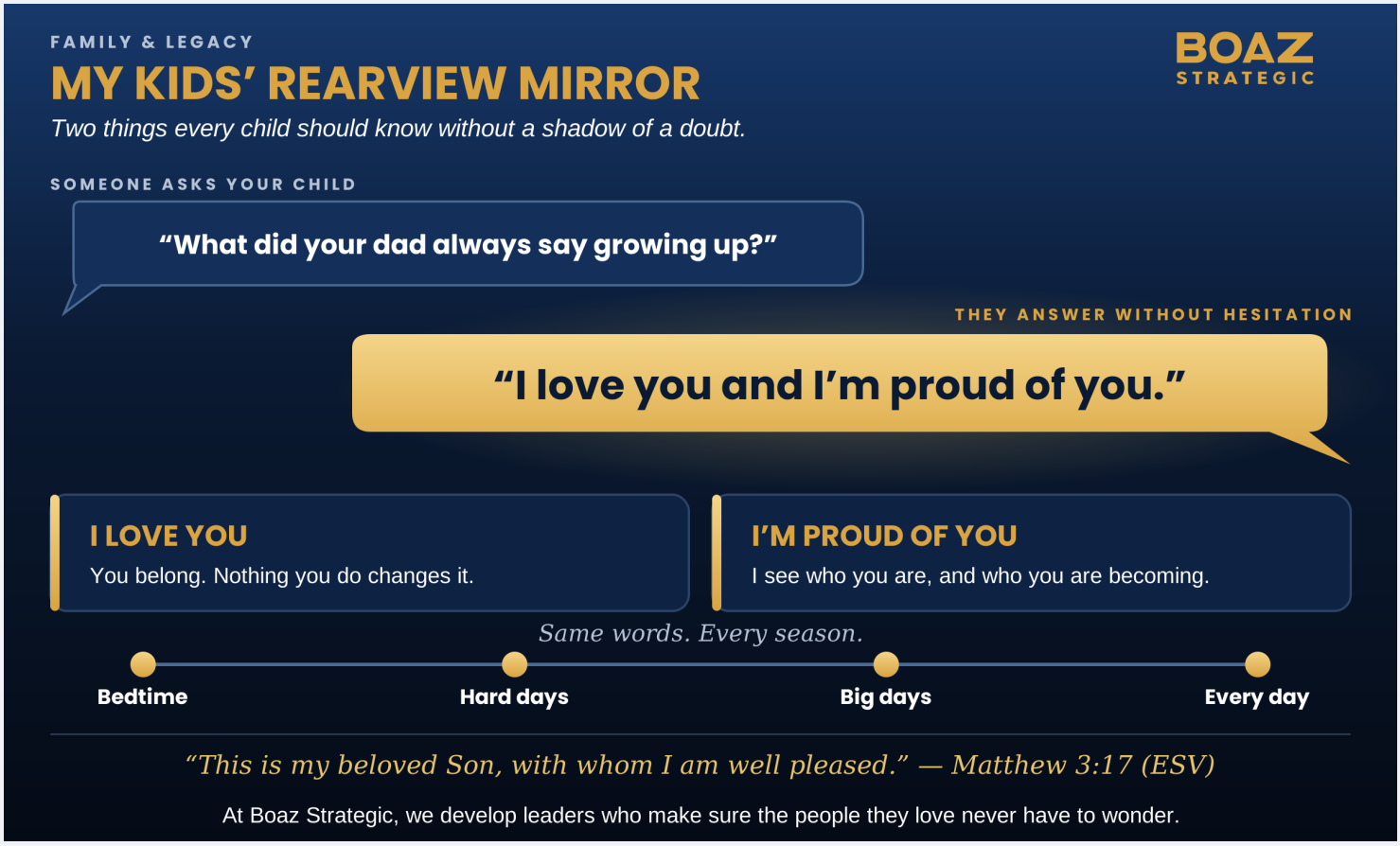


What will they say you *always said?*

> *I love you, and I'm proud of you.*

Imagine someone asks your children, years from now: what did your dad always say when you were growing up? The answer you hope for comes without hesitation. For one father, it is a single sentence: I love you, and I'm proud of you.

Two things every child should know without a shadow of a doubt.

The first is love. Not love that is earned, implied, or assumed, but love that is spoken. The second is pride: the clear message that you see who they are and who they are becoming. Love tells a child they belong. Pride tells them they matter.

Many parents assume their children simply know. But a feeling that is never spoken has to be inferred, and a child can infer wrongly. Do not leave either one to chance.

The research points the same direction. Across cultures, Ronald Rohner and colleagues have found that children who feel accepted by their parents tend to show healthier psychological adjustment. Rohner and Veneziano's review of the evidence concluded that a father's love matters at least as much as a mother's.

Scripture models it. At His baptism, before He had performed a single public miracle, Jesus heard the Father say: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Love and delight came first, before the work.

Make it a rhythm, not an occasion. Say it at bedtime, on hard days, on big days, and on ordinary ones, until the words are as familiar as their own name.

Say it often enough that they could never forget it.

Sources: Matthew 3:17 (ESV); Rohner & Veneziano (2001); Khaleque & Rohner (2012)