

Mom/Dad, I  
am going out  
on a date...  
I'm in love!

Is your teen ready to date?

Are you ready for your teen

to date? Did you know that

nearly 30% of 12–13 year

olds experience a romantic

relationship each year

compared to about 50%

of 15–16 year olds and

70% of 17–18 year olds.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
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# Is Your Teen Relationship Smart?



# Does your teen have relationship smarts?

Dating is a normal and important part of teen development. For younger teens, dating is more about having fun, hanging out with peers, and exploring what they like. Early on, most of their time is spent in same gender peer groups, but eventually they begin to go out on “group dates” where their peer group becomes mixed-gender.

As teens get older, they are more likely to become involved in exclusive dating relationships. For older teens, dating begins to focus more on companionship, sharing thoughts and feelings, and social support. While extremely intense, these relationships are typically short lived and about half end within one year. For teens, these relationships, even when short-lived, can have important implications for their development and emotional well-being.

Dating is an opportunity for teens to learn about themselves and what they want in a future long-term committed relationship. Forming healthy relationships can help teens learn important skills such as cooperation, appropriate behavior, compromise, sensitivity, and the ability to understand others’ feelings. These skills can lead to future healthy relationships in adulthood. On the other hand, unhealthy relationships can put teens at risk for early sexual activity, depression, and forming poor social skills.

Adolescence is a time when teens are developing both emotionally and physically, and these changes can either have a positive or negative influence on a teen’s judgment and behavior in a dating relationship. Does your teen have the emotional intelligence to handle challenging situations in his or her dating relationships?

**Parents play a very important role** in helping their teens learn what is healthy in a relationship and what is not. Parents can also help teens better understand the feelings they experience and how to manage them. Here are a few things you can do to help your teen be relationship smart:

- **Be open and sensitive when talking with your teen** about dating and relationships. Discuss your views and values and hear what they have to say without being judgmental.
- **Maintain a caring, supportive relationship** with your teen. Make sure your teen knows you will support his/her decisions and you are there to offer guidance and direction when needed. This type of relationship opens the line of communication and trust so that your teen can come and talk with you about relationships and dating.
- **Share your own relationship experiences** with your teen and your definition of a healthy versus unhealthy relationship. Model appropriate behaviors in your own relationships.
- **Keep up with your teen’s schedule and activities.** This shows your interest in their social life.
- **Learn about your teen’s friends** – this not only allows you to know their friends and parents and potential romantic interests, but also to foster discussions about how those relationships are going. You can do this by holding daily conversations with your teen. Be a good listener and allow your teen to talk with you about their friends, activities, or anything from their day. What you talk about is not as important as your teen feeling comfortable talking and *voluntarily* sharing with you as part of their regular routine.
- **Join your teen in various activities** – playing video games, using the computer, and watching his/her favorite television programs and movies – particularly those that show teens having romantic relationships. Take time to discuss what you watched, how it related to their current relationship, and the overall message they got from it.
- **Work together to form clear expectations and rules on dating.** Be flexible and willing to listen to your teen’s viewpoint. Negotiate without giving up your parental authority. Being too strict may lead teens to rebel by making poor dating choices or engaging in other risky behaviors. Establish fair and reasonable consequences that you are able to follow through with when rules are broken. This is important because rules without consequences, when they are broken, can increase the likelihood that your teen will engage in unhealthy or risky behaviors in the future.

## Teen Relationship Facts:

- ▶ *About 1 in 5 teens say most of their friends are in unhealthy relationships*
- ▶ *About 1 in 10 teens have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend.*



Overall, dating during adolescence can pose both promise and problems. While this can be a stressful time for parents, it can be an even more stressful experience for teens. Providing a safe and secure base for your teen to communicate with you openly about his or her relationships and helping your teen think about his or her expectations and values in relationships can lead to a relationship smart teen!