

Guiding Your Teen Through the Dating Game

By Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Too many teenagers are being permanently scarred by the dating game. We think it's time for parents to take a long, hard look at teenagers and dating, and to develop a fresh approach, prayerfully determine limits, and train your child to hold fast to the boundaries that you set.

In forming our own convictions as parents about dating, it's not good enough for us to just back off a step or two from what the world says is acceptable. We believe there are four convictions regarding dating that all parents should consider and uphold:

1. Our teenagers need our training, guidance, and ongoing involvement as they approach the issue of guy-girl relationships and dating.

Because our culture tells parents to stay out of the dating lives of our teenagers, we realize this may not be an easy conviction to embrace. We're told that our teens are old enough to begin making their own decisions, that parents who do get involved are old fashioned, intrusive, and "patriarchal."

To us, it seems, very few parents of teens are involved enough in their children's dating relationships. That's why you need to be involved—because others parents aren't! What we have is a youth culture with far too many liberties and not nearly enough parental involvement and boundaries. **The result is the moral meltdown of our youth.**

2. We must set rules and boundaries for our child.

Perhaps the best way to help corral your ideas on what to do about your child's interaction with the opposite sex is to write out your family's dating policy.

This will require some extended conversation between Mom and Dad.

What are your standards going to be? What about dating—are you going to let your kids date or not? At what age? Whom will they be able to date? Will you allow them to date another person exclusively?

Be proactive. Too many parents today allow their children to develop exclusive guy-girl relationships at 13 or 14 because that's what everyone else does. Parents tend to think, "What harm can they do? They can't go out in a car alone." But the pattern of romance and emotional involvement gets established.

As your children begin adolescence, look more closely at this issue and over the years develop some family guidelines for the following: When a child can date, whom they should date, acceptable kinds of dates, telephone use, Internet communications and so on.

3. We (especially dads) need to interview our daughters' dates.

A number of years ago, a friend of mine shared with me the benefits of interviewing his daughters' dates. We've been recommending it ever since and found the benefits to be enormous.

First, if your daughter knows in advance what you will be asking and is prepared for what it will be like, she will usually feel honored, protected, and loved. This way all of the girls know this is normal procedure at their house. They expect and, yes, they like it.

Second, because the interview takes place well before the date, dads can evaluate the young man's character in advance. Should you feel it would be unwise for your daughter to spend time with this boy, you can intervene.

Third, we've found that knowing he will have to meet with you before he can date your daughter has automatically weeded out a number of unacceptable prospects. It takes a courageous young man or an arrogant one to go through the interview for a date with your daughter. You will meet with both kinds!

If you begin talking about interviewing her dates before your daughter begins adolescence, this should not become an issue when you actually begin doing it later on. You start conducting these interviews when you feel your daughter is mature enough to go on a date.

The following is some good advice from a pastor friend of mine and what he did when his daughter started the dating game:

"Ultimately I came up with an eight-point checklist that I reviewed with the guys who wanted to take her out. What follows is a condensed composite of the interviews I've had over the years with young men interested in our daughters. Let's call the young man Tom. (The eight points are shown in italics.)"

"Tom, the first thing I want to say is that *a woman is God's creation, a beautiful creation, a fine creation*. My daughter is not only a fine young woman, but she is also attractive and pretty, isn't she, Tom?" Tom nods and grins. (Hey, what can he say at that point? She's my daughter!)

"Second, *the attraction of a young man to a young lady is both normal and good*. God created it to be that way. I want you to know that this is okay for you to be attracted to her and want to go out with her.

"Third, *I understand and remember what the sex drive of a young man is like*." We talk for a bit, and I tell him that I have done research on how often a young man thinks about sex (about every seven seconds). I say, "Tom, you and I both know they were lying about the other six seconds!" At this point Tom's eyes are dilating; he is clearing his throat and squirming. We try to laugh to ease the awkwardness.

"Fourth, Tom, *I'm going to hold you accountable for your*

relationship with my daughter. I am going to ask you if you are dealing uprightly with my daughter.

"Fifth, *I'm going to challenge you to purity*—not just virginity, but I want you to guard your own innocence as well as my daughter's innocence.

"Sixth, *I want you to respect and uphold the dignity of my daughter by keeping your hands off of her*. Will you keep your hands off my daughter? (Hey I think that's a fair question to ask the young man—if he doesn't faint at this point, then he may be okay!)

"Seventh, *do you understand all of what I've just said to you, Tom?* Do you have any questions? Do you understand that I am going to look you in the eye and ask you if you are being a gentleman with my daughter, whether you go out once or 50 times?"

"Eighth, Tom, *when you are a dad someday, I hope you never forget this conversation, and that you will challenge your own children to abide by these standards. And I hope that someday when you have a daughter, you'll interview her dates*."

Doing these interviews is one of the best things I've ever done for my daughters as a dad. And instead of creating tension and separation between my daughters and me, it has actually drawn us closer together."

4. We need to teach our children how dating fits into the process of finding a mate.



Many couples testify that they were good friends for several years before their relationship turned from friendship to dating toward marriage. We have noticed that God often seems to follow this pattern. We've heard countless couples tell basically the same story.

The teenage years are not the time to be looking for a mate, or to form deep emotional romantic attachments. Children need to learn to use their single years to focus on the Lord and trust in Him rather than basing their hopes and their self-worth upon a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

Dating contracts can also be very useful tools in clarifying parent-child expectations related to dating guidelines in your home. The purpose of the contract is to enforce the idea of holding to convictions and remaining accountable in a dating relationship. It also alerts the child that the parents are paying attention and have great interest in their son or daughter's involvement with a person of the opposite sex.

Be careful to not become obsessed with the sex and dating issues. When you are working so hard to go against the flow of the culture, there's a tendency to

become so preoccupied with how your child is doing that you are constantly harping at them, asking them questions.

Remember that how you handle your relationship with your child is like playing a solo on a fine violin. It's difficult, and much practice is required. Be very careful how you hold the instrument and don't turn the strings too tight! ☺



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