

## Tips For Helping Your Teenager Date Responsibly

from the American Counseling Association

Summer is coming and with it increased opportunities for teen dating and parental worrying. While we all realize that it's natural for teenagers to be attracted to one another, and that dating is the socially-accepted outcome of such attraction, most parents agonize over the whole dating experience and all the things that can go wrong.

While there's no magic way to make such parental worries disappear, there are steps you can take to make teen dating a better experience for you and your child.

- Start by talking to your child early about dating. The junior high years, or even earlier, are not too soon to broach the subject, even though actual dating may be a few years off.
- Develop, with your child, basic rules and expectations regarding dating. Talk about the appropriate age for couple or group dates. Discuss curfews and your expectations regarding driving, behavior and appropriate destinations. As the parent, you should take the lead, but include your child in the discussion and get his or her agreement that what you're proposing makes sense for both of you.
- Have honest discussions about sex and morality. Share your own moral views and talk about AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and the emotional issues related to sex. If you find such discussions difficult, try enlisting a professional counselor, physician or member of the clergy.
- Prepare for emergencies, because they will happen. Is that cell phone charged? Enough money to take a cab home in case of an emergency? A backup person to call if you or your spouse aren't available? Talk about handling problem situations like an auto accident, a drunk or abusive date, or other potential dating disasters.
- Let your teen know you'll be there for him or her. You don't want a teen in trouble too scared to call you. Your child should know that when there's a problem, you're ready to come to the rescue, wherever and whenever, with no questions asked.
- Pay attention. Most teens won't share dating details, but will give clues when things aren't right. Look and listen for problems, from drinking to drugs to inappropriate relationships. Don't be paranoid, but respect your intuition. Ask questions and act swiftly when you sense something is wrong.

Yes, teen dating is a challenge for any teen, but the truth is that it's probably harder on the parents.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcornet@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcornet@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)*

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