10 Tips on Talking about Healthy Relationships with Teens

1. **Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection.** Talk openly with young teens about healthy relationships. Allow them to articulate his or her values and expectations for healthy relationships. Rather than dismissing ideas as “wrong”, encourage debate — this helps young people come to his or her own understanding.

2. **Be sensitive and firm.** Parenting a young teen is not easy—especially when it comes to helping him or her navigate their way through relationships. To be effective, you will need to find the balance between being sensitive and firm. Try to adapt to the changes faced by your child. Be willing to talk openly and respect differences of opinion. And, realize that the decisions you make will sometimes be unpopular with your young teen.

3. **Understand teen development.** Adolescence is all about experimentation. From mood swings to risk taking, “normal teenage behavior” can appear anything-but-normal. New research, however, reveals that brain development during these formative years play a significant role in young teen’s personality and actions. Knowing what’s “normal” is critical to helping you better understand and guide young people.

4. **Understand the pressure and the risk teen’s face.** Preteens and young teens face new and increasing pressures about sex, substance abuse and dating. Time and time again, young teens express their desire to have parents/role models take the time to listen to them and help them think through the situations they face – be that person!

5. **Take a clear stand.** Make sure young teens know how you feel about disrespect, use of abusive or inappropriate language, controlling behavior, or any forms of violence,

6. **Make the most of “teachable moments”.** Use TV episodes, movies, music lyrics, news, community events or the experiences of friends to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships.

7. **Discuss how to be an ‘upstander’.** Teach teens how to stand-up for friends when he or she observes unhealthy treatment of his or her peers.

8. **Accentuate the positive.** Conversations about relationships do not need to focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences. Conversations should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and relationships.

9. **Be an active participant in your young teen’s life.** Explore ways to know more about your young teen’s friends and interests. Find activities you can do together.

10. **Be prepared to make mistakes.** You will make mistakes. Accept that you will make mistakes, but continue to help teens make responsible choices while trying to maintain that delicate balance of being sensitive, but firm.
Respect! Conversation Starters: Digital Dating Abuse

Use these conversation starters to talk to your teen about digital dating abuse.

**Digital Safety:** How do you decide who to share your cell phone number with? Who do you become “friends” with on Facebook? How can you respond if someone you don’t know very well asks for your cell phone number, or to be “friends” online?

Talking Points:
- Be careful about giving out personal information such as your cell phone number to people you don’t know very well, regardless of whether you meet them online or in person.
- Check your privacy settings on Facebook and other online accounts to make sure your personal information can only be shared with people you trust.
- If you’re ever uncomfortable with someone you’re in communication with online or by phone, let me know. We can figure out a way to handle the situation together.

**Textual Harassment:** Do you ever feel like someone is over-texting you? What crosses the line for you – the number of messages or the content of the messages? What can you do if you feel overwhelmed by text messages?

Talking Points:
- It’s not okay for someone to constantly send you messages that interrupt your regular life. For instance, if you can’t study or sleep well because of texts coming in all night, that’s not okay.
- It’s never okay for someone to try to control what you do. If someone texts you asking who you’re with, what you’re wearing, or demanding that you respond ASAP, that’s not okay.
- Even when dating, it’s important to have your own personal time with friends and family. If someone you’re seeing sends you controlling messages that cut into your private time, that’s not okay. Let him or her know you need some space.
- It can be hard to tell someone to stop texting you, but it’s really important to be clear about how you feel. Let the person know when it is okay to text you, how often, and what types of messages make you upset, overwhelmed, or uncomfortable.
- Remember to be self-aware! If you think you might be over-texting someone else, give yourself some space. Ask the person directly how they feel about how often and what you text. Treat others online and by cell phone the way you would treat them in person, with respect.

**Privacy Violations:** How would you feel if your boyfriend or girlfriend was constantly checking your Facebook page or sneaking a peek at your cell phone log to see who you talk to? Why might that make you uncomfortable?

Talking Points:
- You have the right to be friends with people outside your dating relationship. It’s not okay for someone you’re seeing to control who your friends are and who you hang out with.
- A respectful relationship is built on mutual trust. It’s not okay for someone to constantly monitor where you are, what you’re doing or who you’re talking with.
- Keep your passwords a secret to help protect yourself.
Talking to Your Young Teen About Friendship and Bullying

Does your young teen know how to be a good friend? If not, you can help. By helping your young teen learn to be a good friend you’ll be helping him or her develop healthy relationships now and in the future. Here are some key points to cover with your teen:

Helping a Friend: What can you do if you hear a friend being disrespectful towards a friend or someone they’re dating?

Talking Points:
- If you witness one of your friends being disrespectful, don’t join in on it. Instead, call your friend out.
- If you witness a situation that makes you feel unsafe, don’t intervene directly. Ask someone you trust, such as me, a coach, teacher, or school counselor, for help.
- If you think someone you know might be in an abusive relationship, let them know there are people they can talk to and resources that can help, like a trusted adult or the Teen Dating Abuse Helpline loveisrespect.org / 1-866-331-9474 / 1-866-331-8453 TTY

Bullying: What can you do if you see someone being bullied? Who should you inform when you see bullying?

Talking Points:
- If you witness bullying, remember you can be an upstander and speak up and/or reach out to the target of the bullying.
- You can sit or walk with the person being targeted and help him or her connect with others.
- Tell a parent, teacher or trusted adult if you witness bullying.
- Visit SchoolClimate.org to learn more about bullying.

Positive Problem Solving: How do you feel when you become more aggressive during a game, or an argument? When does aggression cross the line? How can you communicate respectfully during a disagreement?

Talking Points:
- There is an important difference between asserting an opinion and becoming overly aggressive and potentially threatening.
- Use language and actions that do not cause or have the intent to cause harm.
- When problems come up in relationships, it is NEVER okay to use violence or threats to control someone.
- Everyone has different personal boundaries. It’s important to respect boundaries and to treat a person how they want to be treated.

Alternatives to Peer Pressure: Are your friends dating? How can you respond to pressure from a friend? How can you respond to pressure from someone you’re dating?

Talking Points:
- You have the power to choose the type of friendships and relationships you want.
- Even though a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend may be comfortable with certain experiences and certain choices, it doesn’t mean you need to be.
- It’s important to be yourself. If you don’t feel comfortable, let your friend, boyfriend or girlfriend know. Real friends will like the real you.
- It is never okay to pressure, intimidate, control or threaten someone.
- Trust yourself to make sure you feel respected, safe and comfortable.
RESPECT! Conversation Starters: Respectful Relationships

RESPECT! shines a bright light on respect in relationships – all relationships – those with family, friends, co-workers, and particularly an intimate partner. You can help the next generation build healthy, non-violent relationships by teaching young people early and often about the importance of respect.

Here are some conversation starters to begin important conversations about what’s okay, and not okay, in relationships.

**The Importance of Self Respect:** What do you like most about yourself? Why is it important to respect yourself? How can you give respect to yourself?

Talking points:
- You deserve to be treated with respect. Surround yourself with people who appreciate and support you.
- You have the right to make decisions that keep you safe, healthy and comfortable.
- You are somebody I love and respect.
- Trust yourself and your instincts on what is safe, appropriate and respectful.

**Personal Boundaries:** What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries? When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun? What can you say and do to communicate your personal boundaries?

Talking points:
- Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. This includes how you’re treated by friends, family, and classmates, both online and offline.
- Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed.
- Each person has different boundaries on what’s okay or not okay. Treat others how they want to be treated and if you’re unsure, ask them directly what they’re okay with.

**Dating:** What are you or your friends’ dating relationships like? What qualities are important to someone you would date or go out with? What makes a relationship good? What makes it bad? What does respect look like in a relationship?

Talking points:
- Respect is the foundation for healthy, happy and safe relationships.
- In mutually respectful relationships there should be safety, support, individuality, equality, trust and communication. *(refer to the Respect Wheel for more talking points)*
- Pay attention to how certain situations make you feel – good and bad – and trust your instinct when you feel disrespected.
How do you know if your teen is in an unhealthy relationship?

Let’s face it—figuring out what’s happening in your teen’s life and relationships can be very challenging. The use of technology makes this especially true.

It is also very difficult for a teen to recognize – and break free of – an unhealthy relationship.

But, you can help your teen decide if the relationship he or she is in is healthy.

**Quiz: A Healthy or Unhealthy Relationship?**

If you think your child may be in an unhealthy relationship, ask your teen to take this quiz to help him or her know if his or her relationship is healthy.

Does your boyfriend or girlfriend...
- Communicate openly with you when there are problems?
- Give you space to spend time with your friends and family?
- Support and respect you?

If your son or daughter answered **YES** to these questions, it is likely that s/he is in a healthy relationship. Encourage your teen to trust their instincts about the relationship to stay safe and comfortable.

If your son or daughter answered **NO** to these questions, ask your teen the following questions:

Does your boyfriend or girlfriend ever...
- Try to stop you from seeing or talking to family or friends?
- Call you derogatory names, put you down, or criticize you?
- Threaten or scare you?
- Hit, slap, push, or kick you?
- Pressure or force you to do something sexual when you don’t want to?
- Humiliate you when you are alone or in front of others?
- Control where you go, what you wear, or what you do?

If your son or daughter answered **YES** to any of these questions, their health and safety may be at risk. Seek advice or help from a school counselor, pediatrician or family physician, the National Dating Abuse Helpline or local domestic violence prevention organization.

National hotlines are completely confidential and available, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

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<tr>
<th>National Dating Abuse Helpline</th>
<th>National Domestic Violence Hotline</th>
<th>Rape, Abuse &amp; Incest National Network (RAINN) Hotline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-866-331-9474</td>
<td>1-800-799-SAFE (7233)</td>
<td>1-800-656-HOPE (4673)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-866-331-8453 (TTY)</td>
<td>1-800-787-3224 (TTY)</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.loveisrespect.org">www.loveisrespect.org</a></td>
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Area Resources

Domestic & Dating Violence

- LifeWire: 425-746-1940: 24 hours/day & 7 days a week
- Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline, 8am-5pm every day: 800-562-6025
- Youth Eastside Services (Dating Violence & Intra-familial violence): 24/7: 425-747-4937
  - Counseling, Substance Abuse Treatment, Psychiatric services for youth birth to 22 years of age

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES:

- Mercer Island Youth and Family Services: 206-236-3625
  - Emergency Assistance for families, food bank, employment assistance
  - Counseling Services
  - Substance Abuse prevention education and intervention
  - Youth development programs

SEXUAL ASSAULT RESOURCES:

- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800.656.HOPE (4673) (https://www.rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline)
  
  King County Sexual Assault Resource Center: 888-998-6423
  
  - Counseling and legal advocacy services
  - Prevention Education

- Harborview Center for Sexual Assault & Traumatic Stress: 206-744-1600 (TDD):206-744-1616
  
  - Counseling
  - Medical Support
  - Comprehensive Assessment

DEAF & HARD OF HEARING RESOURCES:

- King County Deaf Hotline, 24 hours everyday: 206-812-1001 (videophone)—
- National Deaf Hotline, 9am-5pm M-F: 855-812-1001 (videophone) or Deafhelp@thehotline.org