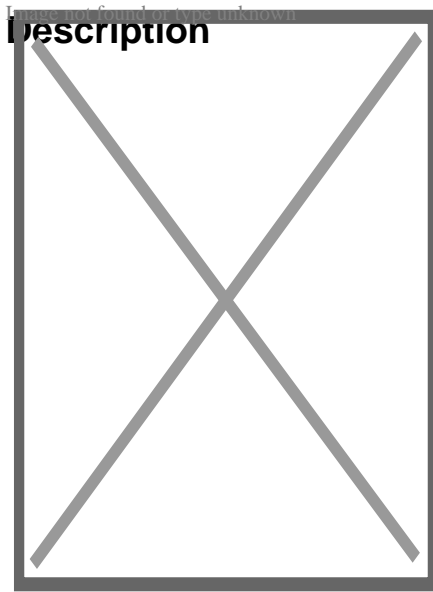


Top 10 Life Lessons I've Learned From My Daughter (So Far)



Children bring a great amount of wisdom with them when they join us

here in this world. I have known this for many years and have always loved being around children. But it was not until I became a father, a bit more than four years ago, that I discovered just how wise these little beings really are.

From the moment of my daughter's birth (and even before that) fatherhood has been a truly transformative experience. It's rare that a day goes by without learning something about life from my Ella. And in many ways I really do see her as one of my most effective teachers.

So I thought it would be fun to share some of the personal growth lessons I have learned from Ella over the past four years. If you have children you will most likely recognize many of these. If you do not have children, you may find some of these corny or silly. Trust me, they are not. Every one of these lessons has had a significant impact on my life.

So here, then, are the top 10 Life Lessons I've Learned From My Daughter so far!

1. Tomorrow's Gonna Be a New Day.

When Ella was younger she would ask me, "Is tomorrow gonna be a new day?" I assured her that, yes, indeed, tomorrow would be a new day. Now that she's reached the ripe old age of four, she gets it. And now she reminds me: "Don't worry Dadda. Tomorrow's gonna be a new day!" It's good to remember that!

I the only one hearing a refrain from Little Orphan Annie in the background? "The sun'll come out tomorrow" Sure it's cheesy, but there is a lot of power in recognizing that, no matter how difficult today is, tomorrow's gonna be a new day.

2. Sometimes it's Better to Make Up Your Own Rules

I already wrote about this one in the post [Life Lessons from Candyland](#). But it's an important one so I included it in this list.

Bottom line: Sometimes it's best to throw away the rule book and make up your own!

3. Don't Be Afraid to Show Your Enthusiasm.

Ella is not shy when it comes to showing her enthusiasm. If someone makes a suggestion that she likes she responds in a number of different ways depending upon her level of excitement. If she likes the idea, she'll say something like, "That's gonna be a great idea, Dada!" If she really likes the idea, she'll nod her head vigorously and let out a loud, "Uh huh!" And if she really, really likes an idea, she starts jumping and galloping around, shouting, "Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh." over and over and over and over!

My favorite part is when we're at the dinner table and we make a suggestion (like for instance on a hot summer night when we, very rarely, suggest walking down to the ice cream shop in town) Ella will get so excited that she actually has to climb down off her chair so that she can run back and forth yelling "uh huh, uh huh, uh huh!" Sometimes her excitement is so powerful I'm afraid she's going to fall off the chair!

Do you ever curb your enthusiasm? I know I do. Somewhere along the line most of us learned that stuff we really wanted or were really excited about could be taken away in an instant. Often the very things that were most exciting to us were used to get us to do or not do certain things: "Get dressed now or you can't ride your bike today!" Or, "Stop saying that word or you'll be grounded for a week."

No wonder we've learned to hide our enthusiasm! We don't want the good stuff taken away from us so we don't let anyone know what we think is good! How messed up is that.

Well it sure is refreshing to watch Ella express her enthusiasm with no hesitation. Enthusiasm is contagious. People want a taste of enthusiasm. They want to know that it is safe to be happy about something.

So give it a try. The next time you discover something you really like, do a little happy dance and see what happens.

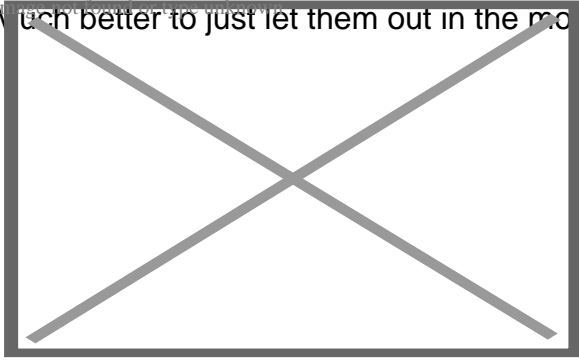
4. Feel your emotions fully.

Ella isn't always happy. Like all kids she has moments of frustration and sadness. We've done our best to encourage her to fully feel those emotions and express them when they're happening. It's amazing to watch how Ella has learned to deal with these moments.

If something happens that causes Ella to feel frustrated or angry she'll go into her room, close the door, lie down on the floor or on her bed and scream or cry for a minute or two. Then she opens the door, comes back out and says, "All better." And usually she is. The frustration that was moving through her just needed to be let out.

How often have you held onto sadness, frustration, anger or grief? I know I've held onto stuff for a long time! And the longer I hold onto those emotions, the more powerful they become.

Much better to just let them out in the moment and let yourself be “all better!”



5. Walk On Walls Whenever You Have The Chance

When was the last time you walked on a wall? Whenever I'm out walking with Ella and we pass a wall, whether it's a curb or a retaining wall, Ella wants to walk on it. And now she gets me to walk on them with her: "Come on, Dada!" And I must say, if you haven't walked on a wall in a while, give it a try. It's a lot of fun!

The life lesson here is that we adult types tend to pass by opportunities for joy and exploration without even noticing them. These opportunities are all around us all the time. We just have to open our eyes and expand our perception. Hanging around kids (even if you don't have your own) is a great way to do that.

6. Sometimes you have to do it alone (even if there's someone right there who could help you).

I often feel a strong temptation to reach out to help Ella put her shoes on or put a puzzle piece in the right place. Simple tasks that I take for granted are a challenge for Ella, as they are for any child. If I were to constantly jump in and say, "Let me do that for you," it would take her a lot longer to figure out how to do it.

It's especially tempting to help her when she reaches that frustration point. But I've learned that if I let her go a little bit longer, just past that moment of frustration is when she succeeds.

In those moments I sometimes think of the scene in the movie, Ray, after Ray Charles has gone blind and his mother pretends she's not in the room as he's calling out for her help. In that moment, he discovers that he's not as helpless as he thought.

It's been a powerful lesson for me as a father and in my own life.

7. Know When to Ask For Help.

Now, while this one seems to contradict the previous lesson, they really work hand in hand. Let's face it; there are some things that a four year old just can't do yet. Ella is pretty good about trying to do things. And she is also pretty good about asking for help when she has reached the end of her patience: "Please help me, Dada." Or if she's tired or frustrated she might say, "I can't do it, Dada."

Her willingness to ask for help is a powerful lesson for someone like me: a die-hard do it yourself-er. Countless hours have been spent figuring out something that I could have easily asked or paid someone else to do.

Knowing when, and how, to ask for help is an important life skill to master. And I am learning from a

master.

8. Don't be attached to what you painted yesterday (or 2-seconds ago).

Ella is a prolific artist. She cranks out paintings and drawings faster than the fastest graffiti artist. And the beautiful thing about her creativity is that once she's done, she's done. There is no attachment to the painting she just created. She puts her piles of artwork into the recycling bin as easily as the Tibetan monks sweep their intricate sand mandalas back into dust.

<http://www.artnetwork.com/Mandala/gallery.html>

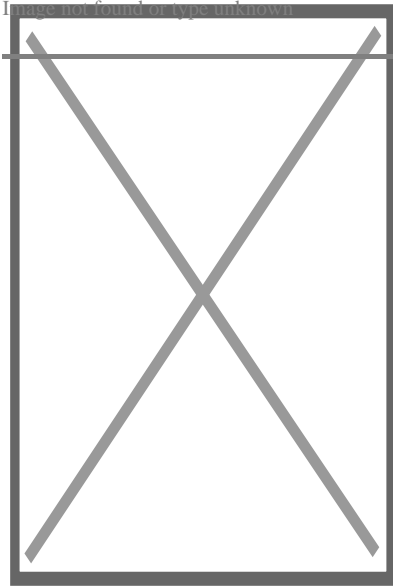
I don't know about you, but I have a hard time letting go of stuff I created 10-years ago! Ella's willingness to let go of her creations leaves her open to the flow of creativity. She is not attached to what she painted yesterday. She does not compare what she is doing today with what came before. She is free to be open and just let it flow.

9. Singing Makes Everything Better.

No matter how traumatic a situation might be, whether it's an overtired and cranky before bed tooth brushing meltdown or a big boo-boo, singing makes it better. Ella and I sing together on our way to preschool. We sing the silly tooth-brushing song we made up together. We sing the pee-pee song. We sing our favorite bedtime songs. Just about anything that you can say can be sung (hey, didn't the Beatles write something about that?).

Singing is fun. Singing makes you smile. I wouldn't be surprised if there's research showing that singing releases endorphins. And most of us adult types tend to sing far too little. The 7-Dwarfs knew what they were talking about when they whistled while they worked! So try adding a bit more singing into your daily diet.

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10. Dance like no one's watching (even when you've made sure that

everyone is!)

Like most houses with young ones, the phrases, "Watch Dada. Watch Mama. Watch everybody!" are heard on a regular basis. Ella loves to dance. And when she does, she lets it all hang out. She makes up new dance moves on a regular basis: There's the running back and forth dance, the sneaky dance, the jumping up and down dance, the spin around until you fall down dance, and of course Ella's famous Jiggy-Jiggy dance!

Somewhere along the way, most of us lose that uninhibited ability to express ourselves. The voices of self-doubt come in and we become self-conscious of our performance. Watching Ella dance with all her heart, whether she's alone or in front of a crowd, is a great reminder of the innocence and joy that we all have inside of us. Isn't it time we start letting a little more of it out?

So there are the top 10 life lessons that Ella has helped me learn so far. What lessons have your children taught you? I'd love to hear. Leave a comment below and share your lessons and stories.

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Date Created

2011/04/06

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