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Helpful 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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