

GABRIEL VALENCIA MY TURN

Being a dad means teaching kids decision-making skills



Father's Day is a day to celebrate dads and all they do for their families. Growing up, my father was present, but not in the way I needed him to be. He was a provider, sure, but that was all, really. Now that I am a father, I am a strong believer that a father is much more than a provider; he is whatever his kids need him to be. We provide; we encourage; we teach; we love.

Being the father of two little girls, I am also a strong believer that I am responsible for teaching my daughters what to look for in a husband and how they should be treated by their husband. Part of this teaching comes in simply being a role model for how I treat their mother.

Before I had my daughters, I

was selfish and cared only for myself. When my first daughter was born, something inside me changed. I wanted to be better for her.

She pushed me to get a better job, for her, which is why I joined Southwest Behavioral & Health Services as a benefits specialist. She pushed me to be a better person because now there was someone looking up to me. When my first daughter came along, I wanted to be the father that I didn't really have.

One of the biggest challenges I face as a father is something I am still trying to overcome because my girls are both still very young; I am still learning how to teach my girls how to make the right decisions.

You can tell your kids over and over, "Don't do this," or, "You should do that," but often they have to make their own mistakes

to learn. But it's my responsibility to teach them how to look at a situation and see all different angles and outcomes before they decide what is the right decision to make. And they will still make the wrong decision at times, but if they can learn from the mistake, I'm OK with it.

Right now, I'm struggling with teaching my oldest daughter, who is 7, that lying is never the right decision.

She has a flex foam mattress, and recently my wife and I discovered holes in the mattress, as if someone had been picking at it. We asked her if she tore the holes in her mattress and she told us she didn't, which of course isn't true because she's the only one who sleeps in her bed.

Now we are trying to teach her that lying is worse than just simply getting in trouble.

I'm trying to teach her that even if you make a mistake, telling the truth is always the best thing to do. I understand that sometimes it can be difficult to find the right time and right ways to talk to your kids, but DrugFreeAZKids.org, a program of Southwest Behavioral & Health Services, has resources you can use on their website.

Being a father definitely has its challenges, but I'm happy that I have the opportunity to be one, as it also is so rewarding. Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there.

Gabriel Valencia is a benefits specialist for Southwest Behavioral & Health Services and has been with the organization for eight years. He has been married to his wife for eight years and has two daughters.



GABRIEL VALENCIA

From top: Natalee Valencia, 7; Gabriel Valencia; Sofia Valencia, 3.



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