



Teens + Dating Relationships

PATIENT EDUCATION

Use your intuition

BE HEALTHY

Be happy

Smart
decisions



BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

What Is the Most Important Part of a Healthy Dating Relationship?

You. Your physical and emotional wellbeing. Your brain. Your heart. Your personal safety. Your privacy. And your self-respect. To name a few.

Why “you”?

Because before you can help build a relationship that’s safe, healthy and happy, you have to be safe, healthy and happy.

Of course you want to invest in your partner too. This isn’t ALL about you. But to make a relationship work, you and your partner each have to be in a good place.

So take care of your body, your heart, your emotions and your mental health!

This material tells you all about:

- How to tell the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy one.
- Some of the relationship issues you may want to avoid.
- How social media can impact your relationship and your life.
- Topics to think about if you’re thinking about having sex.
- Making changes to your dating or sex life.
- Making decisions to keep yourself safe.



Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

“What were you thinking? You’d never hear me saying something like that.”

“You got a C on that test? Wow. That was so EASY. Way to go, stupid.”

“What do you mean you have a curfew? You’re not going to follow that, are you?”

“That is not a good look on you. You need to change before we go out.”

You’ve probably heard comments like these. Did they make you cringe?

This isn’t about a random snarky comment

Many relationships include OCCASIONAL sarcastic or snarky comments. We’re talking about a pattern of obviously mean comments — or comments that could be taken that way. Even if your partner keeps saying she or he didn’t mean it that way, if it’s hurtful to you, it’s hurtful.

A healthy relationship doesn’t have comments like these.

Ever heard of “intuition”?

It’s that little voice in your head that tells you when something is wrong. For example, you hear a tone of voice or see a look between boyfriend and girlfriend. And immediately you think, “That’s not right. What’s going on?” If you’ve ever heard or seen anything like that, or if “the hair on the back of your neck” stands up, pay attention! If you think something is wrong, you may need to take action.



What does a healthy relationship look like?

No matter your age, a healthy relationship is based on these mutually shared qualities:

- Respect.
- Equality.
- Communication.
- Trust.
- Honesty.
- Affection. (Expressions of affection vary by the type of relationship.)

There are other things too, like humor and intelligence. But the list here is the “heart” of a good relationship.

How do you find out whether your dating partner has these qualities?

You get to know each other over time — ideally before the relationship becomes physical or sexual. Getting “physical” too soon can interfere with building a relationship. Here are some fun ways to get to know each other.



- Go to a coffee shop or juice bar; talk about your “Top 15 Favorites.”
- Go swimming or sledding, in the correct season *of course*.
- Go to the mall and window-shop.
- Go to a movie with 2 or 3 other couples.
- Go biking.
- Make a picnic lunch together and hang out in a park.
- Binge watch a favorite TV show or find a new favorite together.
- Cook a meal together.
- Find the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper or a dip of ice cream.
- Go to a thrift store and find a new outfit for each other. Go on a date in your new clothes.
- Take your dog(s) for a walk or jog.
- Have a game night with friends.
- Hang out at a summer or fall festival.
- Volunteer together (food bank, pet shelter, etc.).
- Take a yoga class together.
- Go bowling. In Halloween costumes. During any month other than October.

An unhealthy relationship could look like this:

Examples of emotional abuse

- Putting a partner down.
- Making false accusations.
- Calling a partner names.
- Swearing or screaming in anger.
- Threatening to share photos or private information.
- Threatening to end the relationship; saying that he or she CAN'T live without the partner.
- Being controlling, possessive and/or jealous.
- Forcing someone out of a group.
- Looking through a partner's cell phone.
- Telling a partner who they can spend time with, where they can work, which extracurricular activities they can have, etc. This kind of control often isolates the person who is being controlled.

Examples of physical or sexual issues

- Pressuring a partner to do things against their will.
- Suggesting or pressuring a partner to not use birth control.
- Physical or sexual abuse or assault.

If your relationship has some of these examples, it's time to take a good, long look at it.



Do You Think Your Partner Is Trying to Control You?

Here are two examples of ways that people try to control another person.

1. When a person is dominant or controlling...

They often use language that makes it seem like they care about you a lot. This is done to try to hide the controlling messages and to try to confuse you.

"I don't like it when you wear make-up. I think you're prettier when you don't wear make-up. Besides, guys will think you are available when you do that. I just want you to myself." The controlling messages are, "Don't wear make-up" and "I just want you to myself."

2. A dominant person may try to blame...

A dominant person often tries to blame someone else for his or her efforts to control.

"I don't like it when you hang out with Sierra. I don't think she likes me. I worry that you'll want to break up with me when you go out with her. Besides, when you are with her, we don't get to be together." The controlling message is, "You need to stay away from Sierra."

Sierra is blamed three ways. First, supposedly, she doesn't like your boy/girlfriend. Second, she'll try to get you to break up with your boy/girlfriend. And third, she forces you to miss out on time with your boy/girlfriend.

What to Do If You Don't Feel Safe

If you don't feel safe:

- ✓ Stay calm so you can think clearly.
- ✓ As fast as you can, get to a place where you do feel safe.
- ✓ Talk to a parent or a trusted adult. Tell them everything. If anything feels embarrassing to you, remember this: These people love you and want to help you. It's okay to be **temporarily** embarrassed if it helps you **stay safe**!
- ✓ Get any other help you may need, such as from a school counselor, your parents or other trusted adults, or the police.
- ✓ If you received (or sent) any pictures, threats or otherwise odd messages, don't delete them. You may need those to help prove why you didn't feel safe.
- ✓ Stay away from the person or people who you don't feel safe around. Don't go back to try to reconcile or talk it out! If your gut told you that you weren't safe, there's a valid reason to stay away! Also stay away from anyone who may try to talk you into going.

What if you're not sure what to do?

Have the problems been abusive? If you're not sure you can answer that, get advice from a trusted adult. Are your friends and family okay with this person and how she or he treats you? Has anyone made any comments? Maybe you just thought your family or friends were being critical. But is there a pattern of behavior that's not healthy? **Listen to your gut.**



*You can't
rely on other
people to make
you feel safe.*

You are the only
person in any
relationship who is
primarily focused on
your own well-being.

The Impact of Social Media on Relationships

Social media is a great way to connect with friends and family. But a lot of teens also use it to “connect” with people they’ve never met in real life. Take a minute now to review some social media safety tips.

Follow these tips to help protect yourself:

- ✓ Delete details that identify your city, school, mascot, sports/cheer team names, family names, **birthdate**, workplace, and contact information.
- ✓ Don’t tell “online-only friends” anything personal about you. Even if you’ve been chatting for weeks, don’t let your guard down.
- ✓ **Don’t go to meet any online-only friend in person. If you are asked to go meet someone who you only know online, you HAVE TO tell your parent(s), guardian or a trusted adult.**
- ✓ Don’t let anyone pressure you into posting or sending photos that show parts of your body — even if you don’t show your face and even if the app deletes the photos in a few seconds. People can do fast screen grabs to capture the images.
- ✓ **Do not text or post any comment or picture that you don’t want EVERYONE to see! Once you put it out on the Internet, it’s there for life** — photos, swear words, hateful messages, whatever. Your parents, siblings, kids at school or work, and future employers — anyone can get access to everything these days.

Do you know...

- ~ Someone who’s had private photos uploaded without their consent? It’s a fairly common way for teens to get revenge after a break up.
- ~ How many adult predators are online every day posing as teens? Hundreds, all across the U.S.



Think this can't happen to you?

Ask around. This has already happened to a few kids at your school, even if they won’t admit it. If they’re lucky, you haven’t heard about it.

Is It Time to Talk About Sex?

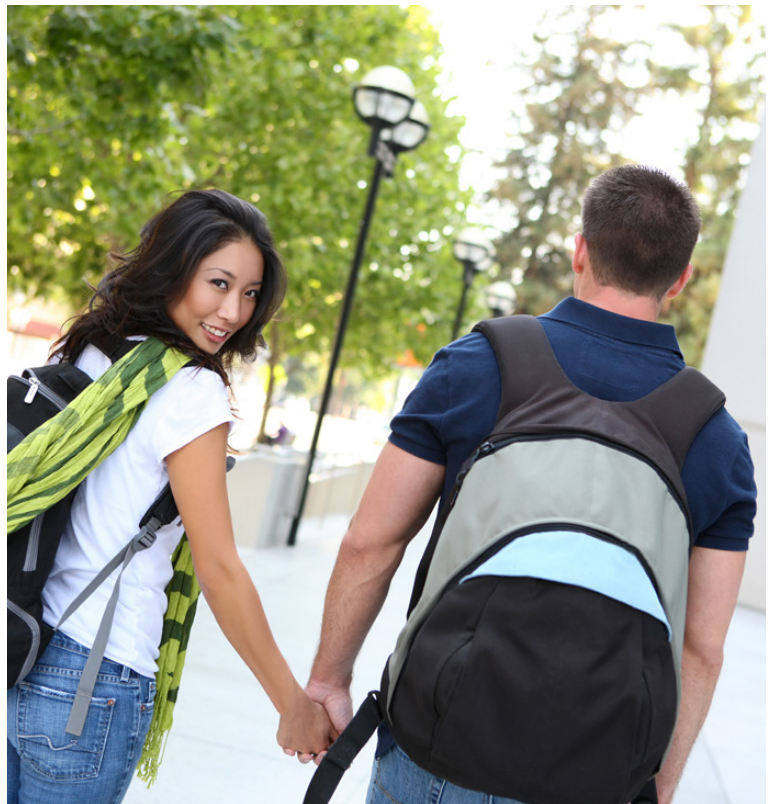
How do you know when it's the right time for you? Every person is different. DON'T BE PRESSURED. Even if it seems like "everyone is doing it."

Stop. Think. Listen to your gut.

- ☐ Does sex fit with your values? What about your family values? Your religious beliefs?
- ☐ Take time to think about and make an actual decision about having sex. Don't try to do this when you're "in the moment" and everything is heated up already. That's not when a lot of rational decisions are made.
- ☐ What about this relationship — is it really healthy?
- ☐ Does this fit with your life goals — college, job, moving, etc.?
- ☐ What if this results in a pregnancy? What then?
- ☐ How well do you know your partner? What about sexually transmitted infections? You can get an STI from the first (or only) sexual act you share with someone. You can get an STI from oral sex and from vaginal sex. (P.S. Some STIs can't be cured.)

Start a conversation now, not when...

Be upfront about what you do and don't want to do. Listen to what your partner does and doesn't want to do. Talk about this when you're not in "a heated moment." You can communicate better then.



It's OK to say "No" at any time

You can't "undo" that first time. When it happens, ideally, you are 100% okay with that decision. This is true for every kind of sexual activity — from kissing to having sex. It doesn't matter whether you started it or you're participating in it. You get to say no.

Even if you're in the middle of some sort of sexual activity...

You get to say, "No, stop!" or similar language at any time. And your partner should respect it. If he or she doesn't, do whatever you have to do to get out of that situation. Yell "NO!" Scream, push away, kick, run. This is your body. You're the only person in this moment who can protect yourself.

Even if you said "Yes" at first...

You can change your mind at any time — with a totally clear conscience. You didn't "lead your partner on." You just changed your mind. You get to do that. And your partner should respect it.

Were you assaulted?

It could be considered a sexual assault or rape if someone:

- Doesn't stop when you tell them to stop.
- Uses force to get you to do something.
- Does something to you when you can't give "permission" or "consent." An example of that could be if you'd been drinking or had drugs in your body. This is also referred to as "being under the influence."

It also could be considered a sexual assault or rape if you are under age 18 and the other person:

- Is older than you by at least a couple years, or
- Is related to you.

All of these issues apply to boys, girls, men, and women. If you want to talk to someone about this, you can contact your health care provider's office. He or she can keep the conversation confidential if you want them to do that. You can also talk to another trusted adult.

You can also contact the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN):

- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- Website: www.RAINN.org



Don't Be Pressured to Do "Other Things"

Sometimes when one partner tells the other partner that they're not ready to have sex, it seems to create a "power imbalance" in the relationship. And when that happens, sometimes the "rejected" partner puts on a lot of pressure to do other kinds of sexual activity instead. **Don't be pressured to do other things.**

If your partner tries to tell you, "Well, it's not sex so you should be okay with this," that's manipulation. And that's not okay.

someone who tries to pressure you is NOT someone you want to be with!

Not sure how to say "No"? Try these rejects

- ~ "Look, I like you a lot, and I'd like to continue to get to know you. But having sex is not something I want to do now."
- ~ "No. Because it'd be way too hard to carry a baby AND a backpack around campus."
- ~ "No, because I'm going to college and I don't want to share a dorm with my baby."
- ~ "No. Because I don't want to."
- ~ "Doing this is a big deal, and I'm not ready for it yet."
- ~ "No because I need my job and my scholarship, and I'd lose both if I had to stay home and take care of a baby."
- ~ "No, and if you can't live with that, we're going to have to go our separate ways."

If You Decide to Have Sex

Are you protected?

If this is the right time for you to have sex, are you protected? To avoid pregnancy and STIs, abstinence is a 100% sure way to do that. To avoid pregnancy, there are many reliable forms of birth control. Such as IUDs, implants, shots, and pills. A condom used correctly is the only way to reduce the risk for an STI.

Note: You are the only person who can keep you safe. Don't rely on someone else to bring a condom, even if you trust him or her. Bring your own and know how to use it.

Need more info about protection?

If you're not sure how to protect yourself, you can always talk to your health care provider. Your care team has the most up-to-date information about STIs and birth control. And they'll keep your questions confidential.

Want to make a change to your dating or sex life?

- ~ Maybe you wish you'd never had sex or participated in any other sexual activity.
- ~ Maybe you're okay with your previous activity, but that was a special person. And you don't plan to be sexually active again — at least not until you're in a committed relationship.
- ~ Maybe your previous partner has told a lot of people that you did it, and now you're getting pressure from others to do it.

The past is the past. You had your reasons then. You get to make new choices today.

Saying “No” after a “Yes”

Every relationship is different. The timing, level of trust and closeness you have are all different with each new boyfriend or girlfriend.

There are many different reasons to avoid sexual activity. **Be strong in your decision. Do not be pressured.** See also “Is It Time to Talk About Sex?”



Final Thoughts

There are a LOT of new things to learn during your teen years, including how to navigate relationships and thinking about being sexually active. In some moments, decisions come easily. In other moments, you have to work through a lot of heavy issues to come to decisions that you feel confident about.

When you're in a new relationship, you want to look your best and be liked. But you also need to be honest with yourself and your partner. You want to learn about each other so you can have a healthy and happy relationship.

You can be your “best real self” in a relationship when you are true to yourself, when you know what’s important to you, and when you feel empowered about your decisions.

*What you do every day,
including who you date
and how you treat your
body, needs to be good
and healthy for you!*





BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.

MAYO CLINIC | 200 First Street SW | Rochester, MN 55905 | mayoclinic.org

©2017 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved. MAYO, MAYO CLINIC and the triple-shield Mayo logo are trademarks and service marks of MFMER.

MC7991