virtues

Discussion Guide

Using the list of virtues, identify your child's top 10 virtues. In your own words, define what that virtue means. Then look for opportunities to tell your children how much you admire the virtue you see growing within them. Also think about how you can nurture these virtues in your children.

BOOKS

The Way of the Wild Heart: A Map for the Masculine Journey by John Eldredge

Fatherhood by Bill Cosby

The Five Love Languages of Children by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

Whose Kids Are These Anyway? by Ken Swarner

The 7 Secrets of Effective Fathers: Becoming the Father Your Children Need by Ken R. Canfield

How to Really Love Your Angry Child by D. Ross Campbell and Rob Suggs

MOVIES

The Princess Bride

Monsters, Inc.

The Pacifier

The Wild Thornberrys Movie

Pan

Lilo & Stitch

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance

FATHERHOOD.GOV
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse
1-877-4DAD411