

“Dealing with Dating”
“Helping Your Young Adult Prepare for the Future”

Have you noticed that our culture is trying to awaken and enlarge the desires of our young people at younger and younger ages? And it seems that parents often find themselves caught between the better judgment of their conscience and the pressure of a corrupt culture. We wonder how to handle the fact that our son or daughter is experiencing attraction to the opposite gender. Do we panic, pack up, and move to Alaskan wilderness? In some ways we want to. Or should we go to the other extreme and start match-making by the time they reach eighth grade? Some take this approach.

In the next couple of articles I would like to share what I believe to be a balanced and biblical approach to nurturing and guiding your teenager’s heart through these powerful new emotions and into a happily married adult life.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” I share this verse because it is your teenager’s heart that is at stake in this battle. Satan would like to turn his heart the wrong direction, enlarge and pervert his desires, and ultimately rob his purity. A wise parent will determine to set up a watch-guard over their teenager’s heart regarding these new attractions.

With this verse as our context, I would like to share fourteen guiding principles I believe will help you navigate these waters. We will look at the first seven now and the next seven in our upcoming edition:

1. Balance Rules with Relationships. Maintain a close balance between being too strict and being too loose. Teenagers don’t need complete restriction from interacting at all with the opposite sex, but they definitely don’t need complete freedom and license to do whatever they please. Clear rules balanced with a close relationship with you will do more to settle their hearts than anything else!

2. Be the Authority. As the parent, you must set the ground rules for how relationships will be handled in your family. You must lay the boundaries and the consequences of both keeping and breaking the rules. Often we think of punishment when it comes to disobedience, but what about the reward for obedience? Help your teenager know exactly what your expectations are and why, and then reward him for honoring those expectations.

3. Be an Understanding Friend. As you exercise authority, you must also remember what it was like to experience these feelings for the first time. Remember the mistakes you made and why. As much as you seek to set and enforce rules and guidelines, also seek to understand the way your teenager is feeling and the power of these new emotions with which he is facing.

4. Communicate Clearly and Openly. Nothing can replace open communication in a teen/parent relationship. If you don’t have this, you must get it! You must be able to talk openly about what you expect and why. Explain your reasons. You are protecting the purity of those who do not yet realize its value, in a world that is trying to destroy it. In

addition to this, your teenager should be able to talk to you about these things. Be approachable and understanding, and provide daily guidance as God leads you.

5. Realize That Things Start to Change in Junior High. There is a natural change that takes place in these formative years. They will be attracted to the opposite sex. Don't try to stifle that God-given change, but deal with it wisely. Dads, maintain a close relationship with your daughters and sons. Don't be threatened by these changes, but don't ignore them either. Handle them seriously in your heart but lightly on the surface. Have some fun and tease with your teenager lightheartedly about these types of things, but be sure to have frequent serious talks on the subject of relationships that please God.

6. Maintain a Group Spirit in All Dating. Teenagers who are attracted to each other do not need to be alone. The devil will constantly try to isolate them away from protecting friends and family. Always keep a group togetherness spirit with your teenager's friends. Sit together as a family, do things as a family, and keep a high standard of accountability.

7. Help Maintain the Right Pace in a Relationship. Teenagers want to move FAST! They need you to help set the pace. You are the "pace car" that keeps your teenager's relationships from crashing. You must slow it down and keep it simple. Don't allow them to become exclusive and consumed with each other. Hours on the phone, talking in a corner at church, endless text messaging, wandering from the group, lower grades, always wanting to be together—these are warning signs of a relationship moving too fast.

We are really just getting started. There are seven more principles that we will see next month, but for now ask God to give you wisdom as you apply what you have read. Do not forget, you are the guardian of your child's heart—even when it comes to his attractions to the opposite gender. Become actively engaged in your teenager's growth in this area. Seek to give biblical and balanced guidance by God's grace. Don't miss next month as we continue these thoughts.

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