



WE'RE TEACHING THIS

The topic of sex can be pretty awkward, right? Have you ever been watching a movie with your parents and suddenly, the characters are having sex? So awkward, right? Or maybe you were having a conversation with your buddies, someone said something, and you had absolutely no idea what they were talking about...until you later realized it was about sex? You probably felt a little awkward. Or maybe you've said something and been laughed at because what you said sounded sexual? Awkward and embarrassing. There's just something about the topic of sex that makes us giggle and

blush and avoid all eye contact. Typically, when churches deal with the topic of sex, they don't help matters. They either ignore the subject altogether or simply say that sex is bad. Instead, we want to have the talk. However, this won't be a one-time lecture, but rather an on-going conversation that will open up the lines of communication between students and peers, small group leaders and parents. When it comes to sex, we want to help you create a guardrails system that will help protect you and your relationships.

THINK ABOUT THIS

By Autumn Ward

Communicating with middle schoolers is hard. And it's especially hard to know what to say and how to say it when it comes to sensitive topics like sex. Deep down, we know that the middle school and high school years are a time to lean in and keep the conversation going with our kids, but sometimes the awkwardness and potential explosions can make us want to do just the opposite.

In her article, "5 Tips For Communicating With Teens", author and mom of three teenagers, Autumn Ward explores how we can keep the lines of communication open on every topic, including sex.

Communication is a two-way street. Often, the reasons teenagers choose not to talk with their parents are because they feel like their parents don't listen or will get mad at what they tell them. Parents, on the other hand, feel like their teens just won't talk to them. Who's right? In most cases, they both are. But don't lose hope! Below are five ways we as parents can help open the lines of communication with our teenagers.

1. JUST LISTEN. We know being in listening mode isn't possible 24/7, but we still need to show our teens that we're open to listening when they need us. And we can pretty much guarantee it will happen when we're on the phone, making

dinner or headed to bed. When this happens, do whatever it takes to give your teenager your undivided attention. (This may require making coffee at 11:00 p.m.)

2. ENCOURAGE. Be encouraging, supportive and positive. If your teenager has a fight with a friend, this is not the time to say, "I never liked that friend anyway!" That's a door slammer. Try, "Are you okay?" Or, "Sometimes friends fight. Hopefully the two of you will be able to work it out. Do you want to talk about it?"

3. SAY, "I DON'T KNOW." Know that it's okay not to know the answer. It's okay to say, "I don't know," but follow it with: "We can try and find out together." And don't miss out on this opportunity to point your teenager to God who does know all the answers and always has a listening ear.

4. BE KIND. Treat your teenager the way you'd want to be treated. We already know that, don't we? We all want to treat our family well, but somehow it's tempting to do

things in conversations with our kids that we'd never do when talking to adults—things like bringing up past mistakes or embarrassing moments. Nothing creates distance in a relationship like shame. So at this critical phase, when it's so important to keep the conversation going, be careful to guard that relationship by being kind and encouraging—not critical and shaming.

5. BE PATIENT. Sometimes we just need to be quiet. There are two answers to the question, "Do you want to talk?" If the answer is "no," you need to respect that. Even if it takes a huge piece of duct tape placed over your mouth, do your best not to push. You can keep the lines of communication open by saying, "Okay, but I'm here when you need me to listen."

For more from Autumn or to connect to a wider community of parents, check out www.parentcue.org.

TRY THIS

Your middle schooler may not be dating yet, but it's never too soon to start talking about healthy relationships and sexual integrity. But sometimes it can be hard to know when and how to talk to our kids about sex and dating. It'd be so nice if we just had a guide that told us what to say.

Well, good news... there is.

In order to help get the conversation started at your house, we've included a Dating Conversation Guide for you and your teenager that helps each of you talk about dating in a real and helpful way before, during and after a relationship happens.

In fact, not only does it help you and your son or daughter come to an agreement about what dating should look like, but it also includes several guides to help your student think through what is important to them and what they are looking for in a relationship.

This week, take a look at the Dating Conversation Guide and plan a time to talk with your son or daughter about either the dating relationships they have now or the dates they plan to have in the future. It doesn't have to be formal or super serious—just a coffee date or some time in the car will work. You'll be glad you did and so will they...even if they don't say so.



DATING

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD "DATING"? SOME OF US MAY REMEMBER A FAVORITE ROMANTIC MOVIE. SOME OF US MAY FEEL THE STING OF OUR FIRST HEARTBREAK. YOU MAY THINK BACK WITH FONDNESS TO YOUR VERY FIRST DATE. IF YOU HAVE TEENAGERS WHO ARE ABOUT TO DATE OR ARE ALREADY DATING, YOU MAY JUST THINK, "NO!" AND WANT TO RUN FAR, FAR AWAY. AS TEMPTING AS THAT MAY BE, IT'S NOT AN OPTION—OR AT LEAST NOT AN OPTION THAT WILL HELP YOUR TEEN NAVIGATE DATING SUCCESSFULLY. AT SOME POINT YOU'LL NEED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT DATING WITH YOUR TEEN (FOLLOWED BY MANY MORE CONVERSATIONS). WE WANT TO HELP GET YOU STARTED BY GIVING YOU SOME WORDS TO SAY AND WORDS NOT TO SAY.

WHAT TO SAY

(BEFORE THEY START DATING)

- "We know you want to make good choices. We're here to help you."
- "I want you to have the best dating experience in high school and look back on it with as few regrets as possible."
- "Let's talk about what your *Personal Values are before you start dating."
- "It's important to ask yourself, *Who Am I Looking For? before you begin dating. Let's make a list of some of those qualities."
- "Who are some friends or other trusted adults you feel you can talk to about dating who will help you make good decisions?"
- "Saying no to someone who wants to go on a date with you or be in a relationship with you doesn't make you a bad person. Just remember to always be honest and kind when communicating."
- "You can't always be close friends with someone who has a crush on you or someone you have a crush on when feelings aren't mutual."
- "Be careful with your words and clothing so you don't lead a person's thoughts or emotions somewhere they don't need to be yet."
- "The rules in your friends' homes will be different than our rules and that's okay."
- "Let's work on a *Dating Agreement together to help us both know what to expect."

(DURING DATING)

- Ask questions like: "How was your date?"
"Did you have fun?" "What did you do?"
"How are you feeling about (name of date)?"
"Do they make you feel important?"
"Are they who you thought they would be?"
- "If anyone tells you to prove you care for them by doing more sexually than what you want to do, that's a sign you shouldn't be dating that person."
- "Let's look back at our *Dating Agreement (or fill it out if you haven't already) and make sure we still agree."

(AFTER A BREAKUP)

- "It's okay to be sad."
- "It won't always hurt as badly as it hurts right now."
- "Even though this stinks, what are some things you learned from this?"
- "God has good plans for you."
- "God still loves that person and he still loves you."
- "It's wise to have some time away from that person."
- "Now is a good time to invest in spending time with your close friends."

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "I know you're probably going to do what you want anyway."
- "You're old enough to decide on your own."
- "I never liked them anyway."
- "If you _____, no guy/girl will ever want you."
- "I can't believe you did that."
- "Well, if that's what all of your friends are doing, then I guess it's ok."

* For the additional resources mentioned, talk with your student leader.

DATING AGREEMENT

I KNOW BEING ALLOWED TO GO ON DATES IS A PRIVILEGE. I RESPECT THAT MY PARENTS LOVE ME AND WANT GOD'S BEST FOR ME. MY PARENTS RESPECT THAT I AM BECOMING A YOUNG ADULT AND WANT THE PRIVILEGE OF DATING. THIS DATING AGREEMENT IS A STARTING POINT AND CAN BE UPDATED WHEN WE AGREE THAT IT IS NEEDED. THE GOAL IS THAT I CAN HAVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH MY PARENTS AND THE PERSON I CHOOSE TO DATE.

WITH THAT IN MIND, WE AGREE:

1. That I can begin dating when I am _____ years old.
2. To keep communicating about my personal values on dating, relationships and physical contact.

(DEFINE YOUR PERSONAL VALUES ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER. INCLUDE YOUR GOALS FOR DATING AND SPECIFIC BOUNDARIES THAT WILL HELP YOU STICK TO YOUR VALUES AND REACH YOUR GOALS.)

3. I will introduce my date to my parents before I will be able to go out alone on a date with them. I understand that I may hang out in groups with friends who my parents know without introductions, but I am to communicate openly about who I am hanging out with.
4. I will not date anyone _____ years older than me or anyone _____ years younger than me.
5. I am allowed to go on _____ dates per week. This includes visiting at each other's homes but not group or school outings.
6. I will be home—in the door and date gone—by _____ p.m.
7. I will tell my parents where I am going to be and with whom for the entire time I am gone.
8. My responsibilities come first. I will keep up with these responsibilities or possibly lose my dating privileges.

(DEFINE THESE RESPONSIBILITIES ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER. SOME EXAMPLES ARE: HOMEWORK, CHORES, CHURCH, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, INVESTING IN FRIENDS, SLEEP, ETC.)

9. As a young man, I am responsible for paying for my dates, not my parents. As a young woman, if my date doesn't pay, I should not expect my parents to pick up the bill.

PARENT SIGNATURE

STUDENT SIGNATURE

PERSONAL VALUES

WE ALL VALUE SOMETHING. IT CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS A FAVORITE PAIR OF SHOES OR SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT LIKE TIME WITH A GRANDPARENT ONCE A WEEK. WHEN IT COMES TO DATING, BEFORE YOU ENTER A RELATIONSHIP, IT'S CRUCIAL THAT YOU DECIDE WHAT'S IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO YOU THAT YOU AREN'T WILLING TO COMPROMISE—THINGS LIKE INVESTING IN OTHER FRIENDSHIPS, MAKING TIME TO STUDY, DATING SOMEONE WITH YOUR SAME FAITH OR "HOW FAR" YOU WILL OR WON'T GO SEXUALLY. KNOWING WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU IS THE FIRST STEP TO HAVING THE BEST DATING EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE.

SO THINK ABOUT IT. WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU? WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU VALUE NOW AND WANT TO CONTINUE TO VALUE WHEN YOU'RE DATING SOMEONE? WHAT ARE BOUNDARIES YOU WANT TO HAVE FOR THE PHYSICAL SIDE OF A RELATIONSHIP? WHAT ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS DO YOU STILL WANT TO BE A PRIORITY EVEN WHEN YOU'RE IN A RELATIONSHIP? **MAKE A LIST BELOW UNDER EACH SECTION TO GET YOU STARTED:**

RELATIONSHIPS (OUTSIDE OF DATING, LIKE GOD, FRIENDS, FAMILY, ETC.):

DATING RELATIONSHIP (INCLUDING PHYSICAL CONTACT, WHAT YOU WILL AND WON'T DO):

SCHOOL (HOMEWORK, SPORTS, CLUBS, ETC.):

OTHER (MISSION TRIPS, CHURCH ACTIVITIES, HOBBIES, ETC.):

This is a great start! Now think of three people you can share your personal values with and ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable to your values. List the people below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

