

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Teen Dating

axis

How do I love thee? Well, it's complicated.

Remember what it was like to be going innocently about your day and then suddenly see the person you had a crush on? Remember how your stomach would drop and flutter around? And if only, if only you could get a date with him/her!

Nowadays, the dating landscape looks pretty different from what it was even a few decades ago, and, if anything, it has only gotten more muddled and confusing. In fact, the number of high school seniors going on dates has dropped compared to previous generations. Around [85% of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers](#) went on dates in their senior year of high school, but it was down to 56% for high school seniors in 2015. Gone are the days of sitting at home waiting for the phone to ring (because, of course, phones didn't go everywhere with us back then!) or of hoping your crush would pass you a note or of "going steady." In fact, what we might think constitutes as dating is vastly different from what today's teens and tweens believe it is.

People are complicated, and romantic relationships are one of the most complex and fascinating kinds of relationships that God has given us. They're challenging even for people working from a solid foundation. So when considering our teens, it can be daunting to consider whether or not we should allow them to date, and if we do, how we can guide them through the process well. Is it possible? Can we help our kids avoid the cesspool of hookup culture? Is there a "right" or biblical way to date? And above all, can we use dating as an opportunity to disciple our kids into a Christ-like perspective of others? We'll answer these questions and more in the following pages.

So what *is* dating like these days?

Those of us who haven't been teenagers and/or on the dating scene for awhile might be tempted to be dismayed by how Gen Z dates. But let's not be too hasty in how we react or judge. After all, we may know different (and therefore determine we know better), but they don't know a different way—and even if they did, it wouldn't really matter since they alone can't change the dating landscape. So rather than wish for a different reality, let's begin by working with what's in front of us.

As we talk about modern dating, keep in mind that what exactly a "date" is used to be pretty clear: A young man would drive to a young lady's house, come to the front door, and take her to dinner and a movie. But now what qualifies as a date is up for just about any definition, which is actually good because it allows couples to have more variety in what they do, but it's also negative because it's often unclear when two people are actually "dating."

Dating and Technology

Dating has changed for singles of all ages, thanks to things like online dating and texting. Author and speaker [Kevin S. Carr says](#), "The Internet Age has redefined the way we meet and the way we communicate with people"—both of which are huge components of romantic relationships. Over the years, online dating has lost its stigma and is fairly common among today's adults, and while the average teenager is probably not on eHarmony, [Teen Vogue reports](#) that it's becoming more common for teens to get on dating apps. If they're not on dating apps, they might be on Tinder-esque swiping apps specifically aimed at teens, like [Spotafriend](#). One teen says that, when it comes to seeking a significant other, [she prefers social media](#) over dating apps.

Texting has majorly impacted how people date and can be a way to avoid commitment or a channel for dating with a low level of commitment. As texting has become a normal way of communicating, texting norms have emerged. Comedian and actor Aziz Ansari explains in his book, [Modern Romance](#), that some unspoken rules when it comes to texting are:

1. Don't text the other person back immediately—if you do, you look like a desperate loser.
2. If you text someone, you shouldn't text them again until they respond.
3. The length of your texts should match the length of the other person's.

People who don't follow these rules risk the other person making a judgment about them and moving on.

Sex and Modern Dating

Sadly, porn and sexting have made it possible for people “fulfill” their sexual desires online. Don't want to put in the hard work that it takes to make a relationship last? Still want to fulfill your sexual urges? Sexting and porn are at your fingertips within a few taps.

For those who want to have sexual interactions in real life without committing to another person, there's always the option to “hook up.” [Hooking up is](#) “an ambiguous term that can signify anything from making out to oral sex to intercourse—without the emotional entanglement of a relationship.” [Tinder has become notorious](#) for promoting and even encouraging hookup culture, especially because of its well-known method of swiping left for those one is not attracted to and swiping right for those one is attracted to. No need to base the relationship on anything else! And even if our teens aren't on Tinder, this mentality has trickled down through culture and does affect them in one way or another.

What other challenges do teenagers specifically face?

Teens face some dating challenges that adults do not. Dating is brand new to them, making it more likely they'll make mistakes. In addition, their definition of “dating” can be pretty fluid: It could simply mean two people have acknowledged they like each other and [text each other a lot](#). One friend of ours says that when certain teens at her small private high school would date, that didn't mean they would go to the movies or hang out together on the weekends. Their relationships didn't impact anything they did outside of school. It just meant that they had an understanding that they liked each other and would hang out while at school. This wasn't true of all of the students there, but it was somewhat common.

Relationships can be more complicated than simply dating or not dating. Teens might be in a phase of getting to know someone called “talking.” [Talking](#) is when two people are interested in being more than friends, but are getting to know each other better before having a [DTR](#) (that is, a “**D**efine **T**he **R**elationship” talk).

Sometimes, a guy and a girl will be close friends, spend a lot of time together, and even be physically affectionate, while insisting that they are not actually dating. When two people of the opposite sex become close without dating, some call this a

“friendlationship” because there is some emotional exclusivity there without any commitment. This can be a painful and confusing situation for at least one of the friends.

Another dating challenge specific to teens is that they are most likely dating someone at their school. One dynamic of dating someone at your school is that it is a sign of social status. Another is that your peers all know about your relationship, whether you want them to or not. If you break up, not only will everyone talk about it, but you’ll also have to see your ex every day, depending on your classes and social circles. When two adults stop dating, it tends to be easier for them to avoid each other. [This is actually the reason](#) why some teens try online dating.

— How does pop culture shape our view of romance?

“[Your Love Is My Drug](#)” — Kesha

One of American culture’s most persistent and dominant messages is that romantic love is wonderful—so wonderful, you can’t even believe it. It’s the most euphoric, rapturous, intoxicating experience you could ever have.

Part of the reason why this idea is so persuasive is that there is truth to it. Song of Solomon does in fact portray romantic and sexual love as intoxicating and overwhelmingly pleasurable. Yet even with it being such a wonderful gift, God’s word never elevates romance over God Himself, which is what culture does.

Entertainment and media communicate that romance is THE thing that can make us ultimately happy. This idea is prevalent in most romance movies, as well as many popular songs, which you’ll see clearly if you take a glance through [Billboard’s current Hot 100](#). “[Lucid Dreams](#)” by Juice Wrld describes being plunged into despair because of a lost relationship: “You were my everything.” In “[Boo’d Up](#),” Ella Mai sings, “How many ways can I say that I need you, baby, it’s true / I think I might die without you.” Ariana Grande takes the idealization of sexual and romantic desire to another level in “[God Is a Woman](#),” where she dwells on her sexual prowess and portrays herself as god to her lover.

As C.S. Lewis points out in *The Four Loves*, treating romantic love (which he calls “Eros”) as though it were divine is not really a new phenomenon: “It is in the grandeur of Eros that the seeds of danger are concealed. He has spoken like a god. His total commitment, his reckless disregard of happiness, his transcendence of self-regard, sound like a message from the eternal world.” But this idea is so pervasive in our society that it’s easy for many, including those of us in the church, to feel as if our lives will be drab and unfulfilling if we don’t have a “significant other.” Think about it—when was the last time you saw someone get genuinely excited about being single? In a culture that idolizes sex and romance, it’s only too easy to feel that if no one finds you romantically (or at least sexually) desirable, something must be wrong with you.

“**Follow your heart**” —every Bachelor and Bachelorette contestant ever

ABC’s *The Bachelor* has aired 22 seasons in 16 years, and the spinoff *The Bachelorette* has aired 14 seasons in 15 years. Out of those 36 bachelors and bachelorettes, [only 4](#) have

married the person they chose (another is actually married to his runner up, with a few others still engaged but not yet married). Despite this dismal success rate (11%), the shows continue to have massive success and no shortage of people hoping to be on the show. So it's safe to say that they're impacting not just the US culture's view of romance and love, but also the whole world's (there are versions of the shows in [up to 23 countries!](#)). And what's the number one idea conveyed? Follow your heart.

Some of the contestants (like [Sean Lowe](#), who incidentally is one of the married ones) may mean something different because of their faith backgrounds, but most of them mean that they must listen to their feelings above all else, even when logic is telling them that they're making a terrible choice. It might follow that the 89% who did this would look back and wish they hadn't or that the newer contestants would learn from their predecessors' mistakes, but, alas, the idea continues to be espoused by every contestant in every season (and even on other spin-offs, like *Bachelor in Paradise*).

There are three reasons why this thinking is dangerous: 1. Our feelings are often deceptive and can change in an instant; 2. It teaches us that if something is hard or that if we have to work to maintain those feelings, then it's not "true love"; and 3. It puts personal happiness on a pedestal, teaching us that our happiness is supreme and our ultimate goal in life.

“Send nudes” —men of all ages

It would be remiss to talk about dating and not mention that sexting and sending nude photos has come to be regarded as a “normal” part of a relationship. In fact, we've talked to many Christian teenage girls who confessed that they felt disappointed and rejected when their friends were being asked for nude photos but they weren't. Why? Because it meant that they weren't attractive or desirable to the opposite sex. Even if many of these girls would never actually send nude photos, they wanted to be asked for them anyway.

And many Christian teenage boys have solicited nude photos. Even if these boys are good guys in every other way, they are not immune to peer pressure and to what culture says is normal. And how did they come to think it was normal? Sadly, pornography. [New stats](#) from Covenant Eyes reveal that 90% of teenagers “are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about porn with their friends.” In addition, 57% of teens search out porn at least monthly. With porn becoming so ubiquitous for Gen Z, it's not hard to imagine how these young men have come to believe that young women should behave in the same way as the women in porn.

How does Christian culture shape the dating landscape?

Talk about whiplash! Going from culture's views of dating and relationships, which are very open and promiscuous, to the Church's approach is often a shocking experience. In fact, the Church today rarely talks about dating in a favorable way, nor does it often provide helpful guidance when it comes to romance and love in the 21st century.

Today's twenty- and thirtysomethings who were raised in Christian families grew up in the *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* era, when many Christians called for an end to dating and

turned instead to [courtship](#). Author Joshua Harris, while acknowledging there were some good points to his book, now says that he [encouraged people to make decisions based on fear](#)—fear of sex and fear of getting their hearts broken.

While the courtship trend is no longer what it was in the '90s, one friend of ours believes that “the ghost of Joshua Harris still haunts conservative Christianity.” Courtship culture is a reaction against the devastation caused by casual dating and the promiscuity that often goes with it. One main reason why [people support courtship](#) is that they want to encourage Christians to surrender their love lives to Christ. This is a good desire, and it's easy to see why some find courtship to be compelling.

However, as Thomas Umstadd points out in his article, “[Why Courtship Is Fundamentally Flawed](#),” courtship has its own pitfalls. It tends to have rigid accountability, strict rules about physical interaction, and a high level of commitment at the outset (which in and of themselves aren't bad but often don't address one's heart or can cause one to think that God owes them because they did everything right). The principles of courtship actually have a lot more in common with arranged marriages than with the norms of American society (which is often why today's teens aren't compelled by how the Church talks about romantic relationships; it's outdated and out of touch).

While courtship has worked for some couples, its ideals have contributed to a general paralysis among Christians who are unwilling to pursue romantic relationships unless they are sure that those relationships will lead to marriage. And neither courtship nor dating is inherently “biblical.” Umstadd observes:

There are some good Scriptural precepts about sexual purity in the New Testament, and there are some principles about the benefits of marrying young and that sort of thing. But the Bible is surprisingly quiet when it comes to laying out a system of courtship. Courtship Systems are cultural, and the Bible rarely advocates one cultural approach over another.

On the other hand, as Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend point out in *Boundaries in Dating*:

In the same way that cars don't kill people, drunk drivers do, dating does not hurt people, but dating in out-of-control ways does....Learning how to love, follow God, be honest and responsible, treat others as you would want to be treated, develop self-control, and build a fulfilling life will ensure better dating.

They list the following benefits of dating done well:

- You learn about yourself, other people, and relationships in general.
- You can work through issues.
- You build relationship skills.
- You can gain emotional healing (although dating shouldn't be the main place where people seek healing).
- You can learn more about you what you like in opposite sex.
- You can learn self-control and delayed gratification.

In the end, though, it's less about the label we put on it (“dating,” “courting,” “talking,” whatever) and more about our intentions and intentionality. So rather than focusing on what it's called or being legalistic about it, we'll help our kids the most by focusing on teaching them how approach romantic relationships and commitment in a way that's honoring to God.

How can I help my teens have a healthy view of dating?

If this is where you're hoping we'll lay out the "dating formula," you're about to be disappointed (sorry!). We can't give you that formula because there is no "one size fits all" answer to our dating woes. Why? Because dating involves humans who are vastly different. Some of your kids, because of their personalities and maturity levels, will be able to handle dating at a younger age than your other kids. You will need wisdom and guidance from the Holy Spirit to determine what will work best for your family. But we can offer some general principles and tips for you to keep in mind as you guide your kids in this area.

Sex and marriage are good.

Sex is not a wonderful secret people discovered when God wasn't looking. He invented it, and He made it pleasurable on purpose. But as the creator of human sexuality, He is the one who gets to say how it works. His word is clear that He intends for sex to take place only within marriage between a man and a woman. But sometimes the Church emphasizes sexual purity so much that people end up thinking sex is shameful and dirty, only to be told once they get married that they should enjoy it. It's difficult for them to suddenly flip a switch and see sex as good at that point. Help your kids to see sex as a good gift that God has graciously entrusted to us to steward well.

Dating isn't something to fear, nor is courtship the perfect solution.

One woman we know has struggled with a lot of fear when it comes to dating. Her parents lived in rebellion against God when they were young and ended up regretting a lot of the decisions they made at that time. As adult Christians trying to figure out what a Christian family looked like, they bought into the ideas in *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. It didn't help that our friend's parents are naturally cautious people, and our friend is also naturally reserved and cautious. She also didn't trust God at the time with her desire for a relationship. The unfortunate result of these circumstances was that our friend lived in fear, not just of dating, but of a relationship in general. It was very difficult for her not to believe that while God might bless other people with relationships, He would never do that for her. This mentality is one that she still has to fight on a regular basis.

A common warning among Christians in the realm of romance is to "guard your heart." This advice is straight from [Proverbs 4:23](#), so it's important and valid. But some misconstrue or misunderstand this idea in 2 ways. First, some take it to mean, "Live in fear." As you help your kids have wisdom about dating, do whatever you can to communicate that dating can be very good. If "guarding our hearts" stops us from taking good risks, we are living in fear. Dating by its very nature is risky and requires vulnerability. Even when people do their best not to hurt each other, they can still cause each other pain. As Elisabeth Elliot says in her book *Quest for Love*, "Love always entails suffering." You can't pursue a relationship and never get hurt. This is not license to be reckless; it's just the nature of the beast.

Second, if we read the entire verse (what immediately follows is "for everything you do flows from it") and indeed [the entire chapter](#), we realize that the proverb was not intended to be applied solely to love. In fact, ancient Hebrews understood the word in this proverb (*leb*) to mean "inner man, mind, will, heart," all at once. For them, it didn't mean to just guard one's emotions, but to guard one's whole self. So, if we're

going to admonish our kids to guard their hearts, then we need to help them see the full meaning of the word and to guard themselves in all areas, not just in the area of romance.

It's not necessary to date in order to be a whole person.

We know another woman, now married, whose mother put a lot of pressure on her to date when she was younger. One year, this woman wanted to go to prom with her friend and didn't feel like she needed a date. But because her mom pressured her, she ended up going with a guy who liked her (she wasn't interested in him) and had an awkward, unpleasant evening.

If your kids are happy not dating, good for them! Society puts so much pressure on us to have a significant other that it's a blessing when people are able to enjoy their lives and be content with what they have. Plus, there's a lot to be said for enjoying high school and college without being caught up in romance. One friend of ours who is now in a serious relationship is thankful that she never dated in high school or college. Instead, she enjoyed her friends and all the incredible experiences she was able to have.

We're not saying that people need to avoid dating at all costs when they are younger. As we said above, there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula for dating. Everyone has a different story. We just want to recognize the value of not being distracted by romantic relationships during adolescence, especially because they can bring so much heartache and very rarely actually lead to long-term commitment.

God has authority over our love lives.

There's just nothing like romance for showing many of us whether or not we are seeking God with our whole hearts. One friend of ours who grew up in the church didn't realize that she was idolizing romance until she went through a breakup. While the experience was extremely painful, she is thankful not to be living in slavery to that desire any more. The drive to pursue romance and sex is so powerful that it really is a form of death for us to give those desires up if that is what God asks us to do. We will find out then if we can truly say [along with Paul](#):

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

God is our ultimate reward—really.

Do we believe that God is good and that He is the source of abundant life? Do we believe that He is for us? Do we believe that He is sovereign over our lives, meaning He is capable of bringing a relationship to us? Do we believe that He is faithful if we never date or get married? Do we recognize that struggling in this area could be one way we "take up our cross" and follow Jesus wherever He might lead us?

Our friend who struggles with idolizing romance has started recognizing patterns in her thinking that indicate she is living out of lies about God and herself. For example, there is nothing wrong with being interested in a guy and wishing he would make a move. But she has come to see that she sometimes dwells on this wish so much that what she's actually doing is believing she needs a guy's attention in order to be happy. This lie is usually coupled with the lie that God will never bring a relationship into her life (it's possible He might not—but He also might!). When she becomes aware that she's living out of those lies, she has started reminding herself of scripture and

speaking these truths aloud to herself:

- I don't **need** a relationship to be happy.
- God **could** provide a relationship if He were willing.
- He doesn't **owe** me a relationship at all.

She has found persevering in this habit to be extremely helpful, even though it's often a battle.

We all deal with lies in different areas of life. Even as you show your kids that dating is good and can be done well, remind them that God is the source of true life, joy, and peace. This is not just something that Christians say to make themselves feel better when they have no prospects on the horizon! **It is actually true.** Living out of this truth will help your kids to be content when they are not dating, healthy in how they approach dating, and more stable if and when they break up with someone.

One other point to remember is that, as Christians, it's easy to think that if we "do everything right" with how we pursue relationships, then we are guaranteed a great marriage. But God never promised us that our lives will be a certain way. Some people do their best to be wise and obey God while they are dating. But after they get married, they deal with serious difficulties in their marriages. God never guarantees that our circumstances will work out so long as we obey Him. He promises that He will be with us no matter what we go through.

— What are some practical tips I could teach my kids about dating?

Be honest.

We surveyed the Axis staff, asking people for the worst excuses they ever heard (or gave) as to why someone was unwilling to date or go on a date with someone else. Here are some of them:

- God told me to break up with you.
- We have to be friends—we come from two different worlds.
- You're cutting into my video game time.
- I have to paint my sister's basement. It's going to take all weekend.
- You're not dating material—you're marriage material.
- We're going different directions. *starts dating another girl he'd been getting friendly with*
- I'm not interested in dating right now. *starts dating someone else*

What's frustrating about these replies is that all of them except one (the video game one) are dishonest. What people really mean is, "I'm not interested in you." Some of the above replies *could* be legitimate—it is theoretically possible that God could tell someone to break up with someone else. But this is almost always a way for the people doing the breaking up to use "Christianese" to look spiritual for breaking up with the other person or to avoid sounding harsh by telling the truth.

There are also times when people are legitimately not interested in dating and want to focus on other parts of their lives. That's fine if it's true. We know people who have done exactly that at certain seasons. But we've also heard of plenty of people who had

someone tell them they weren't interested in dating only to start dating someone else a short time later. Those people were being dishonest. Teach your kids to value speaking the truth in love.

How would you want to be treated?

Other errors are saying “no” without any explanation or giving an unnecessarily long explanation. If your kids are not interested in someone, teach them how to communicate that without belaboring the point. They can say what they need to say without dragging out an uncomfortable situation.

On the other hand, asking someone out is terrifying. If someone has been brave enough to ask your son or daughter out, and your kids are not interested, coach them on how to be gentle while being direct and honest. Procrastinating to avoid hurting someone's feelings is unkind in the long run. How would your kids want to be treated if someone were to let them down with a “no”? The person who has taken the initiative deserves both honesty and compassion. **And this should happen face to face, not online or through texting.**

It's also good for your kids to be open to going on a date with someone they're on the fence about. It's not a marriage proposal. It's just a date. If the person is solid and it's remotely possible your kids could be interested, encourage them to go. If nothing else, it's good experience. They don't have to go again if they don't want to, but at least they gave the other person a shot.

Beware of friendationships.

Guys and girls can avoid inflicting a lot of pain on each other by having healthy boundaries with how they relate to the opposite sex. Encourage your kids to be careful about how much one-on-one time they spend with people of the opposite sex, especially if they're sharing “deep” parts of themselves. If your son or daughter has formed an attachment with someone who is not interested in dating, they need to respect themselves, not hang on to false hope, and move on (see the helpful chapter in *Boundaries in Dating* on false hope).

Help them to steward their technology well.

Texting, social media, and smartphones aren't inherently bad. But it's easy to rely on them as substitutes for real-life relationships. While the tools of technology enable us to meet more people and communicate in new ways, it's still our responsibility to [build meaningful relationships](#) with the people we meet. Several years ago, a friend of ours was getting to know a guy. They messaged back and forth quite a bit on Facebook and occasionally went out for coffee. She really enjoyed their online conversations, but when they hung out one-on-one, the interactions always seemed strained and uncomfortable.

There's nothing wrong with a date being a bit awkward—in fact, that's pretty normal. But if you repeatedly hang out with someone and you never become more comfortable with them, it's probably not a good fit. When it comes to getting to know people, there just isn't a substitute for spending face-to-face time with them. Talk with your kids and figure out what a healthy amount of time texting or messaging on social media looks like when it comes to their significant other.

Avoid ghosting, stalking, caspering, submarining, and all the other terms associated

with modern dating.

Social media makes it easy for teens (and let's be real, adults) to give in to the temptation to "stalk" their exes on social media. In fact, because we can check on people within a few taps, it will be likely be pretty difficult for your kids not to view an ex's online activity, even if doing so is painful. Or, rather than actually telling someone they're not interested, it's extremely easy to just [ghost](#) them (i.e. stop responding to and interacting with them on social media). Or if something better doesn't come up, it could also be tempting to submarine someone (i.e. ghost them for a time, then randomly surface again). How can you help your kids be accountable with their social media use so that it's easier for them and others to move on? Also, we highly advise learning these modern slang words in order to better disciple your kids regarding dating and how to value others.

God gave us feelings, but watch out for how much you trust them.

It's so easy to believe that our feelings define who we are and can reliably tell us what we want. It's tempting to feel infatuated with someone and believe those feelings will last. While our feelings are valid, they should not be our primary guide for conducting our relationships. That being said, when your kids get excited about the person they are dating and want to share that with you, it can be tempting to jump right in and be the voice of caution. Before you do that, enjoy the moment with them! It's ok for them to be excited about someone they're interested in, even if the relationship doesn't work out in the end. That's part of being thankful for what we have in the present and not living in fear. The problem comes when we rely on our feelings to make important decisions.

It's extremely easy, especially for girls, to daydream about what a future with a particular person could look like. This can be an extremely harmful habit. When we dwell in false realities, it starts to feel like they are real or like we deserve for them to be true. Then if they don't come true, it feels like God has cheated us of something. Such daydreams are also close neighbors to sexual fantasies. Both involve dwelling in a reality that we desire and that can be good, but has not yet come to pass.

If your kids find themselves daydreaming too much about the person they're dating or interested in, make sure they understand that it's ok to want to be with the other person in the future. But it's wise at that point for them to bring that daydream before God, honestly tell Him what they were thinking, and surrender that desire to Him. Then they should direct their minds elsewhere. If this is an area they struggle in, encourage them to seek out accountability for it.

Siblings are your secret weapon.

Siblings are an incredible resource for a number of reasons. For one, older siblings can use their experience to give their younger siblings relationship advice. Siblings of the opposite sex can give insight into the mysterious behavior of either guys or girls and help their brothers or sisters figure out what to do in particular situations. Brothers and sisters can also give objective opinions about their sibling's significant other. And your kids will often be more inclined to listen to a sibling's opinion over yours. Granted, this strategy only works if your kids have solid relationships with each other. But if they do, encourage them to help each other out.

Speaking of which, help your kids create a "team."

One of our friends says she can't imagine dating without her "team" around her. She has gathered a group of people she trusts who can give her encouragement and advice

about her current relationship. These include people in various seasons of life (single people, friends who are dating, friends who are married, her peers, and people older than she is). These are friends who will get excited for her, but still tell her the truth even when it's hard (notably, she's also open to hearing the truth when it's hard). They are an invaluable resource in her life.

Pray, pray, pray.

Pray for your kids, and encourage them to pray about their dating relationships. Despite your best efforts, your kids will make mistakes. *You* will make mistakes. God is faithful through all of it. If your kids are not open to receiving your advice, pray that God would intervene in their lives. One mom, seeing some red flags about a guy her college-aged daughter was dating, prayed that God would end the relationship—and He did. The daughter was not open to receiving counsel at the time, but now recognizes that the relationship had a lot of problems and is thankful she didn't end up with that guy.

Discussion Questions

Here are some questions you can explore with your kids as you help them evaluate what they think about dating:

- Are you interested in dating?
- How do you define dating?
- Do you feel pressure to date (from culture, church, friends, family, etc.)?
- Do you think of dating as something to look forward to or to dread?
- Do you think you have any hope of dating?
- What do you think is the point of dating?
- What do your friends think the point of dating is?
- How have you seen dating done in a way that hurts people?
- How have you seen dating done well?
- Do you think it's possible to date and not be hurt?
- What does it look like when people let dating distract them from other important parts of their lives?
- How could you be open to dating without letting it take up too much of your time?
- What would you do if the person you liked asked you for nude photos?
- What does it look like to put God first while you're dating?
- How can you have healthy accountability while you're dating? Who would you pick to be on your "team"?
- Do you feel like because you've never dated someone, something must be wrong with you?
- Whether you're dating or single, what can you do to remember and believe that your self-worth is based in God alone?

Conclusion

Relationships are neither something to obsess over nor to fear, but are rather a way that we move toward growth and trusting God wholeheartedly. Whether or not your kids are dating, you can help them move toward obedience and hope in this area of their lives. Whatever you decide is best for each child, remember as you steward their hearts that your job is to prepare them to trust God in every circumstance of life and to steward their hearts well.

Related Axis Resources

To read before talking to your teen, all found at axis.org/guides:

- A Parent's Guide to Sexting
- A Parent's Guide to Pornography Bundle
- A Parent's Guide to Teen Singleness (coming soon!)

To watch with your teen:

- [Dating Conversation Kit](#) (brand new!)

Additional Resources

- [The New Rules for Love, Sex, and Dating](#) by Andy Stanley
- [The Sacred Search: What If It's Not about Who You Marry, But Why?](#) by Gary Thomas
- [Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No](#) by Dr. John Townsend
- ["Christians and Dating,"](#) Joseph Solomon
- [The Dating Manifesto: A Drama-Free Plan for Pursuing Marriage with Purpose](#) by Lisa Anderson
- [Boundaries in Dating: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Relationships](#) by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend
- [Rethinking Sexuality: God's Design and Why It Matters](#) by Dr. Juli Slattery
- ["Why Courtship is Fundamentally Flawed Q&A,"](#) Thomas Umstatted
- ["Thomas Umstatted talks with Joshua Harris about his book I Kissed Dating Goodbye,"](#) Thomas Umstatted
- ["Christian boy meets Christian girl,"](#) Susan Olasky
- ["Is Your Teen Using Tinder? Here's What You Need to Know,"](#) Toni Birdsong
- ["Is Your Teen Daughter Ready for Dating Independence?"](#) Jackie Brewton
- [Passion and Purity: Learning to Bring Your Love Life Under Christ's Control](#) by Elisabeth Elliot

We're creating more content every day! If you found this guide helpful and valuable, check out axis.org/guides each month for new Guides covering all-new topics and for other resources.