

**Dating**

 The Adventure of Dating

Dating can be an exciting and fun experience. It gives you a chance to meet new people and try new things. While you are getting to know someone, you also get to know yourself. You can decide what is important to you and what is not so important and learn about the kind of people you like and respect and those you don’t. Dating is a big part of growing up.

Dating can also be confusing. There are a lot of choices and decisions to make, and you may not be sure how to proceed. Maybe you have a crush on someone and don’t know how to tell that person. Or maybe someone has a crush on you and you aren’t sure what to do. You may be afraid to ask someone on a date or to go on a date if someone asks you. What will you talk about? Where will you go? Will you have to or want to kiss? Will you want to have sex?

Dating is like riding a roller coaster. You want to try it, and you think you’ll like it, but you aren’t sure exactly what to expect. While it’s happening, your stomach feels funny, your palms are sweaty, and you’re scared. Then you suddenly realize that you are laughing, having fun, and enjoying yourself.

Spending time with someone who you think of as more than a friend can often lead to a romantic relationship. This experience is an exciting part of growing up. In such a relationship, you have to learn how to balance the time spent with your romantic partner with everything else in your life, such as school, friends, and family. You have to figure out when the right time is for you to get serious. You can talk about things such as dating exclusively (which means you go out only with each other and do not date other people), whether or not to act on sexual feelings, and your future together. You might also have to figure out when a relationship isn’t working and if it is time to say good-bye.

While you are dating, just like when riding a roller coaster, you also have to think about safety. You need to look out for yourself. That means learning about things such as date rape, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and physical and mental abuse. These things happen in all kinds of relationships, even between teenagers. You need to know how to be smart, stay safe, and get help if you need it.

Maybe you don’t even want to date yet. Maybe your parents won’t allow it. That’s okay, too. Every person is different, and different people start dating at different times. Some people do a lot of dating before they find someone with whom they want to have a relationship. Sometimes those relationships work, and other times they don’t. Others find one person, date them, start a relationship, and live happily ever after.

When you are in a relationship, you learn about your values and your emotions. Honesty, trust, and respect are important aspects of any close friendship or relationship. And though dating and romantic relationships aren’t always predictable or easy, they are enriching and an important part of growing up.

To Date or Not to Date?

You may be asking yourself, “What does ‘dating’ mean, anyway?” The truth of the matter is that dating means many different things, depending on whom you talk to. How do you know if you are dating someone? Well, there isn’t an easy answer to this question.

You can date someone you see every day or just once a week. You can also date someone who lives next door, across the country, or even across the world. You can date more than one person or commit yourself to just one. You may go out on dates to places like the movies or the local diner. If you don’t drive or don’t have access to a car, you may just hang out together at school and at friends’ houses. And just because you are doing these things with someone doesn’t always mean that you are dating. Maybe the two of you are just good friends.

Confused? If you are, that’s okay. Dating is complicated. The most important thing to remember is to talk to your partner. Make sure that you both agree on the kind of relationship you have. It is easy to hurt someone’s feelings if you are not communicating clearly.

If you’re not sure where you stand with someone, don’t be afraid to ask them. Find out what kind of relationship the person thinks you two have and what kind of relationship they want to have with you in the future. Whether you decide to date or to be just friends, it is important to have an honest, open relationship and good communication.

**How Do I Know If I’m Ready?**

As a teenager, you are probably pretty curious about sex. Your body is changing, and you may be experiencing some emotions that are new to you. Suddenly, you may find yourself sexually attracted to others.

Along with these physical changes come many emotional changes. You may feel the need to try new things and be more independent. You may want to meet new people and start new relationships. Dating helps to teach you how to treat other people and also allows you to discover how you want to be treated by others. Through dating, you can grow as a person and become more confident, self-sufficient, and independent.

Some people begin dating in their early teens, whereas others wait until their twenties. Peer pressure—when people around you pressure you to do things that you wouldn’t normally do—can be tough to deal with. Though it can be hard to stand up for what you believe in, and for what you want to do and not do, ultimately, others will respect you for making your own choices. Don’t let others make decisions for you. If you don’t want to date now, do not let other people’s opinions sway you. And if you do want to date, remember that in order for it to be a positive experience, you have to be mature enough to know what you want.

In any relationship, especially a romantic one, it is important to be sensitive. This means being able to respect someone else’s thoughts, feelings, and opinions, regardless of whether you agree with them. You also should be able to communicate effectively with the person you date. You should be honest with each other and try to resolve your differences. Everyone feels hurt, jealous, and angry sometimes. Solving problems together makes a relationship stronger.

When you build a new relationship, you are also building trust. And with this bond should come comfort. If you are shy and nervous and find dating uncomfortable, maybe you should wait until you feel ready.

Does all of this sound hard to do? It is, but you don’t need to do it all at once. People spend entire lifetimes learning to respect, trust, and communicate with the ones they care about. If you are willing to jump in and get started with all this, you are probably ready to date.

**Parents? Not a Problem**

Your parents may want to be involved in your social life. If this is the case and you have decided that you are ready to date, talk to your parents about your decision. It is better to be up front, rather than sneaking around without their knowledge.

Explain why you feel ready to start dating. Presenting a thoughtful argument for dating will show them that you take it seriously and that you intend to behave responsibly. Your parents may put some restrictions on you, such as a curfew or deciding how often you can date, where you are allowed to go, and if you can use the car. By showing your parents that you acknowledge their concerns, you will earn their trust.

Sometimes parents decide that teens should not date. Depending on your age, religion, and background, your parents may have certain ideas about when dating is appropriate. If your parents forbid you to date, ask them why. Perhaps you can address their concerns. If not, it is best to obey them. Disobeying your parents will cause them to lose trust in you and to doubt your maturity. If they do not want you to date, wait a few months and then discuss dating with them again. Your responsible behavior may convince them that you are ready to date after all.

Crushes, Flirting, and Other Scary Things

It always happens when you least expect it. There you are, minding your own business, and you look up and see them. Or maybe you’re hanging out with your friends and suddenly they walk by. Time stops, and the world around you fades away. That’s it—you have a crush.

**Crushes**

When you have a crush, meaning that you like someone from afar, you usually want to get to know the object of your affection better. However, you may not be sure how to go about this. Everyone gets crushes. Sometimes teens have crushes on people who are much older than they are, such as a teacher, coach, or friend’s mom or dad.

Crushes are fun, but they can be scary, too. The uncertainty about what to do about your crush can be exciting. As long as you do not become obsessed, crushes are a safe way to get used to all the feelings that attraction brings. You may be tongue-tied and terrified around your crush. That’s okay; more than likely they will not know this is going on. That is why crushes are fun. But remember, crushes are not the same as relationships; you may admire someone without the feeling being returned. If you do start to date, you will experience some of the same feelings you had during your crush. This is good because you will be able to recognize the feelings that you are having and they will not seem so strange.

**Same-Sex Crushes**

Many people have crushes on someone of the same sex. Girls can get crushes on other girls and guys can get crushes on other guys. Teens often wonder if having a same-sex crush means that they are gay. Almost everyone has a same-sex crush during their life and it is perfectly normal. We get crushes on people we like, admire, and respect, and we want them to like, admire, and respect us. Often same-sex crushes don’t have an element of sexual or romantic attraction.

If you do feel sexually or romantically attracted to someone of the same sex, you might be gay. There’s nothing wrong with being gay; it’s just another way of loving and caring for others.

However, some people think that being gay is wrong or immoral, which can make things hard for gay teens. If you think you are gay, talk about it with someone you trust. They can encourage you and help you to find out more about services that support gay people.

**Flirting: Do or Don’t?**

When you have a crush on someone, you want that person to notice you. You want them to see that you are smart, funny, attractive, likable, and a good person. Basically, you want your crush to like you as much as you like them.

One way to get your crush to notice you—and hopefully like you—is to flirt. Flirting is acting in a way that draws attention to you and is often a playful way of getting to know someone. Teens of all genders, non-gender (nonbinary) teens, and teens who are transitioning genders all flirt.

Flirting often gets a bad rap, but it’s not necessarily a negative thing. Flirting is a way of subtly expressing your attraction for someone. It’s a great way to make a good impression on your crush while you are letting the person know you like them.

Sometimes all it takes is letting someone know that you are interested in them. Once you get someone’s attention, try to get a simple conversation started. If you are relaxed, the two of you will probably enjoy talking to each other. That is the first step. Some people are shy, especially in new situations. But if someone wants to get to know you, too, your attention will please them.

The most important thing to remember while flirting is to be yourself. It is okay to show off all the good qualities you have, but don’t go overboard. Good flirting is showing yourself to your best advantage and flattering the other person. Bad flirting is pretending to be someone you’re not or making the other person uncomfortable. If you act less intelligent, capable, sensitive, or thoughtful than you really are, you’re not showing your crush the real you. When it comes to flirting, it can be hard to know where to draw the line. Just be yourself. You are smart, talented, attractive, and fun—there’s no need to act differently.

Okay, so you’ve decided that you are ready to date, and your parents approve. You have found the person that you would like to get to know better. You have made the first step in getting to know your crush. Maybe you have tried flirting, maybe not. Are you ready for the next big step—the date itself?

**"Sexting"**

 Some teens use "sexting" as a new and extreme way to flirt. Don't be tempted. Sexting—sending provocative, nude, or partially nude images over cell phones—has gained recent attention as it’s become more common among teens. A 2018 study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* showed that at least one in four teens (ranging in age from 12 to 17 years old) are receiving sexually explicit texts and emails, at least one in seven are sending sexts, and more than one in ten teens are forwarding sexts without consent.

What many teens don’t realize is that sexting is a crime. Sending nude images of those under 18 through digital media can be considered child pornography. The people taking and sending the images can be charged with a crime—whether they themselves are underage or not. That means that a teen who sends a nude photo of themselves to a partner can actually be charged with transmitting child pornography under the law.

While often meant to be private, these images, as reflected in the above *JAMA Pediatrics* study, often find their way to other people, too. In some cases, images have been sent to other friends, classmates, and even more widely into a teen’s community, causing a great deal of embarrassment and shame.

Getting Started: Making a Date

Just like writing a paper, the hardest part of dating is getting started. Many teens say they don’t date because they are afraid to ask someone out. Years ago, it was mainly guys who asked girls for a date. Today, however, girls and teens of other gender identities are taking charge and asking others out, too.

If you want to ask someone out, it may be easier if you plan in advance what you are going to say. Have an idea of where you would like to go on the date. Ask your date to do something specific, like go to a movie, a school dance, or a party. You will also want to speak to the person alone. Asking for a date is hard enough without a group of snickering friends peering over your shoulder.

Let’s be real—it is hard to ask someone out on a date! You are making yourself vulnerable and risking rejection. After all, the person could say no. But they could say yes, too! The best advice: Get up your courage, take a deep breath, and ask.

**When the Risk Pays Off**

You’ve taken a chance and asked. And the person said yes! Or maybe someone has asked you for a date and you’ve said yes. Now what? Whether you have been asked out or you’ve done the asking, you’ll want to be part of planning the date.

First dates don’t have to be elaborate, expensive events. You can do something as simple and inexpensive as going to a friend’s party or meeting at a school football game. The important thing is that you both agree on what to do.

If you have asked someone to go to a movie, find out what kind of films the person likes and then decide on a film together. If someone has asked you to dinner, don’t be shy about sharing your likes and dislikes. If you are a vegetarian, do not agree to go to a steakhouse. If you hate seafood and your date suggests going to a restaurant that specializes in fish dishes, speak up. Do not be afraid of hurting the other person’s feelings. After all, if you don’t enjoy the movie or the meal, you won’t have a good time.

Consider planning your first date with a group of people. It makes conversation a lot easier, and the date may go more smoothly with others around. Dating in a group takes the pressure off you and your date. You can go on a double date with another couple or just hang out with a bunch of friends. Stream a show or movie together, hang out in the park, or pick another group activity. It’s easier to be yourself when you are around people you are familiar with.

After picking the event together, decide on a time. Do you want to see a movie at night or an afternoon matinee? On a school night or a weekend? You will also need to think about transportation. Who is going to drive? If neither of you is old enough to drive, you’ll have to arrange a way to get there and back or make a plan to meet. When planning your date, keep your parents’ rules in mind. After all, you don’t want to break curfew or borrow the car without asking and end up grounded.

**Dealing With Rejection**

Unfortunately, your crush may say no to a date. Dating disappointments happen to everyone, but they hurt just the same. If someone turns you down for a date, it is best to simply say okay and walk away. People have all sorts of reasons for not going on a date, and often those reasons have nothing to do with you. Maybe that person isn’t allowed to date or maybe they already have a romantic partner. Sometimes a person simply isn’t interested in you romantically.

If you question the girl in your chemistry class about why she turned you down for a date, you are likely to end up with hurt feelings. If she is trying to be considerate, don’t make her explain in detail why she can’t or doesn’t want to go out with you. Also, don’t argue. You won’t change her mind, and you will both end up feeling very uncomfortable.

What if someone asks you out on a date and you don’t want to go? It’s perfectly acceptable to say no, and it’s the best thing to do. Dating someone because you don’t want to say no or because you feel bad for that person isn’t fair to either of you. By accepting the date, you would be giving that person the impression that you are romantically interested when you aren’t. Instead, be polite and say, “No, thanks.”

Don’t make excuses for saying no, unless they’re true. If you tell Mike that you can’t go out with him on Saturday night because you already planned to go to a movie with your best friend, he might assume that you would go if you were not busy and will probably ask you out again. What will you say then? A firm, polite “No, thank you” will let him down gently without giving him false hope.

**The Big Moment**

A word about kissing: Despite what some people say, there is no rule about kissing on the first date. Do what feels right for you. If you like the person and want to kiss them, make sure it’s okay with the other person and then go ahead. If you don’t feel ready yet, you don’t have to kiss anyone. And don’t be insulted if your date doesn’t try to kiss you. If the time is right, the kiss will happen.

What Is a Relationship Anyway?

We all have many different kinds of relationships. You have relationships with parents, siblings, and other relatives. You also have relationships with friends, acquaintances, peers, coworkers, team members, and teachers. Here, when we talk about a relationship, it refers to a romantic relationship between two people who care for each other.

After two people have gone on a few dates, they usually realize that they are getting to know one another better. At this stage, a relationship is starting to develop. In a relationship, you can learn more about your partner’s likes and dislikes, family and friends, hopes, dreams, fears, and sense of humor.

However, in any relationship in which you share your innermost thoughts and feelings, you are also vulnerable, meaning that you are at risk of getting hurt. You are sharing private parts of yourself with someone. A relationship can be scary, but it can also be wonderful. Being part of a healthy relationship can teach you a lot about yourself.

**The Right Stuff**

Romantic partners have all sorts of ways of relating to and behaving with each other. You may know some couples who are very serious and others who joke around a lot. Maybe you know some couples who spend lots of time together, whereas other couples see each other only once in a while. Different people have different ways of being together, but a few elements are key to all healthy relationships.

**Communication**

In a healthy relationship, couples talk openly to one another. They share their thoughts, opinions, emotions, and ideas. Couples even tell each other when they feel hurt, angry, ashamed, or jealous. It is not always easy to share your feelings with someone else, but it is very important. By revealing more about yourselves, you get to know each other better. By sharing your problems, hurts, and frustrations, you can then figure out a way to resolve them together. That makes your relationship stronger.

**Individuality**

It is important to be comfortable with who you are, especially when you are in a relationship. Each person brings something unique and special to the relationship. Couples complement one another by playing off each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Think about the qualities or character traits that you like best about your romantic partner.

**Honesty and Trust**

Honesty builds trust, and trust is an essential part of a happy relationship. Couples need to be truthful with each other and up front about problems and other complicated issues. As a couple, you rely on each other. It is important that you and your partner trust each other and believe that the other will be there for emotional support in times of need.

**Respect**

To show respect means that you value the opinions, beliefs, and ideas of someone else. Basically, you believe in that person. People in healthy relationships respect one another. They do not purposely hurt, put down, or upset each other. Though they may not always see eye-to-eye about everything, they respect their partner’s opinion.

**Keeping It in Perspective**

It’s easy to get wrapped up in a relationship when you think that you have found the perfect person. You are getting to know each other better and having a great time. It sometimes seems as if nothing is as much fun as being with your partner. However, it is important to keep things in perspective. You need to find a balance between your relationship and all the other aspects of your life. These include your family, friends, school, a part-time job, pets, hobbies, and other interests.

Before you get too caught up in a new relationship, take a moment to think about what makes you unique. What are your talents and your strengths? Are you a musician, a writer, an athlete, or just an all-around fun, interesting person? Do not neglect the rest of your life. You will need to learn how to balance your responsibilities.

Your talents and hobbies make you happy, so do not stop pursuing them. Also, you should be careful not to neglect the people who care about you. With your family and good friends by your side, providing comfort and support, you can probably make it through anything.

You don’t need to spend all of your time with your partner in order for your relationship to be strong. The more you do and learn individually, the more you will have to contribute to your relationship. People who truly care about you want you to be the best, most talented, and most interesting person you can be.

Dating Smarts and Safety

Dating and relationships are an important part of growing up—something that many teens want to experience. However, there are some concerns that you should be aware of in regard to dating and relationship safety. If you want to make the most of your teen years, you need to be smart and stay safe.

**Date and Acquaintance Rape**

Date rape occurs when two people are on a date and one person forces the other to have sex. Acquaintance rape means that the rapist is someone the victim knows but is not necessarily dating. Anyone of any gender can be date rapists and anyone of any gender can be victims. However, in most date rape situations, girls and women are the victims and boys and men are the aggressors.

According to a February 2017 report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a national survey found that ten percent of teens had been kissed, touched, or forced into having sex by someone they were dating against their will. Some date rapists are violent criminals who threaten to hurt or kill their victims. More often, date rapists are men who force women to have sex by pressuring and physically intimidating them. A 2019 report from the CDC also found that one in twelve high school students had experienced physical dating violence (hitting, kicking, or another type of physical force used against them). For both people involved in a relationship, regardless of gender, it is extremely important to be sensitive to what your partner wants. If your date or partner says that they do not want to have sex, respect that choice. Don’t put sexual pressure on your partner. Instead, talk about what you both want and try to figure out a way to meet each other’s needs.

It is especially important for women to be very clear about their sexual choices to young men. If you don’t want to have sex, tell your date “no” firmly. If he persists, leave or call for help. Also, you are allowed to change your mind, even at the last minute. Maybe you thought you wanted to have sex, but then you realized you didn’t. Sex is not something you should engage in because you feel guilty. You can always say no—no matter what. And remember, whatever the circumstances, rape is never your fault. This applies to people of all genders and all sexual orientations.

**Dating Smarts**

To stay safe, you’ll need to be cautious on dates, especially when you don’t know the person well. By following the tips below, you can avoid many dangerous situations.

* Avoid being alone with someone you don’t know well or trust completely.
* Give a family member or friend your date’s name, where you are meeting them, and when you expect to be back.
* Drive yourself to and from a date or arrange transportation beforehand. Don’t get into a car alone with someone you don’t know well.
* Always bring a phone or money on a date in case you need to call someone to pick you up or pay for transportation home.
* Don’t drink alcohol or take drugs and don’t stay with a date who does. People under the influence of alcohol and drugs make poor decisions.
* If your date seems angry, violent, abusive, or unstable, leave immediately.
* Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable or frightened, call for help or get out of the situation immediately.

**Recognizing an Abusive Relationship**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence against women is devastatingly pervasive, with one in three (around 736 million) being subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or from a non-partner. Also, approximately one of every three high school students has been involved in an abusive relationship. Teens who plan to date need to know the signs of an abusive relationship.

An abusive relationship is one in which one person mistreats the other in some way. The abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional. Abusers often have other problems in their lives. They may have emotional problems, drug or alcohol problems, or difficulties at home. Even so, there is no excuse for abuse. Hurting someone is definitely not the right way to deal with your own problems and frustrations. Similarly, if someone has abused you in any way, it is not your fault. No one asks to be hurt, and no one deserves it. You need to get away from your abuser and get help. Your safety and well-being depend on it. Abusive relationships can have long-lasting effects on your mental health. According to Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), the likelihood that a person suffers suicidal or depressive thoughts increases after sexual violence. People who have been sexually assaulted are also more likely to use drugs than the general public.

**Help is Out There**

If you have been raped or abused, you need to get help right away. You may feel as though you are all alone, but you aren’t. Many people have experienced date or acquaintance rape and have survived. All sorts of resources are available to help you. First of all, you need to get to a safe place away from your attacker or abuser. Tell a parent, friend, teacher, or someone else you trust what has happened. They can encourage and support you while you get help.

If you’ve been raped or physically or sexually abused, call the police and get medical attention. Eventually you’ll have to tell your parents. Remember, you have done nothing wrong. There is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed. If you think you will have trouble telling your parents, ask someone to be there with you to help you.

People who have been raped or abused have to cope with feelings such as anger, shame, embarrassment, depression, and sometimes even thoughts of suicide. Talking about what you are feeling is the best way to handle your emotions. You can speak to a school counselor, therapist, or someone else you think can help you get through this. Many people have survived rape and abuse; you can, too.

Getting Serious: Beyond Dating

After you have been dating the same person for a while, there may come a time when you discover that your relationship is getting more serious. The two of you are probably spending more time together, you tell each other things you would not tell other people, and you are growing closer emotionally. When this happens, you may decide that you want to date only each other. If you decide to date one person exclusively, this means that you and your partner agree that neither of you will date anyone else. Some people call this “going out.” Some couples even exchange small gifts as a sign of their commitment.

Going out with someone takes your relationship to a new level. It requires even more trust, honesty, and communication. It also requires sacrifice, because each of you is giving up the opportunity to date other people. Before you agree to date someone exclusively, think about how that will change your social life. If you don’t think you are ready or think you may get bored or restless dating only one person, you may want to wait.

On the other hand, if you think you are ready to commit to one person, go ahead and do it. Dating exclusively is an important part of learning about yourself and can show you what you need to be in a relationship. It teaches you a lot about the qualities of a healthy and beneficial relationship. You learn a lot about caring for and loving another person.

**The Future**

As you get older, you will need to think about what role your relationship will play in your future. When you near the end of high school, you will start considering new options—going to college, getting a job, or possibly moving to a new place.

**Across the Miles: Long-Distance Relationships**

If you or your partner is moving away after high school, you will have to decide if you want to continue your relationship. You can have a long-distance relationship, in which you are still together but don’t see each other as often as you would if you lived close. You might only see each other twice a month, once a month, or maybe even only once every few months. Long-distance relationships can be just as happy and healthy as those in which people see each other every day. However, they require an added level of commitment.

Some people decide to stay together even if they are separated by many miles, and their relationships are stronger because of it. Others decide that they can’t handle a long-distance relationship. They think they will be lonely or feel left out if they aren’t dating someone who lives nearby. Talk to your partner and together decide what is right for you.

**A Lifetime Commitment**

Some young people are so committed to each other that they decide to get married. Marriage is a huge decision—one that you should consider very carefully. When you get married, you are committing yourself to another person for the rest of your life. You are saying, “This person is the one for me. I don’t need to date anymore or try out any more new relationships. I’ve found my lifetime partner.”

Unfortunately, the majority of teenage marriages end in divorce. As you get older, you will grow and change in many ways. You are still developing your adult identity in your twenties and even your thirties. Your likes and dislikes, opinions and interests—all these can change radically. The person you thought you wanted to be with forever when you were seventeen might not be the person you want to be with when you are twenty-five.

If you are truly in love with someone, that love will last. Consider waiting a few years before getting married. You don’t need to hurry into any big decisions. If you are right for each other, your love won’t fade. By waiting to marry, you will give your relationship time to develop and grow. Then, when you’re ready to say “I do,” it will mean even more.

When It’s Over: Breaking Up

Going on dates and being in a relationship help you to discover what kind of person you feel the most comfortable with. By dating different people, you can see what sort of person fits you best. You will also realize what sort of person you don’t want as a partner and discover who isn’t right for you. Relationships are learning experiences—even the ones that do not work out the way that you would have liked. All relationships help you figure out what you do and don’t want in life.

If you don’t have fun with your partner anymore—if you argue a lot or seem to have grown far apart—it may be time to reassess your relationship. Analyze the feelings you have for your partner. Do they add something special to your life? Do they make you happy? If you have tried to work things out but you are still not happy, that means that it’s time to break up.

**Letting Someone Down Easy**

When you are in a relationship with someone, it is because you care about them. Most of the time, even if you want to end a relationship, you probably will still care for your partner and not want to hurt them. It can be difficult to end a relationship in a non-hurtful way. It takes a lot of maturity.

It might be tempting to try to force the relationship to end so that you won’t have to actually break up. You may find yourself treating your partner badly or doing things to push them away. Often you may not realize that you are behaving this way. You may think that if you are inconsiderate enough or mean enough, it will force your partner to break up with you. This plan might work, but you will both feel hurt and angry in the end. Besides, you probably do not really want to mistreat someone you care about. You owe it to your partner to be honest.

When you decide it is time to break up, pick a private place to tell the person. Tell them how you feel and why you think it is best for you to end your relationship. Be honest, but don’t hurt the person unnecessarily. Be prepared for them to ask questions. You also owe it to the person to explain why you are breaking up.

Don’t be surprised if they get upset. After you have finished explaining yourself, leave the person alone to deal with the news. It might take a while for it to sink in, and they will probably want some space in order to be able to figure things out. However, if the person seems extremely upset and you think that they might hurt themselves, stay until someone else arrives to help.

**Dealing With Getting Dumped**

While it is hard to break up with someone, it is even harder to have someone break up with you. People call this “getting dumped” because that is often how it feels. No matter how you think a relationship is going, people rarely expect the breakup when it happens. If someone ends a relationship with you, you need to accept that it is over. The reality of the end of your relationship may take a while to sink in, but you have to respect the other person’s decision. Trying to change their mind or win them back will only make things more stressful and uncomfortable for both of you.

If someone breaks up with you, take some time alone to think about the relationship and to figure out how to deal with your feelings. You might see that the decision is the best one for you, too. Or maybe that will take some time. This is a good time to turn to your friends. Everyone, no matter how popular or attractive, has been dumped. Your friends will understand how you feel and will be able to comfort you.

It also helps to keep busy. Remind yourself that you have a very full life, even without the relationship. Remember that you had a great life before you began the relationship. Things can be even better after it’s over.

If you truly feel devastated by the breakup, you may want to seek help. Being dumped can make you feel hurt, lonely, and depressed. However, if your feelings are too powerful to handle or last well after the relationship has ended, talk to your parents, a teacher, or a school counselor about how you're feeling. They can assist you in finding a professional counselor who can help you in handling your feelings.

**Moving On**

When a relationship ends, it sometimes feels like the end of the world. It takes some time to recover from the hurt and loneliness that comes with a breakup. This is true even when you are the person who ends the relationship.

Remember that being single has lots of advantages. Now is your chance to enjoy them. You can spend time with friends you lost touch with and reconnect with your family. You can get that perfect 4.0 GPA you have been after or try something you’ve never done before. Take a kickboxing class. Read a really good novel. Start writing in a journal so that you can record your feelings and look back at this time later on. When you are not dating anyone, you will find that you have a lot more free time. Do something fun with it.

**Acting Out on Social Media**

 It’s normal to feel angry, humiliated, or hurt after breaking up with someone. However, acting out in anger or seeking revenge against an ex is never acceptable. Although it may seem harmless to bad-mouth your ex or post an embarrassing photo or video on social media, your actions can have major consequences. It’s important to remember that anything you post online can potentially be seen by everyone, even with the tightest security settings.

Posting or sharing nude or sexually explicit photos or videos of another person without their consent is a growing problem and a serious offense in many countries, including Australia, Japan, Canada, and Israel, and several states in the U.S. If you are caught posting private or intimate images of someone, you could be charged with producing, possessing, and/or distributing pornography. This typically includes jail time and a hefty fine, and you may be required to register as a sex offender. If you send the images to your friends, they could be charged with possession of pornography. If the person in the photo or video is under eighteen years old, you could face charges of child pornography, which carry even more severe penalties. Be aware that lawmakers and law enforcement are cracking down on minors who share sexually explicit images. Being accused of or charged with a sex crime can follow you for the rest of your life.

If your personal photos or videos have been shared without your consent, the first step is to tell a trusted adult. If you are not comfortable telling your parents, you can talk to a teacher, coach, or a friend’s parent. You can also contact the police for help. They will advise you about specific laws and legal services in your area, and can suggest ways to help you get your photos or videos taken down. Finally, consider talking to a teacher or librarian about safe ways to take control of your digital reputation and build a positive social media presence. You may feel embarrassed and angry about what has happened, but help is available.

Ten Great Questions to Ask About Dating

1. How old is old enough to date?
2. My parents don’t think I am old enough to date, but I do think I am old enough. Can I convince them that they can trust my judgment? How?
3. I want to ask someone in one of my classes out, but I am afraid they will say no. What do I say? What do I do if they say no?
4. My friends don't like the person I'm dating. What should I do?
5. I don’t want to have sex with the person I am dating and they are pressuring me. How do I get them to stop? What if they won’t?
6. How do I know if I’m ready to go out with someone?
7. My partner and I have been together for a while but I don’t think I want to date them any longer. How do I know when the relationship is over? How do I break up with them?
8. I recently broke up with my partner and now I have to see them all the time in school and it’s hard. What can I do to not feel bad when I see this person?
9. I don’t think my friend is being very smart about their relationships. Should I say something? What can I say without making them angry?
10. All my friends are dating and I’m not. Is something wrong with me?

Myths and Facts About Dating

**Myth:** Rapists are people who hide in the bushes or the shadows of parking garages, waiting to leap out at you.

**Fact:** According to RAINN, eight out of ten rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. Of the sexual abuse cases reported to law enforcement, 93 percent of juvenile victims knew their perpetrator—59 percent were acquaintances and 34 percent were family members. Only 7 percent were strangers to the victims.

**Myth:** All birth control is the same. I’m safe as long as I’m using something.

**Fact:** While spermicides seem like a good alternative to condoms for preventing pregnancy, they can actually irritate the skin, making it easier to transmit disease. Condoms are still the best method of birth control and disease prevention. For example, nonoxynol-9 kills sperm and is the active ingredient in most over-the-counter spermicides. But nonoxynol-9 does NOT protect you from contracting the HIV virus (which causes AIDS) or other sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea or chlamydia.

**Myth:** All first dates should be going to a movie or out to dinner.

**Fact:** A date can be whatever activity you and your date like to do. You could have a picnic, go for a hike, go to a sporting event, or visit an art gallery. Just be sure you will both have fun.

**Myth:** If you don’t want to date, you’re weird.

**Fact:** Completely not true! Some people would rather spend time with their friends or alone than spend time with a romantic partner. Just like any other activity, some people like to date and some people don’t.

Joey’s Story

The amount of success that I have had with dating has been very little to nonexistent. I have built up strong friendships with girls, but I have not managed to get one of them to date me. However, I did a survey for a class and four out of five girls would be willing to date me if I asked them out.

I have asked some girls out to the Homecoming dance. The only success I had was in senior year, when a girl asked me to the dance, and I accepted. I already had a relationship with this girl whom I knew from middle school. She used to call me “mojo jojo.”

I have had a few crushes, and some of the girls I know by name but I don’t talk to them much. The main source of communication I have with them is through classes, or theater productions. I have interacted with all of the girls in my senior class and I have gotten to know most of them through my high school career. However, I still can’t get a date, even given the fact that I know these girls. They all know me from school, but they probably already have boyfriends or have something to do on the weekends.

I did once decide to go to the Homecoming dance on my own, but when I asked a girl to dance she turned me down. That one hurt so badly I was unable to interact with anyone for the rest of the night. I spent the time wandering from seat to seat until my parents came to pick me up.

While I have still not gotten a date, I do have a friend that has given me advice on how to get a date. Thanks to his tutoring, I have gotten a girl’s number, but I have not gotten a date with her.

—Joey

[Share your own story here.](http://www.teenhealthandwellness.com/page/main/SubmitStory.html) Sharing stories is a powerful way to connect with other people. Be part of the Teen Health & Wellness Personal Story Project—like Joey did above—and share your story about successfully dealing with or overcoming a challenge.

Christine’s Story

 One day you will find love, or you will think you found love. Love comes in all different shapes and sizes, ages and genders, miles and cities.

I fell in love with Josh, the love of my life. Like most teenage girls I gave him my heart in ways I never gave to anyone else. That’s when I think things started to go downhill. Josh lives in Denver and I live in Chicago. I began to long for him, his touch, his voice, his body, and his love. I needed his love; I wanted his love so bad to the point where I felt like I couldn’t be without him. I wanted him to love me as much as I loved him but I failed.

As time went on he became confused about us, while I began to think about marriage. He wasn’t ready, I knew it but I didn’t want to believe it. I was pushing him hard to the point where I was pushing him away. Emotionally I was hurt and confused, I began to question myself. What am I doing wrong? Why can’t he see us spending our lives together? Why can’t he love me the way that I love him? I stopped eating and I began to cut myself. I was in pain. At some point I felt like I was losing him. The love I thought we had disappeared.

I broke it off, and I regretted it. I cried for two days, the pain was there and no matter how hard I tried it just wouldn’t go away. I couldn’t stop thinking about him. I hated myself for hurting him and our relationship to the point where I was hurting myself. I felt like I didn’t need to live, I didn’t deserve to live. I kept cutting myself; I swallowed pills, I WANTED TO DIE. I wanted to know if he would miss me if I was gone.

 I grew tired of feeling like this so I got myself a counselor. We talked and I told her things I never told anyone. I was so hung on Josh because I was missing a piece of myself; a piece that my daddy took away from me when he left. After a few sessions I realized I am strong by myself and I don’t need a man.

 I still love Josh with every bone in my body but I’m taking things one day at a time. I have learned to be a stronger person. Josh and I are friends and we both moved on, I’m okay with that. I love him deeply but I would rather be friends than not have him in my life at all. At the end of the day I have to work on me. I’m happy and for all of you who don’t know how to deal with love it will come to you, you will find a way. I’m working on it one day at a time. I miss him so much, I miss us, but if he doesn’t want the same don’t beat yourself up over it. After all it may not be you it may just be him.

—Christine

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Mia’s Story

This is one of the worst breakups I have ever gone through. There was something about this boy and this relationship that was perfect. When we were together it seemed as time had stopped or every problem I had, just disappeared. We would laugh so hard for long periods of time. He was my person. He was my best friend, the person I could go to for anything. But one day that changed. I don’t know how it happened, but it did. When he broke up with me, it felt like I was crushed by three semi trucks. He told me that we couldn’t be together because he couldn’t have a job and focus on school and have a girlfriend all at the same time. After the breakup, I didn’t know what to do. I cried all of the time and I just laid in bed. Hoping and wishing he would come back. As a month went by I started to get better. I started to actually enjoy hanging out with friends again and I wouldn’t cry as much. It’s still a struggle and I would say he still means a lot to me. During this period of time I realized that if you have the same problem for so long, people stop listening to you when you’re begging for help or comfort. I also learned that I could do this on my own because I am strong and even if I have no one in my corner, I will always have myself, and to me that’s all that matters. But if someone was to give me help, I would take it. I don’t want others to struggle like I did, so get help.

—Mia

[Share your own story here.](http://www.teenhealthandwellness.com/page/main/SubmitStory.html) Sharing stories is a powerful way to connect with other people. Be part of the Teen Health & Wellness Personal Story Project—like Mia did above—and share your story about successfully dealing with or overcoming a challenge.

Resources

Break the Cycle
<http://www.breakthecycle.org>
 Break the Cycle teaches young people about the various forms of relationship abuse as well as how to build healthy relationships. The organization offers resources for those dealing with issues related to sexual assault as well as ways for teens to help friends in trouble.

Go Ask Alice
[www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)
 The Go Ask Alice website offers advice and information about a range of topics related to sexuality in straightforward language. This site encourages discussion and education in a setting where young people interact with their peers.

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
<http://www.endsexualviolence.org>
 This national organization works on public policy and advocacy for victims of sexual assault. Its mission is to provide a missing voice in Washington for state coalitions and local programs advocating and organizing against sexual violence and for survivors.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline
 (800) 799-7233 Text: Start to 88788
<https://www.thehotline.org/>
 The National Domestic Violence Hotline is staffed twenty-four hours a day by experts who can provide crisis assistance and information about shelters, health-care centers, and counseling. Assistance is available in English and Spanish, and there is access to more than 140 languages through interpreter services. There are text and chat options available.

NeedHelpNow.ca
[needhelpnow.ca/app/en/](http://needhelpnow.ca/app/en/)
 This site was created by Canadian Centre for Child Protection. It provides help and guidance for teens who have had sexual pictures or videos of themselves put online, and information on how to stop the spread of personal images through texting and social media.

Ontario Women’s Directorate
 (416) 314-0300
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/womens-social-and-economic-opportunity>
 The Directorate works for the safety and economic well-being of women. Its website offers a list of articles on dating and healthy relationships.

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)
 (800) 656-4673
[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)
 This is the nation’s largest anti–sexual assault organization. It partners with local agencies to provide programs to prevent sexual violence, provide aid and support to victims, and ensure that those who commit sexual assault face justice.

Toronto Rape Crisis Centre
 (416) 597-8808
 Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week

For Further Reading

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Glossary

**abstinence** Complete avoidance of a particular activity, such as sex or drug use.

**abusive relationship** Relationship in which one or both people abuse the other physically, sexually, or emotionally.

**acquaintance rape** Forced sexual intercourse or other sexual contact between two people who know each other.

**breakup** The end of a relationship.

**crush** Strong romantic attraction to someone who is not aware of your feelings.

**date** Social engagement between two people who are usually interested in each other romantically.

**date rape** Acquaintance rape that happens between two people who are dating.

**depressed** Feeling extremely sad, uninterested in life, hopeless, or helpless.

**exclusive** Able to exclude or restrict membership of a group or organization; single or sole; undivided as in attention.

**flirt** To act romantically in a casual way, or in a way that draws romantic attention; to experiment with; to come close to, especially a disaster.

**gay** Sexually or romantically attracted to the same sex, often referring to men only but sometimes to lesbians and bisexuals.

**individuality** Traits that distinguish an individual from others.

**peer pressure** Social pressure by members of one’s peer group to conform to the behaviors and wishes of the group.

**rejection** The act or state of not being approved or accepted; process in which the immune system recognizes a transplanted organ as foreign and attacks it.

Citations

**Article Citation in MLA (Modern Language Association) Ninth Edition format:**

“Dating.” *Teen Health and Wellness*, Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., January 2023, teenhealthandwellness.com/article/110/dating. Accessed 29 Mar 2024.

**Article Citation in APA (American Psychological Association) format:**

Dating. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2024, from <https://teenhealthandwellness.com/article/110/dating>

**Article Citation in Chicago Manual of Style format:**

"Dating." Teen Health and Wellness, Rosen Publishing Group, Inc. January 2023. Accessed March 29, 2024. <https://teenhealthandwellness.com/article/110/dating>.

Reviewed by: [Andrea Feder, LCSW](https://teenhealthandwellness.com//static/expert_review_board#afeder)
Updated: January 2023

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