

## **DADS AND DAUGHTERS**

**BY JOE KELLY**

[www.dadsanddaughters.org](http://www.dadsanddaughters.org)

“No man is at a more teachable moment about gender justice than when he has a daughter,” relates Joe Kelly, co-founder and director of Dads and Daughters (DADs). Creating a space for reflection about men, their behaviors, and relationships with their daughters is a fundamental starting point for the educational, advocacy, and policy work undertaken by DADs. Dads and Daughters’ mission is education and advocacy for fathers and daughters. Specifically, DADs helps strengthen father-daughter relationships and galvanize fathers (and others) to take social action that benefits girls. In other words, we help men be better fathers at home while also helping them recognize the vital links between their home life and what society does to girls and women (objectification, discrimination, etc.). Once a father sees that link, we believe he is much more motivated to be an activist and advocate on behalf of his daughter and every girl.

These linkages are also important for work in the gender violence prevention arena. Kelly further explains, “There is a story I’ve heard in a number of variations from countless men in different cultural contexts. I refer to it as the ‘shot gun story,’ but it is more than a story; I think of it as a parable.” It goes, more or less, like this. A father says, “If I let my daughter go out on a date before she is 35, I will be sitting on the front porch cleaning my shot gun when the date comes to pick her up.” The implicit lessons for the father, daughter, and young man reveal much about how men see women and other men. The young man is not to be trusted by the father because of the assumption that men mistreat (or use violence towards) women. And yet the father faces this situation by threatening to use violence. The young man is being told that he does not have the capacity for a nurturing relationship, but is instead a sexual predator. The expectation portrayed is that men confront other men with the threat of violence.

DADs makes the connection between our gender norms and behaviors, and how these create a culture that perpetuates different types of violence against women and girls. However, DADs’ entry point into this conversation with men—their daughters—gives them a compelling advantage to reaching men on a very personal level, as fathers.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY AND OVERVIEW**

The inspiration for Dads and Daughters came in 1999, after California businessman Michael Kieschnick’s nine-year-old daughter asked: “Daddy, do you think I look fat?” Michael recalls, “I knew the answer wasn’t as important as the question. It led me to realize that the influences around my daughter—telling her that she had to look and act in a certain way—were more powerful than her mother and I were.” But Michael also realized that fathers have the power to change the way their daughters see themselves, and the way society sees them. Together with Joe Kelly, he created Dads and Daughters, the national nonprofit that puts fathers to work in the family, the community, and the culture.

Since 2000, Dads and Daughters has galvanized fathers to take social actions that benefit girls through monthly DADs action campaigns directed primarily at corporate marketing harmful to girls, and occasionally at public policy makers to support girls' health and well-being. The premise for taking such action is this: most corporate CEOs and policy makers continue to be men who are also likely to be fathers. DADs actions are designed to send messages father-to-father, asking in effect, "Will you please put YOUR daughter's face into the picture of what your organization is doing? If you would not do this to your daughter (or allow someone else to do it to her), then please stop doing it to our daughters."

DADs has been among the progressive voices of fathering—a role taken seriously because the roots of the highest profile fatherhood groups are often found in very conservative soil. DADs is a member of the Stop Commercial Exploitation of Children Coalition; the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action; and the National Coalition for Woman and Girls in Education.

DADs' action has achieved some successes, including:

- Convinced Macy's to drop out of teen magazine ads for Bongo clothing; the ads depicted scantily-clothed young woman in highly sexualized, pornographic-like poses.
- Persuaded Campbell's Soup to stop airing a TV commercial marketing soup to pre-teen girls as a diet tool.
- Convinced the maker of "Sun-In" to drop a *Teen People* ad reading "4 out of the 5 girls you hate ask for it by name. Stop hating them; start being them with Sun-In."
- Got Jewelry.com to remove mainstream magazine ads suggesting that sexual acts should be bought and sold, as long as the price is high enough. The ad showed a man performing foreplay with a woman and read, "Trust us, a food processor won't get you there."
- Helped persuade Scholastic, Inc. (Harry Potter's publisher) to cancel sponsorship of the Golden Marble Awards, which reward commercial exploitation of children.
- Gave awards to Chevy Trucks for positive portrayal of a father-daughter relationship in ads and to Omni Hotels for sacrificing millions of dollars by pulling pay-per-view porn from their guest rooms.
- Got ASKO, Inc. to drop kitchen appliance ads that mocked eating disorders.
- Sparked a national outcry over Simon & Schuster's video game "Panty Raider."
- In 2001, purchased and began publishing the national newsletter *Daughters: For Parents of Girls*, ([www.daughters.com](http://www.daughters.com)), which helps **mothers and fathers** improve communication with their pre-adolescent and adolescent daughters.

- In 2002, released Joe Kelly's book, Dads and Daughters: How to Inspire, Understand, and Support Your Daughter When She's Growing Up So Fast (Broadway/Random House).
- Developed the *Dads and Daughters: Growing Together* program for 10-14 year-old girls and their fathers and stepfathers.

### **SOME CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

As Kelly explains, "Some of our biggest constraints are the cultural concepts of what is to be a man." DADS has been able to reach and motivate men by talking to them in person through workshops and trainings, but not as effectively through direct mailing and other outreach methods. To help transform the culture, they want to reach policy makers and appeal to them as men and fathers. Currently, DADS is focused on the Title IX debate in the United States, and fighting attempts to water down legislation that mandates equitable access to and resources for sports programs for girls and boys. As DADS sees it, sports are a major opportunity for relationship building between dads and daughters—something strengthened by Title IX. The hope is that men who are legislators and fathers will see it this way too.

Thus, DADS is evolving from primarily an educational organization to one that also is beginning to inform national policy. In 2003, DADS' board of directors committed to new efforts to:

- Rate corporations on advertising and marketing to girls.
- Create a research agenda and regular national polling on father/daughter relationships.
- Build coalitions to achieve public policy changes that help girls.
- Join with other organizations to raise awareness of father/daughter issues.

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