

Tackling Tough Topics - THE Big "D" Word...DATING

Purpose of Dating

- Give kids a chance to try out new more adult roles as they become more independent.
- Explore romantic feelings and develop interpersonal skills necessary for success in later long-term relationships (**communication skills)

Why we have a problem!

- o Television convinces children that they should be dating
- o Television gives children inappropriate expectations of how they should deal with adult relationships
- o Music videos and advertisements add pressure
- o Schools and parents contribute when they push kids into relationships by holding boy-girl parties and dances
- o Dating Myths
 - Early dating is just a stage.
 - Kids are too young to get serious.
 - Kids need to have interactions with opposite sex friends to develop social skills.
 - Sixth grade dances are "cute." In fact, most kids say the dances make them feel nervous.

Developmental Sequence

1. Elementary school kids choose friends who live in the same neighborhood or share the same sports and activities.
2. By age ten kids are ready to choose same-sex friends who have the same values, interests and beliefs.
3. Same-sex friendships allow kids to develop skills such as sharing emotions and learning how to give and take without social or sexual pressure. These skills will be needed in later dating relationships.
4. Too much time with opposite sex relationships prevents kids from developing these skills. Dating is developmentally inappropriate for kids ages 10-13. It is like trying to drive an 18-wheel truck before you learn to drive a car.
5. During this time kids become more grounded in their self identity, self-esteem and values and beliefs

How Parents Can HELP

1. Kids need a strong pillar to stand behind when they face difficult decisions. Kids actually seek the guidance of their parents even when they seem not to agree.
2. Know the reasons to delay dating.
3. Have "Safety Rules" for your home and their friends' homes. Most sexual experiences that go too far occur in the students' home, after school.
4. Make firm, clear rules about dating and stick to them

I. Define dating with your son/daughter

1. Does it mean seeing each other weekends or after school?
2. Do they go to movies, video arcades or skating rinks?
3. Do they go alone, in groups or with couples?

II. Compromise by encouraging social interactions with a group of friends is in a more non-threatening environment:

- o Go to an amusement park or sporting event
- o Plan supervised social gatherings
- o Community service projects
- o Amateur theater or musical productions
- o Church ministries
- o Special-interest clubs

III. Discuss why it is important for you to know:

- o Who is going
- o Where they are going
- o Who is driving
- o When they'll be home

IV. House Rules:

- o Date should be no more than two years older than your child.
- o Reasonable curfews allowing for a later evening for a special occasion
- o Wait up or require child to wake you when they get home. Do a "sniff test."
- o Never attend unchaperoned parties
- o Need name of host parents, address and phone number
- o Call ahead to verify the occasion and ask about supervision and alcohol/drug policy. Can use the call to ask if you help by bringing something.

V. What your child should know before dating:

- o Good communication with date – likes, dislikes, principals, values
- o Recognize which areas are negotiable and which are not (physical safety, the extent, if any, of physical intimacy, and issues involving drugs and alcohol).
- o Make decisions in advance:
 - Where you are going?
 - Who are you going with?
 - What are you going to do?
 - Who's going to pay?
 - Who is going to drive?
 - Who else will be there?

Adapted from: *Parent to Parent: Raising Kids in Washington* by the Parents' Council of Washington, 7303 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20817 (I SBN 0-9661107-0-6)