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Tips to Help Parents with Their Dating Teenager©

There are many new and wonderful experiences that teens often can't wait to delve into. For parents, this season of parenting brings excitement for our kids as well as fear about what they are getting themselves into. Dating is certainly in this category.

Dating for teens is often not the dating that we as their parents experienced many years ago. Because of this, we often don't understand the pressures and expectations they face. Hopefully these tips will help you both understand your teenager as well as establish guidelines and consequences to make dating a wonderful time of growth and fun for them.

How has dating changed?

- Today there is a different understanding of what dating is...and it runs the gamut. When I grew up a boy asked you out, picked you up at a certain time, you went out together, and then he brought you home at a certain time. Now there is a range of what is considered "dating". Now it is more referred to as "going out", "seeing each other" and includes holding hands at school, going out with a group of friends, wandering around the mall, etc. It is important to not question this way of describing a budding relationship, or they will stop talking to you about it...and you don't want that. The other end of this continuum is "hooking up" which implies sexual encounters, often very quickly into the relationship.
- The expectation that dating can begin as early as 12 or 13. When I was dating, the standard amongst my friends was no dating until age 16.
- An expectation that dating and sex are linked. There are a lot of assumptions now about this. Teen girls need to know that dating

and sex are separate. Dating is spending time with a boy to get to know him better. Dating does not imply sex. Our daughters need to know how to set this line for themselves, and have a plan to get out of a situation with a guy that feels unsafe or uncomfortable.

- There are greater concerns with increased drinking and drug use than there was when I was dating. Alcohol use makes people stupid. In 50% of arrests alcohol is a key factor.

How can parents approach the subject of dating?

- Teens whose parents talk to them about dating, are better prepared and happier.
- The important backdrop is establishing a close relationship with your teen, preferably from way back. Sometimes we can panic about things like dating and come down hard on the rules...without having a strong connected relationship. So, work on listening, spending time, being encouraging, as well as setting guidelines for dating. When a close relationship is in place, teens will be much more likely to take in your influence and advice about dating.
- Try to be calm and in control of your responses. Overreacting, panicking, and controlling responses will just result in them shutting down and not sharing...and you want to keep the lines of communication open.
- Dating guidelines and clear consequences need to be in a broader context of clear guidelines and consequences in other areas such as chores, curfews, how you treat others, etc. This will make the rules about do's and don't of dating more readily acceptable because they are part of existing training of standards, responsibility, and consequences.
- Parents need to have clear guidelines in place about dating, what is allowable and not, as well as what the consequences are if these guidelines are broken. A written contract, which is crafted and signed by both parent(s) and teen can also be very helpful, and then there are no questions.
- Parents need to enforce consequences, even when teens try to persuade them otherwise. A teen's brain is not fully formed and in shape to make wise decisions until 25, even if they sound like they know it all. Parents need to be empathetic with their teens, and stick to the guidelines they've both agreed to.

What I hear about in my office

- Many teens are not prepared for dating emotionally and practically. There is a lot of naïveté' about things like the possibility of date rape, a 33% chance of teen girl experiencing some kind of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse during a dating relationship, and the prevalence of STD's.
- Teens often haven't developed the ability to trust themselves and their intuition and the sense to get out of bad situations.
- They often don't have an escape plan set in their mind, and a way to let their parents know they need help.
- There is a lot of alcohol use occurring with teenagers which radically increases the chances of being harmed in some way.
- I also hear about some wonderful dating experiences that pave the way for great relationships in the future.

Some possible guidelines

Of course the guidelines set will be up to each parent. This is just a place to start your own thinking process.

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- Group dating only...things like going to a movie; hanging out at a friends home--only if you know the parents and that they will be supervising; football games; hanging out at your home for movie or dinner.
- Things like agreed upon curfews, them letting you know where they are, and if they change locations are important guidelines to make clear.

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- Single dating (if you feel like your teenager is ready for this)
- With curfew
- With them letting you know where they are, and if they've changed locations
- Meeting the date of your daughter is preferable
- Not dating anyone more than 2 years older. This is because the rate of abuse and possible over control in a relationship increases significantly if there is more than a 2 year difference in ages. More than 2 years older is no big deal as an adult, but as a teen it is a huge difference.

Qualities you want to see in your teenager before single dating:

- Are they responsible overall? (not perfect)
- Do they show respect for themselves and others?
- Are they able to stand up for themselves, and get out of uncomfortable or unsafe situations?
- Are they basically trustworthy? (not perfect)

Where do you start?

Assess the above information and decide where you need to start.

Is it:

- Getting tighter on guidelines and consequences in other areas that have been lax?
- Talking to your teenager about what constitutes a good healthy relationship, and asking them what kind of qualities they want to see in the person they date? Help them come up with what qualities or treatment they would not put up with.
- Figuring out what standards you want to set?
- Talking to friends to get more input or to process your thoughts?
- Figuring out what consequences you decide will go with each infringement?
- Talking to your teen to let them know about your thoughts, and coming up with an agreement together which you put into a contract to both sign?
- Inviting your son or daughter's girl/boyfriend over to get to know them better.
- Work on building a close emotional relationship with your teens. If interested, check out my CD's about parenting Teens at www.KimFredrickson.com

I hope this has been helpful. Parenting is challenging, Your teens need you...You can do it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

© Kim Fredrickson, M.S., Marriage and Family Therapist (CA MFC 22635) and Life, Parent, and Relationship Coach is the author of many popular CD's and articles that will help you build **Encouraging Relationships** in your life. To learn more about Kim and sign up for more FREE Relationships Tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.EncouragingRelationships.com>.

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Helpful Hints for Parents About Teens, Dating, Sex, and STD's©

There are many new and wonderful experiences that teens often can't wait to delve into. For parents, this season of parenting brings excitement for our kids as well as fear about what they are getting themselves into. Dating and Sex is certainly in this category.

There are a lot of understandable questions about this topic...so here we go.

When do you start talking to your kids about sex, contraception, and STD's?

An important thing to remember is that these topics are best handled in a series of conversations, rather than one big talk. It would be best to start conversations about the body, caring for it, not abusing it, not letting others abuse it, etc very early on...this sets the context for continuing talks about the body. Talking to your child about sex before puberty is imperative, with continuing talks adding to the information you've shared. It is also great to start the conversation asking them what they know.

"Have you ever wondered how babies get inside the mommy's tummy?"
(obviously for a younger child)

"What have you heard about STD's?"

"What kind of stories have you heard at school about sex?"

"How far do you think it's OK to go on a date?"

"What would you do if a boy/girl wanted to go farther physically that you were comfortable?"

"How will you know on the inside that you're being pushed to go farther than you're ready?"

Starting with questions is very important, because it gives you important information about what they know and where they are in their thinking process. This will clue you into misinformation they might have, so that you can gently correct it.

How do you bring up the issue of contraception?

Ideally you would bring it up in a series of conversations you have with your teen. After explaining the biology of sex, as well as your own convictions about where sex fits in the life of a relationship, it would be natural to explain how sex does not have to necessarily result in pregnancy. Pregnancy can be avoided through abstinence, and the chances can be lessened by contraception, which tries to make sure the egg and the sperm do not connect. This can be done by preventing the egg from being present (birth control pills), or the sperm not making it to the egg through condoms, spermicidal, etc.

Since teens do not tend to play out the results of their actions to the end, they need us to help them do so...and this could occur in another one of these conversations. When a person decides to be active sexually, they are also signing up for the possibility of lots of other outcomes, such as:

- Pregnancy
- STD's
- Regret when and if the relationship ends
- Possible lowered chance of becoming pregnant at a later date when desired
- Gossip

Sex is an adult activity, not a recreational sport to be decided in the moment. As their parents, we need to help them think through this decision, as we do the other important decisions in their life.

Other things your teens need to know:

- Differentiate between dating and sex. Dating does not have to include sex.
- Accurate information about STD's (most teens do not know that STD's can be transmitted by oral sex).
- They need to decide where their own line is regarding sexual activity. Trying to decide this in the middle of a passionate moment, or when experiencing sexual pressure from a date is not a wise move.
- They need help paying attention to their own internal world, and their intuition when they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in a situation.
- They need help coming up with an exit plan when they feel uncomfortable or unsafe, so as not to be caught in an unwanted situation.
- They need to be able to set limits, stand up for themselves and say, "no".

Things you need to know:

- The part of a person's brain that controls planning, impulse control, and foreseeing consequences is not fully developed until age 25. Therefore, a teen's ability to think through their decisions, especially in such an emotionally and physically charged area as their budding sexuality is not as developed as they think. They need you to help them think through decisions.
- They need accurate information...otherwise most of their information comes from their peers and is probably riddled with inaccuracies.
- It is best to take a "coaching" approach talking to your teens about this and other issues rather than a lecture format. One works, and helps your teen develop the ability to things through issues (coaching) and the other style (lecture) causes kids to shut down and not accept your influence. For more about coaching your teens, check out my CD, "Coaching Your Kids/Teens Through Life" at www.KimFredrickson.com
- It is understandable to be tempted to ignore the issue and hope your kids will be OK. Don't give into this temptation. Instead, get educated and be brave enough to have these important conversations with your teens. Teens whose parents talk to them about dating/sex, are better prepared and happier.
- The important backdrop is establishing a close relationship with your teen, preferably from way back. Sometimes we can panic about things like dating/sex and come down hard on the rules...without having a strong connected relationship. So, work on listening, spending time, being encouraging, as well as setting guidelines for dating. When a close relationship is in place, teens will be much more likely to take in your influence and advice about dating/sex.

Try to be calm and in control of your responses. Overreacting, panicking, and controlling responses will just result in them shutting down and not sharing...and you want to keep the lines of communication open. It is important during these conversations to keep yourself as steady and non-reactive as possible. The bigger picture here is keeping the lines of communication open and to keep them feeling safe to share with you. Try some deep breathing, and

- coach yourself to stay centered...and bite your lip to keep from saying something reactive out of fear. Even though it's easy to be scared of what they are getting into, we need to stay the grown-up and keep ourselves centered. For a free article to help you with this, go to www.EncouragingRelationships.com and download (under the articles tab) my free article, "*Encouraging Myself in Parenting My Teenager*".
- Don't go through this time alone...get support and input from other parents at your teen's school, your church or synagogue, or neighborhood parents groups. It helps to get ideas, support, and empathy from other parents who understand the challenges you are facing.

Helpful Books

Boundaries with Teens by John Townsend

Talking to Your Kids About Sex: How to Have a Lifetime of Age-Appropriate Conversations with Your Children About Healthy Sexuality
by Mark Laaser

How to Talk with Your Child About Sex: It's Best to Start Early, But It's Never Too Late – A Step by Step Guide for Parents by Linda and Richard Eyre

Why Do They Act That Way? by David Walsh

I hope this has been helpful. Parenting is challenging, Your teens need you...You can do it!

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Encouraging Myself in Parenting My Teenager©

*A crucial part of parenting teenagers is developing the ability to tell yourself encouraging statements about yourself and your teenager. By learning to “coach” yourself through the ups and downs of your teen’s moods and behaviors, you’ll be able to remain stable rather than ride your teen’s emotional rollercoaster. It’s often a challenge in the moment to not **react** to your teen out of anger and fear. Repeat these statements to yourself everyday.*

- It’s OK, this is a stage of his growth. It’s normal for my teen to be emotional, impulsive, and need time to grow in these areas.
- Take a deep breath, slow down, I can do this. One step at a time.
- God, please give me your strength, your compassion, your perspective, your love and acceptance for my teen
- Remember, he/she needs to push away from me in order to gain her own sense of self
- This feels so personal, but it’s not...In order to separate, he needs to separate from me. When it happens, it isn’t smooth.
- Him taking time in his room is most likely his way of thinking through all that’s going on inside. It’s not a rejection of me.
- I will still make attempts to connect, even if they are rebuffed. They are going in, even if I can’t see it now.
- My teen is going through a lot...stress, changes, pain, and confusion. I need to notice this and have it count, not dismiss it and expect her to be OK even if her world is falling apart (or shaken, changing, etc).
- It’s OK if I don’t understand everything, or know what to do. I am learning too.
- My teen and I are worth the effort, and so is our relationship.

- I'm on the right road. Keep going. I don't have to do this alone. I'll call a friend for a listening ear and prayer.
 - God will bless my efforts as I lean on Him for strength, courage and understanding
 - He/She will eventually become an adult, with brighter times ahead.
 - As hard as this is, God is using it to grow me up on the inside.
 - Remember, my teen's brain is not fully developed. His ability to think through things, plan, and delay his impulses isn't mature yet...but it will be eventually!
 - Remember to keep the big picture in mind...my long-term relationship with my teen. I want him/her to visit me in the future...grandkids...good relationship.
 - It's my job to keep myself under control emotionally, even if my teen is out of control...remember, one of us has to be an adult...it's me!
 - It's OK to give myself time to think through how I want to handle this...I'll get back to him later about consequences.
- * A big part of getting through these teen years is making sure I'm taking care of myself. I'm going to make sure I get enough rest, exercise, good nutrition, and time with friends.

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