

## **Teen Dating: It's Not Like it Used to Be!**

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Parents watch from the sidelines observing teen dating is just not what it used to be. Seasoned parents know that "dating" is outdated. What is a better description for this phenomenon - hangin out, datetexting, group dating, online relationships, and the dreaded hooking up?

Despite the changes, some things about teens and dating have not changed:

- Teenagers are interested in romantic relationships
- Teenagers have little knowledge about learning how to have an intimate relationships with others- they have to learn just like we did
- Teenagers need their parents to be involved
- Teenagers still have sex in romantic relationships

The evolution of dating is in part driven by technology and the media, so understanding as a parent this aspect of influence is essential. Grasping how your teen views "dating" keeps you in touch with their entry into the world of romantic relationships.

**Technology** has had a large impact on how teens navigate romantic relationships. Danger lurks, teens do not often recognize the danger, and parents need to be aware of and monitor their teen's media involvement.

Get up to date with twitter, instagram, blogs, facebook, etc, where your teen can interact with anyone by sending pictures and messages. They network with teens from other schools, cities, and states. The pool of potential suitors is immense. This can be a positive thing with parent monitoring.

**Teens hang out in groups.** Much of the "dating" that occurs in this generation is with a group of other teens. In these groups, romantic behavior can commonly occur casually, when a dating relationship is not established. Have an open discussion with your teen about this potential behavior.

**Girls have become more assertive.** Girls have become empowered to be the one to ask a guy out, to push a bit harder to date someone, and to exert more control in the dating situation. Recognize this whether you have a daughter or a son and discuss it openly.

**Teen dating violence has become more common.** Unfortunately violence in relationships with teens is increasing, leaving scars that can affect a teenager for life leading to eating disorders, drug use, suicidal behavior, and becoming involved in violent relationships in the future. Be aware of the following risks: aggression, alcohol use, other problem behaviors, believing that dating violence is acceptable, and depression. Prevention strategies include consistent parenting that is not harsh and parental supervision that is monitoring and supportive.

**Cell phones are a part of dating.** They

create a difficult dilemma for parents. News spreads fast and you are not privy to much of the information. Lost are those opportunities to at least speak to the potential date. It's okay to ask your teen to turn off the phone at a decent time at night and monitor their cellular use. Having your teen call from a land line to assure arrival at the said destination can be a good strategy if concerns arise. As the parent, you can insist you meet the date even if your teen is telling you no one does that anymore, tell them "Yes I do!" Also speak to your teen about impulsive posting of potentially damaging pictures of an intimate nature.

**Sex and gender same sex dating is viewed differently.** There has been a common acceptance, proliferation, and at times encouragement of same sex dating among teens. Be aware this is present in this generation, don't ignore it, and find your own way to discuss this with your teen. Oral sex is commonly seen as not "real sex". Your teen needs to hear how you view oral sex and the impact of sexual contact of any kind. Be sure to educate your teen about sexually transmitted diseases and if they do not wish to hear this from you, then provide them with a reputable website to help them ([teenhealthfx.com](http://teenhealthfx.com)). This generation has been bombarded with sexually explicit media exposure from easy to reach internet porn to reality shows.

In general parents truly need to step up to the plate when their teen begins to seek romantic relationships:

- Reinforce your family values and model these values with your significant other
- Set rules and limitations as teen dating experience largely influences confidence and self esteem once they enter the adult dating world
- Assure your teen you are always there if they get into trouble
- When your teen shows poor judgment, show understanding and discuss how this can be prevented in the future
- Be on the same page with your partner- teens do not need mixed messages about their privileges

As a parent you have to hang in there and never give up. The role of the teenager and the parent has become increasingly more difficult in society today.

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