

Teen Dating: Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

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Relationships during adolescence are a typical part of development which allows adolescents to further explore their identity, as well as discover qualities and values they find important to share with a partner in the future. Dating also allows teens to further their social skills by experiencing a more involved interest in someone, rather than just a casual friendship. However, there is no course in school for dating. Learning in this area typically comes from life experiences, shared information amongst peers, and parents. During this time, it is important for parents to maintain an open line of communication with their teen, as well as being able to distinguish when relationships are healthy vs. unhealthy to prevent dating violence.

The most important characteristic of a healthy relationship is respect, for oneself and partner. In contrast, the lack of respect in a relationship can allow one partner to exert power and/or control over the other physically and/or emotionally. Since youth during this time are still learning to establish clear boundaries, some may find it confusing and mistake certain behaviors for love. Ask your teen these basic questions to help identify whether respect is present in their current relationship:

- Do you like yourself in this relationship?
- Do you like how you treat your partner?
- Do you like how your partner treats you?
- Do you like how your partner treats themselves?

Should the answer to one or more of these questions be “no,” it may be a sign of an unhealthy relationship and needs to be further discussed to ensure your teen is safe. Next steps should include helping your teen repair and/or possibly end the relationship. This may be difficult for the youth to accept, so it may be helpful for them to think about the qualities they value in a friendship. If they do not find the behaviors acceptable from a friend, they are not acceptable from a partner.