

Tips on Teen Dating for Parents

1. *Teens need to know themselves first before beginning to date.*

What does that mean?

- it's important for teens to know what their interests and special abilities are
- the teen years provide the opportunity for teens to explore their developing personality
- this is a time in which young people begin to establish their own values and beliefs

Why is this important?

- every person needs to have a clear identity – this begins in the teen years
- when teens know they can do something WELL, they will have a sense of pride and purpose
- if the teen has a strong peer connection based on a specific interest (music, art, a sport, dance), he/ she has a much stronger identity and is less susceptible to negative influences

How can parents help?

- Be **Alert** – develop sensitivity to each child's specific personality, moods, needs and how he/she handles stress, praise, correction, etc.
- **Affirm** – always let your teen know you are proud of him / her – even when you set boundaries. Smile; be a cheerleader; be your teen's ally.
- **Allow** individuality – no 2 children are the same. Be flexible with differences in personality, talents and interests.
- Be **Available** – your teen is one of your highest priorities. Make yourself accessible for connecting with him / her.
- **Apologize** – be quick to admit when you make a mistake.
- **Articulate** – share your values with your (pre-) teen when he / she is open to hearing.

2. *Encourage teens to choose positive friends.*

- **Learn** healthy criteria for choosing friends. If teens learn to be discriminating in their choice of friends, they are more likely to make healthy decisions regarding dating.
- Useful criteria could include: honesty, respectfulness, courtesy, ambition, focus, energy, goal-orientation,

3. **What IS love? What is love NOT?**

Love IS:

- **Nurturing** – it allows for personal growth in a safe environment
- **Unconditional** – not dependent on what another person thinks, is or does; love in spite of imperfections.
- **Generous** – what you *give* to the relationship is more important what you *get* out of it.
- **Secure** – there are no worries or doubts about the other person when you are apart

Love is NOT:

- **Controlling** – not allowing for personal choice
- **Conditional** – “love” based on performance; needing to do or be something to earn “love”
- **Physical arousal** – “love” based on excitement and hormonal highs, which diminish in intensity after 6 – 12 months.

4. **Talk with your teens about sex. Parents think teens know more than they actually do. This is not true!**

How can parents help?

- for pre-teens: answer questions as they arise out of normal curiosity
- for teens: be open and relaxed; be sure your comments are non-judgmental
- parental sarcasm and criticism often arise out of being uncomfortable with the subject
- be genuinely interested
- if a teen shares / asks about sex, do NOT make them feel inferior, stupid, uninformed or “bad”; build on what they share.
- do NOT push; invite!

What do teens know?

- teen information often comes from conversations with their peers
- teen conversations involving sex often include posturing / bravado to create impressions
- teens are hesitant to ask peers for facts, not wanting to appear ignorant
- teens know bits and pieces of incomplete information about sex; however, they may be experimenting and gaining knowledge from that

5. **Boundaries in Relationships**

Establishing clear boundaries requires:

- being **clear about values and goals**. For example, if getting an education is a goal, the teen needs to learn to distance him- / herself from activities and people which hinder them from reaching their goal.
- learning to **articulate** their wants / needs clearly and without apology
- knowing **when to say “no”** to others who try to persuade them to do things they are not comfortable or agree with.
- **valuable for all relationships** – with adults, siblings, parents and peers.

6. **Safety in Relationships**

Physical, emotional and technological safety is critical for teens.

Technology

- Parents should educate themselves about the technology that their teen uses in order to protect him/ her and how to better relate to their world.
- There are various opinions on this, but parents may consider having access to all their teens’ technology. This may include:
 - cell phone passwords and texting
 - passwords to all online accounts
- Parent and teen need to agree on “house rules” for online conduct including but not limited to:
 - expectations for cell phone usage and behavior online
 - appropriate rewards and consequences for behavior
 - teach (pre) teens that use of technology is a privilege which comes with responsibility

“Hooking up”

- This means different things to different people including:
 - connecting with someone for a movie or school athletic event
 - going out
 - sex with a stranger
 - gaining access to specific resources
- teens need to clarify what’s meant by the term when used in conversation
- parents need to ask for clarification when their teen uses the phrase; **DON’T ASSUME THE WORST**, but avoid naiveté

Breaking up

- a teen must evaluate his / her relationship and know exactly if / why they want to break up
- when they make the decision, they need to be firm and make a decisive move
- Do's and Don'ts:
 - do NOT simply quit calling, avoid contact or break up by phone, online or by text message
 - do NOT promise to "be friends" once you have broken up
 - do NOT break up in front of your dating partner's friends
 - be in a public place, especially if there is history of control or violence in the relationship

For More Information on our Dating 101 for Teens Workshop (15-17),

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