

Tips for Parents: Girls and Leadership

Are your daughter's career choices equal to her talents?

Separate fact from fiction.

Discuss images of women. Advertisements, movies, TV, and newspapers shape our ideas of what women can be. Are powerful men and women described differently in news articles? Is physical beauty more important for women than men? Are powerful women shown as attractive? Are women portrayed as helpless and inept in a crisis or only competent in the laundry room or kitchen?

Point out women leaders. In addition to state and national leaders, your own community has women school board members, business owners, doctors, and lawyers. The business and sports sections of newspapers have stories about women leaders. History, the arts, and politics also have examples of women who are leaders in their fields.

Having a career is not the only way to demonstrate strength and leadership. Volunteers, politicians, active community members, and homemakers often exemplify strength, creativity, and leadership. What obstacles did women in your family overcome to reach their goals? How have women helped solve problems in your community?

Make your home a positive environment.

Expect the same of girls as you do of boys, in school and out. As early as second grade, boys are called upon in class more often than girls. Tell your daughter that it is important to get involved in discussions in class and at the dinner table. Let your daughter and your son take part in whatever activities they like, whether sports, art, auto repair, or dancing.

Encourage involvement in long-term activities. Sports, dance, band, scouting, and theater teach the leadership skills of assertiveness, perseverance, commitment, and teamwork. Those long practice sessions make it clear that you can learn from mistakes and that everyone's contribution is important in achieving a goal.

Don't expect perfection. Let your daughter know that you love her even when she "fails". Fear of failure keeps many girls from trying new and challenging activities. Emphasize what was learned, not what was missed. Try comments such as, "The team is really improving its offense", instead of "You lost again".

Respect women. Fathers, remember that your attitude toward your wife teaches your daughter a lot about the acceptable role of women. If you respect your wife's ideas and input, your

daughter will learn that women count. Mothers, if you believe in the importance of your own contribution to the community, your daughter will learn to be proud of the role of women.

Five messages

Being a leader means being self-confident, open to new ideas and willing to take action. A study of 25 top women leaders found that, as children, they had all been given five messages.

1. **You are loved and special.** Children don't automatically know they are loved. Hug your children. Let them know you love them even when they make mistakes or misbehave.
2. **You can do anything you put your mind to doing.** Let your daughter believe in her power to achieve. Don't do things for her that she can do for herself. As a toddler, let her dress herself. Later, let her manage her allowance.
3. **You can take risks.** Mistakes are an unpleasant but inevitable part of learning. Let your daughter take risks and applaud her efforts. If she wants to try out for sports, the school play, or student government, encourage her. If she doesn't make the team or loses the election, help her see what she learned from the experience and encourage her to try again.
4. **You can use and enjoy assertiveness.** Listen to your daughter's goals and dreams. She may wish she could play a particular piano piece or she may envy her friend's ability to ride a bicycle. Help her make a realistic plan to achieve her goal. Reward her through open displays of pride, such as attending a piano concert or taking a bike ride with her.
5. **You are entitled to dreams of greatness.** Don't limit your daughter's dreams. If she wants to be an astronaut, don't tell her she'll get airsick. If she wants to be an attorney, don't tell her men won't be attracted to an assertive woman. If she wants to be a teacher, don't tell her she can do better that. Help her believe she excel at whatever she does.

For more information:

Information, activities and fun to empower girls.

<http://www.girlsinc.org/gc/>

Jobe, Denice A. "Helping Girls Succeed" 2003

http://www.sonoma.edu/users/f/filp/libs_200/girls.pdf

Rimm, Sylvia B. "See Jane Win for Girls: A Smart Girl's Guide to Success". Free Spirit Publishing, 2003

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