

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Start Talking!   
Building a Drug-Free Future



## Know! To Talk Teen Relationships and Dating

February is the month of romance, so what better time than now to bring up the subject in your classroom? Boys and girls need to be taught about healthy dating relationships. They need clarity on their specific family rules regarding teen romance and dating. And, they need to be keenly aware that no means no, and that “love” does not equal sex. This is a critical subject that needs to be discussed regularly with teens throughout adolescence. Here are some specific topics to address:

Uncomfortable with the topic? Understandable, but you have to do it. If you don't answer your teen's questions, they'll look elsewhere for the information, including their friends and the internet. This is a critical subject that needs to be discussed regularly with our children throughout adolescence. Here are some specific topics to address:

► **Healthy Teen Relationships:** Role modeling is the most effective tool in teaching your child what a healthy relationship looks like. But in addition to seeing it in action, young people need to be taught that a healthy relationship includes mutual respect, understanding, trust, honesty, communication, and support. It also involves setting healthy boundaries that are respected by both partners (including NO means NO), as well as the freedom to maintain outside interests and friendships.

► **Unhealthy and Abusive Teen Relationships:** Unhealthy relationships consist of any type of imbalance of power and control, which can develop into an abusive relationship as well. One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner. Abusive relationships in adolescence additionally place youth at a greater likelihood for making other hazardous life choices, which oftentimes lead to substance misuse, eating disorders, and risky sexual behaviors.

► **Differences between Infatuation, Lust and Love:** During adolescence in particular, infatuation and lust are oftentimes mistaken for “love,” as they can all three elicit those feel-good butterflies and goosebumps. But there is a difference, a big difference. Typically based on physical attraction, infatuation can happen instantly, and even with



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someone you don't know. It is short-lived and once those momentary feelings wear off, so does the desire to be with that person. The same goes with lust - which is the intense desire for someone or something. Unlike infatuation and lust, love builds and develops over time. Where infatuation and lust can cause people to act selfishly, for their own pleasure, love is unselfish, kind, respectful, honest, and desires only positive outcomes for the other person. The key here is that love does NOT equal sex. And if a partner truly loves you, he or she will not pressure you to do anything you are not ready to do.

► **Sex:** At this point, your students are likely familiar with the birds and bees, but give them a chance to get clarity and ask questions. It's fine to acknowledge that the subject is a little uncomfortable, but it is important to be direct and share with them the risks of sexual activity objectively, including the emotional pain, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancy. They also need to hear that oral sex, which is popular among teens, isn't a risk-free alternative to intercourse. This is also a good opportunity to encourage them to talk to their parents about personal family values and their religious beliefs.

► **Offer Your Support:** It's about showing compassion when needed, lending an attentive ear, and letting them know they can come to you with questions or concerns. When and if they do come to you for support, be sure to give them words of affirmation and praise for their good decision – which will open or strengthen those lines of communication.

As you talk to your students, you may want to consider using gender-inclusive language regarding sexual preference. If a young person is questioning their sexual orientation, this may provide the open door they're looking for to share their feelings with someone – maybe you. It may also help your teen feel more comfortable with his or her identity.

And finally, the most important things you can do when talking with students about relationships and dating is to show them respect; respect for their opinions and beliefs, and respect for their individuality.

Sources: [The Heritage Foundation. Teen Sex: The Parent Factor. Oct. 7, 2008.](#)  
[LoveIsRespect.org: Dating Abuse Statistics.](#) [Mayo Clinic. Healthy Lifestyle: Sexual Health - Sex education: Talking to your teen](#) [Psychology Today.](#)  
[Deborah Anapol Ph.D. - Love Without Limits: What Is Love, and What Isn't? Nov. 25, 2011.](#)

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