



Five tips for teen dating

Most of all: Talk to your kids and teach them how to date and how to have respect for one another

Sept. 24 — Dating is a time of social experimentation for teens. It's a time to test out which type of partners appeal to them, and how they can negotiate a romantic relationship. But it can also be a confusing time and a difficult time for parents too. "Today" contributor Dr. Gail Saltz, a psychiatrist with New York Presbyterian Hospital, has some advice.

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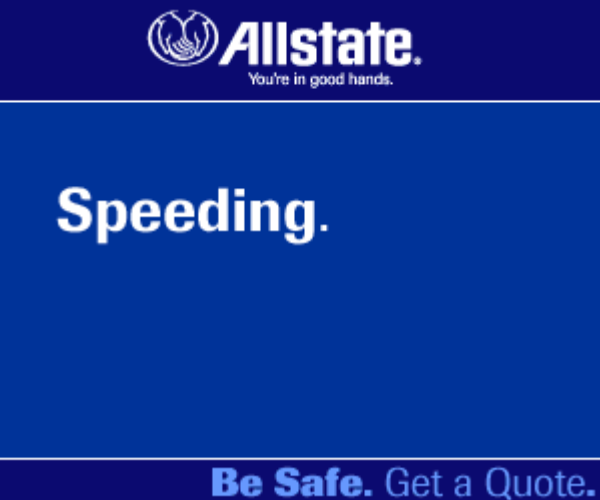
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TEEN DATING can be a wonderful and fun time where self confidence is built up, and dating techniques are learned. Teens also learn how to be both assertive and compromising, how to be giving to another and how to expect the same in return. All of this is a sort of practice session in order to find "Mr." or "Miss Right."

Unfortunately, too often teens start dating with no preparatory talks from their parents and then they can get into trouble. According to Planned Parenthood, about 10 percent of teenage girls in the U.S. become pregnant before age 20. And the U.S. Attorney General

reports that 38 percent of date rape victims are girls between the age of 14 and 17.

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Talk to your children. Teach them how to date, how to have respect for one another and how to protect themselves from emotional and physical hurt.

Here are some more tips:

1. BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL.

Your relationship with your partner is a model for how your teen will behave with others. Your relationship for your child speaks far louder than anyone's words. Show them how you compromise, stick up for yourself, give and expect respect and argue but love your spouse.

2. TELL THEM TO LISTEN TO THEIR INNER VOICE.

Help them pay attention to the voice inside that says, "I'm uncomfortable in this situation and don't want to do this." Teach them to trust their judgment. Tell them how to avoid unwanted sexual advances. Tell your sons that having sex does not make them a man and tell your daughters that having sex does not make them cool.

3. WARN THEM ABOUT THE DANGER SIGNS.

Being manipulated, verbally put down, pushed or slapped and kept isolated from other relationships are all signs of an abusive relationship. Make sure both your son and daughter understand that, and that they should come to you or another parent/teacher/counselor if they feel at all threatened or oppressed by their boyfriend or girlfriend.

4. NO, MEANS NO.

Tell them they need to be honest and clear in communications. "I'm not sure..." from a girl can mean "I just need to be pushed or pressured some more before I say yes" to her date. Tell girls to say "No" clearly and firmly. Tell boys if they hear "No" then proceeding anyway is rape.



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5. HAVE THE SEX TALK.

Make them think seriously about what sexual intimacy really means to them. Tell boys they are not expected to try a million different ways to get sex. Tell girls that they do not need to have sex to keep a guy.

Tell them that oral sex and anal sex are sex. Many kids are having these forms of sex because they tell themselves it's not really sex.

First tell them they shouldn't be having sex yet. Then tell them about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. You hope they will wait to have sex, but if they don't, it's best that they protect themselves.

Let them talk privately with their doctor so they can get what they need to take care of themselves. Encourage them to come to you with any question or conflict. Try to be open to discussing it, rather than lecturing them. You want them to listen to your opinion, yet at the same time feel they are making up their own mind.

Dr. Gail Saltz is a psychiatrist with New York's Presbyterian Hospital and a regular contributor to "Today."