# **Single Dads & Consistent Words: 5 Things to Avoid**

By Matt Haviland

**How often do you think about the words you use? Even more:** Do you understand the long-term impact that[*your words*](https://fathers.com/blog/consistency/just-use-your-words-wisely-just-be-dad/)are having on your children?

[I was a single father](https://fathers.com/blog/your-situation/single-dad/4-things-i-learned-as-a-single-father/) for over nine years, [sharing parenting time](https://www.verywellfamily.com/tips-to-succeed-as-a-co-parenting-father-4129032) with my daughter's mom. As my daughter has grown and matured, some things have gotten easier. She and I can have more "grown-up" conversations, and she is becoming [more discerning](https://fathers.com/blog/topics/education/teaching-discernment/) about her parents' situation and how it has affected her. But I can't take this for granted.

As I've written before, if there is inconsistency in the other home, that makes consistency in your own home that much more important. Of course, [consistency](https://fathers.com/blog/consistency/what-consistency-looks-like-in-a-dad-5-keys/) comes in many forms, but I've narrowed the focus here to the importance of single parents using consistent words.

## Avoid:[*Emotions*](https://fathers.com/blog/nurturance/dads-demonstrate-healthy-emotions/)getting the best of you

Granted, slip-ups like this are not exclusive to single parents. But I speak from personal experience: our children arouse strong emotions in us like few other things in life. And when conflicts arise that involve your kids—whether you feel undercut as a parent, the children are being used as pawns against you, or you're left out of important parenting decisions—that's a time to tune into your emotions and beware. Do all you can to prevent that built-up aggression in your heart from translating into words you will later regret.

## Avoid: Slamming the other parent

Many years ago, a friend who worked with co-parents taught me that children [find their identity in both parents](https://fathers.com/blog/your-situation/divorced-dad/divorced-dads-respect-a-childs-love/). So when a child hears one parent say the other one is stupid, lazy, incompetent, or selfish, it's likely that the child will take on those negative qualities as part of her self-perception. We all have flaws, and unfortunately, many adults never address their flaws in a healthy manner. Still, as a father leading his kids towards adulthood, your job is to set a standard they can follow for the rest of their lives. Don't let negativity be the main characteristic of your influence on them.

## Avoid: Retaliation

We are taught it as children but forget so quickly as adults: If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything. Once again, emotions can get heated, so it's important to resolve now, when you're clear-minded, to never retaliate with hostility—even if you're being verbally assaulted. Whatever the situation, and especially if you anticipate a confrontation ahead of time, protect your children from collateral damage and guard your heart (and theirs) before the conflict. By doing so, you will provide your children with some of the best life lessons they could ever experience.

## Avoid: Gossip

Oh boy, here we go. I'll just put it this way: going down the gossip path smears someone else's character and yours. I've experienced this many times, like the single dad I worked with, who would constantly gossip about and slander his ex-wife. Not only did I not want to hear it, but I also avoided him sometimes. It's a habit that can easily grow, become out-of-control, and eventually seep out in front of your kids, on social media, and into other areas of your life. It's an extremely slippery slope, so nip it in the bud now.

## Avoid: Irrationality

Things considered irrational lack normal mental clarity or coherence; they aren't governed by sound reason. But they may seem like natural tendencies or reactions during more emotional moments. In co-parenting, I would consider the following irrational: keeping score against the other parent (how many times she has done or not done something), getting even, and impulsive or even damaging behavior (especially behaviors that may land you in legal trouble). I know there can be strong urges toward some of those behaviors, but you must resist.

I know it's tough, but it's worth avoiding these negative words and habits—or, even worse, outgrowing them. Enlist a friend or a professional to help you if needed. Your children need to see a positive example of a respectful, mature dad, even if you're dealing with significant and unbearable issues with their mom.

Read the original article and others articles here: <https://fathers.com/blog/your-situation/single-dad/single-dads-consistent-words-5-things-to-avoid-2/>

BIO: Matt Haviland is the Men's Center Director for Alpha Grand Rapids (AGR), which operates two centers: Alpha Women's Center and Alpha Men's Center. He is married to his amazing wife, Christy, and is the father of a wonderful teenage daughter. He and Christy are currently in the adoption process as well. Matt has been working with fathers since 2008 through various organizations and partnerships. He joined the team at Alpha Grand Rapids at the beginning of 2021, shortly before the new Men's Center facility was completed and opened as one of the first standalone buildings solely serving fathers in the United States. As Men's Center Director, Matt empowers staff members and volunteers to walk alongside fathers and equip them to be the best man, partner, and father possible. He is deeply passionate about discipling men and understands how valuable fathers are to their families and communities. A native of Grand Rapids, MI, Matt enjoys family time, reading, playing golf, and almost all outdoor recreation.

Matt Haviland is also the author of [A Father's Walk: A Christian-Based Resource for Single Fathers](https://www.amazon.com/FatherS-Walk-Christian-Based-Resource-Fathers-ebook/dp/B0792KF4VZ/ref%3Dsr_1_2?keywords=matt+haviland&qid=1578686120&s=books&sr=1-2) and the co-author of [The Daddy Gap](https://www.westbowpress.com/en/bookstore/bookdetails/602638-The-Daddy-Gap). For more information, email Matt at afatherswalk@gmail.com.