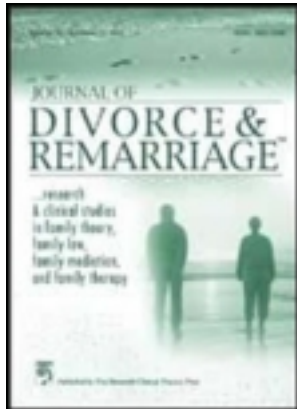


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Divorced Fathers and Their Daughters: A Review of Recent Research

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After parents' divorce, a father's relationship with his daughter is often far more damaged than his relationship with his son. Why is this? In what ways does the daughter pay an ongoing price for this damaged—or destroyed—relationship with her father? More important still, what can we do to reduce the damage to so many father–daughter relationships after divorce?

KEYWORDS divorced fathers and daughters, divorced parents, father–daughter relationships, fathers and daughters, shared parenting

Most daughters pay an ongoing price for their parents' divorce because they receive too little—or no—fathering after their parents' marriage ends. Eighty percent of the daughters and sons in the United States only live with their fathers for a maximum of 10% to 15% of the time after their parents' divorce. Nearly half do not spend time with their father on a monthly basis and 25% do not spend any time at all with him. Only 5% to 7% live with their father for more than 25% to 30% of the year (Kelly, 2007). These statistics are alarming because those daughters whose fathers remain actively involved in their lives differ very little from girls whose parents have never been divorced. Especially those daughters who live with their dads for at least 25% of the year receive the kind of fathering that offsets the negative impact of their parents' divorce (Bauserman, 2002; Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996; Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Schenck, 2010; Schwartz & Finley, 2005).

In what ways are daughters who receive too little fathering generally disadvantaged after their parents' divorce? As teenagers, these daughters are more likely to have babies out of wedlock, have sex at an early age, and be sexually promiscuous (Jeynes, 2001). Their teenage pregnancy rates are

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2.5 times higher and their chances of having sex at an early age are 4 times higher—although the older they are when their parents divorce, the lower their pregnancy risks (Quinlan, 2007). Looking at two countries with the highest teen pregnancy rates, 10% of teenage girls in the United States and 7% in New Zealand become pregnant every year—and half of them have the babies. However, those teenagers who have not lived with their fathers since early childhood are seven to eight times more likely to become pregnant, whereas those who lived with their fathers until later childhood are only two to three times more at risk—even after family income, their mother's age, and parental supervision were taken into consideration (Ellis, Bates, & Dodge, 2003).

These “underfathered” daughters are also more apt to make bad grades, drop out of high school, and never make it through college (Chadwick, 2002; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Menning, 2006). They engage in more anti-social behavior and are more likely to be arrested for breaking the law (Coley & Medeiros, 2007; C. Harper & McLanahan, 2004). With more self-image problems (Dunlop, Burns, & Bermingham, 2001), they abuse drugs and alcohol more often, even when they do not live in poor communities (Hoffmann, 2002; Lerner, 2004). As teenagers and young adults, they have more emotional and psychological problems and are more likely to become depressed than daughters with close, ongoing relationships with their fathers after divorce (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Carlson, 2006; King & Soboleski, 2006; K. Stamps, Booth, & King, 2009; Stewart, 2003).

Having a close, ongoing relationship with dad after parents' divorce also has health benefits. As teenagers, these girls are less likely to be extremely overweight or extremely underweight (Menning & Stewart, 2008) or to develop an eating disorder (Maine, 2004). As young girls, they also enjoy better overall health (Troxel & Mathews, 2004). As young adults, they have fewer stress-related illnesses such as insomnia, headaches, chest pains, and intestinal problems (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007).

Receiving too little fathering also leads to more troubled, more unstable romantic relationships later in the daughter's life. In college these daughters tend to have more trouble trusting and creating emotional intimacy with men (Harvey & Fine, 2004; Kilmann, 2006). They do not communicate as well with their boyfriends and they often fear emotional intimacy (Morris & West, 2001; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). As young adults, they have more trouble negotiating, compromising, controlling their emotions, and defusing anger (Conway, Christensen, & Herlihy, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This is to be expected because, even in married couples, the father generally has more impact than the mother does on the way a daughter relates to men (Danes, Frieman, & Kitzmann, 2006; Sanftner, 2009; Scharf & Mayseless, 2008). Whether her parents are married or divorced, the daughter who has a fulfilling relationship with her father is usually more trusting, more secure, and more satisfied in her romantic relationships than the daughter with a

troubled or distant relationship with her dad (Lost, 2009; Schaick & Stolberg, 2001).

Moreover, the daughter of divorce generally pays a greater price than the son does in these regards. She is usually less trusting and less satisfied with her romantic relationships than the son (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). She often has poorer communication and problem-solving skills than the son (Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). When engaged to be married, a daughter is more likely than a son to believe the marriage might fail (Whitton, 2008).

More important still, a daughter is more likely than a son to feel unloved and rejected by the father. Roughly 85% of sons and daughters say they want—or wanted—more time with their fathers rather than having lived almost exclusively with their mothers after the divorce (Emery, 2004; Fabricius, 2003; Harvey & Fine, 2004; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Marquardt, 2005; Parkinson, Cashmore, & Single, 2005; Smith, 2003; Schwartz & Finley, 2009; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2004). Daughters, however, generally feel the most abandoned and unloved. For example, in a 20-year study with 173 children, three times as many daughters as sons felt their relationship with their dad had gotten worse after the divorce (Ahrns, 2007). Similarly in a study involving nearly 2,500 children, daughters' relationships with their dads were more damaged than sons' relationships (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Other teenage girls also rate their relationships with their fathers lower than teenage boys, regardless of their race (K. Stamps et al., 2009). Teenage girls also feel more unloved by and angry at their fathers than the boys do when their mothers continue to speak badly of him (A. Koerner, 2004). College daughters are less likely than the sons to think that their fathers wanted to spend time with them (Fabricius, 2003), to feel satisfied with the amount of time they had together (Finley & Schwartz, 2007), and to be content with their current relationship with their dad (Frank, 2004; Harvey & Fine, 2004). Even years after their parents' divorce, when they get married or have children, daughters are less likely than sons to reconcile or become closer to their dads (Scott, Booth, & King, 2007).

REASONS FOR DAMAGE TO THE FATHER–DAUGHTER BOND

Given the extent of the damage, the question becomes this: Why is the father–daughter relationship usually more negatively affected than the father–son relationship after parents divorce?

Parent–Child Relationships Before Divorce

In part the answer lies in the kind of relationships that most parents have with their children during their marriage. Even though most children have

a closer relationship with their mother than with their father, the daughter's tends to be even closer than the son's. For example, in a study with 173 teenagers whose parents were divorced, 40% said they felt closer to their moms than to their dads during their marriage, whereas only 4% felt closer to their dads (Ahrons, 2007). In married families, African American and White teenagers said they felt closer to their mom and talked more to her about personal topics like sex and drugs (Miller, 2002). Likewise, in a nationwide representative sample of 453 teenagers with married parents, 90% felt close to their mom and only 80% felt close to their dad (Scott et al., 2007). So even if their parents never divorce, children's bonds with their mothers usually grow stronger over time, whereas bonds with their fathers stay the same or grow weaker (Bengston & Roberts, 2002).

As might be expected then, although most children's bonds with their fathers get weaker after the divorce, their bonds with their mothers almost always remain the same or grow stronger. Compared to young adults whose parents are still married, those with divorced parents are especially close to their mothers (Bulduc, 2005; Riggio, 2004). Whereas only 10% of college students with married parents wondered if their fathers loved them, more than 30% of those with divorced parents felt this way (Emery, 2004). In yet another college study, almost 90% of the students with married parents felt close to their dads, compared to only 65% of those with divorced parents (Knox, Zusman, & DeCuzzi, 2004). Similarly, 74% of college students said that their mother had been their primary caretaker and 23% had spent no time with their dad after the divorce (Ferrante, Stolberg, Macie, & Williams, 2008). Among high school students, 60% said their relationships with their dad were not as close as they had been before the divorce, whereas 90% felt as close to their mom as ever (Scott et al., 2007). Among young adults whose parents had been divorced for more than 10 years, feeling closer to their mother meant that 55% still felt they had to protect her and 25% still felt they had to take care of her emotionally, compared to only 30% and 8% who felt this way about their father (Marquardt, 2005). Understandably then, when their divorced parents reach old age, sons and daughters are much more likely to help their mothers financially and to have a closer relationship with them than with their fathers—especially if the mothers never remarried (Amato & Dorius, 2010). In a study with almost 10,000 adults, 12% provided their divorced or widowed mother with care and 20% helped her out financially. In contrast, only 9% provided any care for their divorced and widowed father and only 6% helped him financially (Lin, 2008).

Generally a daughter's relationship with her mother is closer and more communicative than the son's maternal relationship during the parents' marriage. Teenage girls feel closer to, talk more with, and ask more advice from their mothers than their fathers (Sprague, 1999; Way & Gillman, 2000). Likewise, 85% of 535 daughters in college who were surveyed between 1990 and 2005 felt closer to, spent more time with, and disclosed more to their

mothers than their fathers (Nielsen, 2006). Mothers also tend to depend more on their adult daughters than on their sons for emotional support, advice, and comfort (Suitor & Pillemer, 2006). In other words, at the time of the divorce, the father's relationship with his daughter is usually not as strong as the mother's relationship with her daughter.

Mother's Disclosures

Making things more difficult still for fathers and daughters, divorced mothers tend to be more emotionally dependent on their daughters than on their sons—and to disclose more information that damages the father–daughter relationship. By disclosing more negative information about fathers to their daughters than to their sons, mothers can further weaken the father–daughter bond (Afifi & Hamrick, 2006). Based on what their mothers have told them, teenage girls are more likely than boys to doubt that their father loves them and more likely to take their mother's side against their father (A. Koerner, 2004; S. Koerner, Kenyon, & Rankin, 2006). Consequently, as teenagers these daughters are more depressed and stressed from becoming “parentified”—taking on the role of their mother's ally and advisor in their mutual alliance against the father (Silverberg, 2004). These role reversals and alliances too often continue into the daughter's adult years, further contributing to problems in the father–daughter relationship (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Leudemann, 2006; Jurkovic, Thirkield, & Morrell, 2001). Moreover, many children first hear about the divorce from their mother, which allows her to influence their feelings about their father—sometimes not for the best (Western, Nelson, & Piercy, 2002). As might be expected, both sons and daughters tend to blame their fathers for the divorce (Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas, & Murch, 2003; Harvey & Fine, 2004; Jennings & Howe, 2001; Nielsen, 2008). Because the daughter is usually closer to the mother than the son is, however, the mother's negative feelings about the father could have a particularly damaging impact on the father–daughter bond.

Further complicating the situation, the parents' conflicts are generally more upsetting to the daughter than to the son. After a divorce, this is especially hard on the father–daughter relationship because the daughter is usually already more aligned with her mom than the son is. Young adult and teenage daughters tend to be more upset and more depressed than sons by conflicts between their married and their divorced parents (Davies & Lindsay, 2004; Frank, 2004; S. Harper & Fine, 2006). The daughter also tends to be more unsettled than the son if one of the parents has emotional or psychological problems (Bosco, 2003). It is worth noting that even during the marriage, mothers tend to disclose more damaging information than fathers do—information that can weaken the father–child bond (Dolgin, 1996). Carried to the extreme after a divorce, the mother's behavior causes

some children to reject their father altogether (Baker, 2007; Clawar, 2003; Warshak, 2010).

Damaging Messages

Based on what their mothers might have told them, some daughters could be receiving two particularly damaging messages about their fathers. The first is related to the kind of parent he was during the marriage. The second is related to how he feels about parenting after the divorce.

The first damaging impression that a mother can create is that her ex-husband was not a very good parent—or that he selfishly refused to do his fair share of the parenting during the marriage. This taps into the widespread myth of the “second shift”—the belief that most employed married mothers are doing almost all of the child care while their lazy, disengaged husbands are reveling in their leisure time. What the daughter might not realize is that the vast majority of married, employed parents are both doing a “second shift.” However, because most married couples choose to have the dad earn most of the income and spend more hours working and commuting, most married dads spend one fourth to one third less time with the kids than the moms do—and most moms spend one fourth to one third less time earning the family’s money. Most parents wish they could spend more time with their kids and feel stressed trying to balance work and family; very few dads are lazy slackers who selfishly dump all of the child care on their exhausted wives (Amato & Booth, 2006; Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006).

The second message that can undermine the father–daughter relationship after a divorce is that the father does not want to spend more time with his kids. Although this is true for some fathers, it is not true for the overwhelming majority of divorced dads. Even though 90% of divorcing parents reach a legal agreement without going before a judge, this does not mean the father freely chose or was satisfied with the plan to which he agreed. In fact, most fathers do not feel they have been given nearly enough time to create the kind of meaningful, involved relationship that their children need and deserve—which explains why dads are usually far unhappier than moms are with their legal agreement about parenting time (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Bonach, Sales, & Koeske, 2005; DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Fabricius et al., 2010; Frieman, 2007; Nielsen, 1999; Spillman, Deschamps, & Crews, 2004; Stone & Dudley, 2006).

The daughter also might not realize that the legal system often works against fathers who want to share the parenting and want their children to live with them more than a few nights a month. In a survey of 72 family lawyers, 60% agreed that the law is biased against fathers who want to share the parenting (Braver, Cookston, & Cohen, 2002). In another survey of 4,579 judges and lawyers in four states, two thirds of the judges and half

of the lawyers said that fathers do not usually get treated fairly in custody decisions—especially if the children are young (Dotterweich, 2000). Nearly 60% of 150 judges surveyed in four Southern states agreed that children under the age of 6 should live exclusively with their mothers, and almost half felt that mothers were “by nature” better parents than fathers (L. Stamps, 2002). More than half of the judges attending a national law conference were also opposed to shared physical custody (Williams, 2007). Many custody evaluators also believe in the superiority of mothers, with one going so far as to say, “This five year old child will be irreparably damaged were she to spend even one overnight (with her father) away from her mother” (Kelly & Johnston, 2005, p. 236). Indeed, in a survey of 81 custody evaluators with an average of 13 years of experience each, only 30% said that children under the age of 2 should spend the night in both parents’ homes and only 4% thought older children should spend equal time with both parents (Ackerman & Dolezal, 2006).

Then, too, many daughters might not be aware of how distressed and heartbroken most fathers are because they are allotted so little time with their children after the divorce. Fathers who do not get to see their kids often become stressed and depressed (Bailey & Zvonkovic, 2006; Hallman & Deinhart, 2007; Hilton & Frye, 2004). In contrast, dads who get to spend plenty of time with their children feel less depressed and are more emotionally well adjusted (Baum, 2006; Bokker, Farley, & Denny, 2005; Stone & Dudley, 2006). Moreover, after a divorce most fathers are excluded from their children’s lives in many ways—excluded by their children’s doctors (Coleman, 2004), by teachers and school counselors (Fagan & Hawkins, 2003), and by therapists and social workers (Frieman, 2007; Sieber, 2008). Indeed one of the reasons some fathers might gradually stop seeing their children is that they cannot tolerate the grief of being virtually cut out of their children’s lives (Spillman et al., 2004). Perhaps if daughters had a better understanding of what most of their fathers endure after a divorce, their father–daughter relationships might end up less severely damaged.

Mothers’ Feelings About Shared Parenting

As we have seen, daughters who spend ample time with their fathers benefit in a host of ways throughout their lives, but “ample” means spending far more than a few nights a month living with him—and spending far more than 15% or 20% of the time together. When researchers talk about the benefits of shared parenting, they mean fathers and children living together for at least 25% and as much as 50% of the time. However, as the laws now stand in almost all states, the mother must agree before the father can spend more than 15% or 20% of the time with the children (Family Law in the Fifty States Case Digests, 2008). So how enthusiastic are most mothers about shared parenting? The short answer is not very. Most mothers will not

agree to give the father more than one fifth or one fourth of the parenting time—if that much (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Bonach et al., 2005; DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Kelly, 2007; Madden & Leonard, 2002). In fact more than two thirds of all divorces are initiated by women, in part because mothers know they are likely to get what they want from the legal system—to limit the children's time with their father and to have them live with her (Brenig, 2005). Interestingly, too, divorce rates have fallen in states where the laws have been changed to make shared parenting easier for fathers to obtain (Levy, 2007).

After their parents' divorce, many daughters clearly get the message: Mom does not want to share the parenting with my dad—and she does not want me living in his home more than a few days a month, if at all. Looking back at the years after their parents' divorce, young adults often say that when it came to criticizing, badmouthing, and demeaning one another, their mothers were worse than their fathers (Harvey & Fine, 2004). Even though 70% to 80% of college students knew that their fathers wanted to spend more time with them—and wanted them to live more equally with him—they also knew that their mothers opposed it (Fabricius, 2003). More disturbing still, a mother can be so opposed to sharing the parenting that she falsely accuses the father of having physically abused her—thus causing the court to deny him any contact with his children (Jaffe, 2008; Johnston, 2005; Thocme & Bala, 2005). Likewise, the American Psychological Association has acknowledged that, in her attempt to cut the father out of her daughter's life, a divorced mother can brainwash her daughter into believing that her father sexually or physically abused her as a young child, when no such abuse ever occurred (Ceci & Bruck, 1999).

So the question becomes this: Why are so many mothers unwilling to share the parenting with fathers after their divorce? Why do these mothers want their daughters (and their sons) to live exclusively—or almost exclusively—with them? In part this might happen because divorced women tend to hold onto grudges longer than their ex-husbands, refusing to forgive and let go of the past so that they can coparent (Bonach et al., 2005; Hilton & Frye, 2004). For example, in a 20-year study with nearly 1,400 divorced families, mothers harbored more resentment than fathers, even richer mothers who resented having to live a less affluent lifestyle (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Women are also more likely than men to get stuck in negative feelings and to brood about the failed relationship, making them less likely to share the parenting (Duck & Wood, 2006). Other mothers are still emotionally attached to their ex-husbands or regret having divorced them—in which case coparenting makes it harder to build a new life (Sbarra & Emery, 2006).

Too many mothers also believe that women are so superior to men as parents that their children do not need and will not benefit from shared parenting. For example, in a recent survey of 1,500 married and divorced women, half believed that a single mother and two thirds believed that

another man could adequately replace their children's father (Whitehead & Glenn, 2009). Even during the marriage, too many mothers are "gatekeepers" who do not allow their husbands to share much of the parenting—a situation that is not likely to improve after a divorce (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; McBride et al., 2005; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). A divorced woman is more likely to share the parenting when her family and friends believe this is the "right" thing to do (Markham, Ganong, & Coleman, 2007). She is also more willing to share the parenting when she had a loving, meaningful relationship with her own father (Krampe & Newton, 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

This is not to say that mothers are always less willing to share the parenting than fathers are. Clearly there are fathers who want no part of shared parenting—or any parenting—and clearly there are mothers who are enthusiastic about shared parenting. For example, nearly one fourth of the couples who divorced in Wisconsin in 2003 agreed to share the parenting equally (Brown & Cancian, 2007). Likewise, 46% of the fathers were awarded at least 35% of the parenting time in Washington State in 2007 (George, 2008). In Arizona in 2008, 45% of the divorcing couples chose to let the children live with their father 24% to 32% of the time, another third chose 35% of the time with dad, and almost one fourth chose equal time for mom and dad (Venohr & Kaunelis, 2008). Still, though, only a few states allow children to live with both parents if one of the parents objects (Family Law in the Fifty States Case Digests, 2008). And most moms are still less willing than most dads to share the parenting after their divorce—or at least not to share it for more than 15% or 20% of the time.

STRENGTHENING FATHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

For many reasons then, many father–daughter relationships are damaged or entirely destroyed after the parents' divorce. So how can we reduce the chances of this happening? What does the research tell us? In brief, the answer seems to be more "dad time"—more shared parenting, more time living with dad. As already explained, the overwhelming majority of fathers and young adult children believe that shared parenting would have been better than living exclusively with their mothers. And the research backs them up: Spending 15% or 20% of the time together—and usually less—is not enough to create the kind of relationship that helps children overcome the negative impact of their parents' divorce. Fathers and children need plenty of weekday and overnight time together (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Cashmore, Parkinson, & Taylor, 2008; Fabricius et al., 2010; Kelly, 2007; King & Soboleski, 2006; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Stewart, 2003).

Those daughters who get to live with their fathers for at least 25% of their childhood after the parents' divorce reap the greatest benefits—lifelong

benefits. For instance, in a 20-year study involving 173 children, those who had the most shared parenting in the first 5 years after their parents' divorce had the best relationships with their fathers and were the most well adjusted. Half of these young adults felt their relationships with their fathers had gotten better after the divorce because they were able to spend so much time with him (Ahrons, 2007). Likewise, in an analysis of 33 studies, children who lived with their fathers for a substantial part of the year or who spent ample time with him every week were better off in terms of school success, self-confidence, mental health, and adjustment to the divorce even when there was ongoing conflict between their parents (Bauserman, 2002). Even in a study conducted almost 20 years ago with 573 teenagers, those who lived with their fathers for at least one fourth of the year were the most well adjusted even if their parents were not getting along well (Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996). For college freshmen, 93% of those who had lived in shared physical custody said this was the best choice, and 70% who had lived almost exclusively with their mom wished they had lived with both parents more equally (Fabricius, 2003). Again, even when their parents had ongoing conflicts, those young adults who had lived with both parents had better relationships with their dads and fewer problems related to the divorce (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007)—a finding repeated in other college surveys as well (Laumann & Emery, 2000; Schwartz & Finley, 2005). Even young children living in dual residence have fewer behavioral and emotional problems than those living exclusively with their mothers (Lee, 2002). Finally, it is worth noting that fewer than 10% of the kids who start out living with both parents end up living with only one of their parents (Berger, 2008; Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996).

For the sake of their future relationship, a divorced father needs to spend plenty of time with his preschool-aged daughter—including overnight time. Many people believe that preschool children need to live exclusively with their mother to remain securely attached to their “primary” caretaker. Popular as this belief might be, there are a number of underlying flaws with it (Lamb, 2007; Riggs, 2005; Warshak, 2007). First, emotional attachment is not based on which adult spends the most time with a child. If that was true, then millions of children would be more attached to their day care workers or relatives than to their parents. More important still, infants and preschoolers need to be securely attached to both parents, regardless of which parent provides most of their daily care. Each parent's bond has an equally powerful impact on young children—an impact that lasts a lifetime. Moreover, if a young child is far more strongly attached to one parent, this is not necessarily a good thing—and is not a reason for giving that parent most of the time with the children after a divorce. Kids can become more strongly attached to the emotionally disturbed, depressed, or needy parent than to the healthier, “better” parent. In fact, 4- to 6-year-olds who spend nights in each parent's home have fewer problems than those who spend every night in

only one parent's home (Pruett, Insabellla, & Gustafson, 2005). Fortunately guidelines for creating parenting plans for infants and young children are now available to assist parents and family court workers (Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2006; Pruett et al., 2005).

Can a father who does not spend enough time with his young daughter to create a secure bond "make up for lost time" later in her life? Not likely. Both the strength and the quality of these early bonds are extremely difficult to change later in childhood. The kind of bond a father creates with his young daughter is long lasting and resilient to change. In divorced or in married families, the father and daughter who have not created a secure bond in early childhood usually both pay a price for years to come (Krampe & Newton, 2006; Silverstein, Conroy, Wang, Giarusso, & Bengtson, 2002; Stroufe, 2005; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Hutchinson, 1994).

What if a daughter wants to live exclusively with her mom and does not want to spend much time with her dad? Shouldn't the family respect her wishes? As kind-hearted as this sounds, giving children this kind of power and responsibility is not in their best interests when both parents are competent and loving. To begin with, some children are overly attached to one parent in unhealthy ways that prevent them from creating—or from wanting—a close bond with their other parent (Titelman, 2007). Children might also want to live with the most lenient, permissive parent or with the emotionally needy parent who relies on them like an adult friend—neither of which is in their best interests (Garber, 2007). As already explained, a daughter's willingness to spend time with her father can be undermined by her mother. In other words, we should not "let the tail wag the dog" by allowing daughters to make the final decisions about how much time they want to spend with their fathers.

CONCLUSION

Considering all of the research on divorced fathers and their daughters, perhaps the two most important messages are these. First, those fathers who spend plenty of time with their daughters after the divorce have the greatest chance of creating and maintaining a loving, meaningful, lifelong relationship. Especially when they live with their fathers for a substantial part of the year, these daughters are the most likely to reap the lifelong benefits of having been well fathered. Second, an increasing number of parents are sharing the parenting more equally after their divorce—a pivotal step toward strengthening father–daughter relationships. Hopefully as the research on divorced fathers and their daughters becomes more widely disseminated, more families and more professionals who work with divorcing parents will foster and respect this bond.

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