**Should Teens Date?**
Dating and romantic relationships are a normal part of adolescence. 44% of teens date or have dated by age 17.

Healthy adolescent relationships can:
- Foster a sense of identity
- Build skills for Healthy Adult Relationships
- Promote Teen Autonomy

Many teens don’t date. That’s okay too! ...but only half of parents talk to their teens about abusive relationships. ABUSE CAN BE PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, VERBAL, OR EMOTIONAL. These behaviours may indicate abuse: Unexplained bruises or injuries New/worse depression or anxiety Decreased interest in usual activities Major appearance/behaviour changes Inappropriate sexual contact from your child’s partner (including social media monitoring) Isolation from friends or family Increased self-criticism

If your teen chooses to date, a healthy and supportive romantic relationship can be an important, positive influence for them.

**Should My Teen Date?**

If your teen chooses to date, it is important to discuss dating with them in a way that is open and genuine.

INSTEAD, ASK YOURSELF:
- Does my teen have strong conflict resolution skills?
- How does my teen cope with stress?
- How much social support does my teen have?
- Is my teen educated about the risks and consequences of sex relationships?
- Does my teen have a healthy relationship with their parents? Many parents want to learn more about the possible expectations.
- Is my teen comfortable expressing their feelings to me or their parents? LGB teens also have specific needs such as:
- A sense of belonging
- Acceptance of their identity
- Support from peers
- Inclusion in school activities and clubs

Beyond “The Talk”
Teens who receive accurate sexual health information before being sexually active for the first time are more likely to delay sexual activity and use protection because they have the knowledge to make appropriate decisions. Many parents want to learn more about the possible expectations.

**Keeping the Lines Open**
Starting to date is a major milestone for teens. Here are some ways to ensure transparent, ongoing communication as they navigate this new stage:

1. BE OPEN AND CURIOUS.
Share your opinions about healthy relationships with your teen, but balance that with asking for their views on the subject. Discuss your family’s view of dating and relationships, but also the views expressed in media, by friends/classmates, etc.

2. SUPERVISE, BUT DON’T IMPose.
Teens are learning to make decisions on their own. Lecturing or telling them what to do may make them feel threatened and discouraged. Instead, express any concerns gently and ask questions to guide your teen to their own conclusions.

3. BE A SAFE CONFIDENT.
Your teen will be more willing to communicate if they view you as a trustworthy, non-judgmental support person. It might be difficult for your teen to tell you about their dating life — they might be nervous or ashamed to bring up certain topics. Try to respond to them in a non-judgmental, compassionate way (even if you might not agree with their decisions!) and thank them for trusting you. This sets the stage for solving problems collaboratively.

Give your teen a reasonable amount of privacy when it comes to phone calls, social media, and time with friends/dating partners. Be clear and upfront about how much “access” you expect while also showing you trust them. You might be excited when your teen enters a new relationship or tells you about the person they are dating, but don’t embarrass them by sharing information without their permission unless their safety is a concern.

**Dating Violence and Abuse**

1 in 3 teens who date experience at least one form of dating abuse... but only half of parents talk to their teens about abusive relationships.JEALOUSY OR POSSESSION From your child’s partner (including social media monitoring) ISOLATION FROM FRIENDS OR FAMILY INCREASED SELF-CRITICISM

Your teen may not immediately want to leave an abusive partner because of strong feelings toward their partner or self-blame. Though it is scary to know your teen is in an abusive situation, a careful approach is needed. Validate their feelings. Do not force them to break up, as they may resist. Avoid guilt or punishment. Develop a safety plan together.

Here are some examples of effective rules that parents might set:

- Make sure your teen understands the rules and consequences of their actions.
- Set age-appropriate rules that tell a teen that they are not allowed to engage in certain activities, without a justification, may feel overly intrusive and unfair.

IN A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP, BOTH PARTNERS ARE RESPECTED, HEARD, AND VALUED FOR THEIR INDIVIDUAL SELVES.

**Dating and Sexual Orientation**
The general principles on this poster can be a good starting point for talking about relationships with a teen who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) or questioning their sexual orientation. LGBT teens also have specific needs such as:
- A sense of belonging
- Acceptance of their identity
- Support from peers
- Inclusion in school activities and clubs

Providing your teen with reassurance and support can improve their well-being, overall health, and potentially their sense of safety.

**Resources**

SHORE CENTRE (KITCHENER-WATERLOO) www.shorecentre.ca
- Accurate, inclusive sexual health information and support for accessing sexual and reproductive health services.

LOVE IS RESPECT (USA) www.lovesisrespect.org
- Tips regarding healthy relationships, dating abuse, and how to support someone in an unhealthy relationship

OK2BME (KITCHENER-WATERLOO) www.ok2bme.ca
- Education and support for LGBTQ+ individuals and their loved ones.

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**Beyond “The Talk”**
Teens who receive accurate sexual health information before being sexually active for the first time are more likely to delay sexual activity and use protection because they have the knowledge to make appropriate decisions.

Normalize talking with your teen about sex. That means not just having “the talk,” but many talks at an age-appropriate level. Acknowledge your (and your teen’s) potential discomfort, but remind them that it is normal and necessary to discuss sex directly.

**WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT?**
In addition to discussing your family’s beliefs or expectations about sex, it is important to:
- Educate your teen about safer sex. That includes condom use, birth control, STIs and testing, pregnancy, and personal readiness for sex.
- Explain the importance of sexual consent. Teens should know how to assertively communicate boundaries, verbally ask for consent, and respect the wishes of their partner.
- Talk about digital safety. 14.8% of teens have sent sextually suggestive messages, and 27.4% have received them. Therefore, it’s crucial talk to your teen about the possible consequences of sending sexually explicit photos, videos, or text messages, particularly when there is identifying information.