

20 April 2021

Sharing your interests with your children

by Michael Grose

The family was a little shocked when dad Chris, bought his six and four-year-old daughters a motorbike. "You got them a what?" was the standard reply.

It turns out that getting his daughters a motorbike was a stroke of pure fathering genius, although Chris didn't know it at the time.

Chris bought the motorbike for his daughters because he had fond memories of riding on his family's farm when he was young. He wanted his kids to enjoy the same experience.

Close family members questioned Chris about introducing a motorbike to kids at such a young age, but he let it pass. He even received a comment or two about the suitability of such a pursuit for girls. "You and your brothers loved motorbikes, but that doesn't mean that your daughters will," was the attitude of some people.

Undeterred, Chris spent many weekends riding in a nearby property teaching his girls the finer points of motorbike riding. He began by riding with each daughter using trainer wheels, slowly progressing to two wheeled riding as they grew more confident.

The parenting genius in three parts

Helping them to face their fears

Firstly, after acknowledging his daughters' fears, Chris encouraged them to face them, but in their own time. The girls set the developmental pace, so they felt they had full control over their experiences. He showed himself to be astute listener ready to work with his daughters. This is respectful relationships in action.

Lessons of self-worth

Secondly, through the experience Chris showed his daughters that what they do with their bodies is far more important than how they look. His daughters are young, and their attitudes may change when they become

tweens or teens, but the lessons of self-worth they absorb during this stage of childhood are lasting. The fact that these messages come while sharing activities organised by their father adds to their potency.

Communicating and forming strong bonds

Thirdly, he's using activity to communicate with and form strong bonds with his girls. Fathers generally express themselves best with their children when they are fully absorbed in an activity. Parenting author Steve Biddulph says 'activity is the language of fathering'. Men are usually at their parenting best when they're involved in games, having fun or being active with their kids. It is through activity that many dads teach kids lessons such as fairness, playing by the rules, trying their best and, of course, sharing stories from their own childhood.

Another side to this parenting genius is that Chris shared something of himself with his daughters when he bought that motorbike. Each time he rides with them he is sharing a part of who he is with his daughters – not the work persona, the parent persona or the friend persona – but something that is close to the essence of who is, which was forged during the joyous times of childhood.