

7 Teen Dating Rules for Parents from a Metro Detroit Mom

MP metroparent.com/daily/parenting/tweens-teens/7-teen-dating-rules-for-parents-from-a-metro-detroit-mom/

January 31,
2020



This past Thanksgiving, my husband, four kids and my son's girlfriend packed into our seven-seat SUV to drive to Washington, D.C., for holiday time with family.

While some people might think it's odd to include a high school girlfriend on a family trip, I was happy to welcome her along – because an essential part of teenage dating has to be the involvement of supervising family.

It may sound cliché, but teens today are in many ways different from the way we were. Back in the social media-free 1980s, if you wanted a romantic relationship with that cute guy down the street, you had a few options: tell a friend to tell a friend to tell him that you like him or subtly flirt with him in class or at neighborhood gatherings.

While we went on bona fide dates, today's teens don't date. They "chat" on Snapchat, DM on Instagram, text and go out in groups. Some daring teens invite a crush to "hang out," which is 21st century code for hooking up. There isn't a lot of courting or in-person getting-to-know one another.

And yet, face-to-face experiences are the key to healthy relationships. Since middle school, my husband and I have encouraged our kids to invite peers to our house. We supported open communication, so our kids talk to us, which helps them navigate the often confusing world of relationships.

Two of my teens are in relationships now. We've met their significant others, and their parents, too. They met in school, which is reassuring. I've heard of teens who "meet" an interest on social media – a big red flag! That's when a parent must vet the love interest by meeting them in person and doing some parental reconnaissance to confirm this is a teen and not a creepy pedophile.

If your teen is ready for the dating scene, keep these tips in mind:

1. The dating world can be scary for a budding adolescent. Look for signs of discomfort. If they hesitate about spending time with someone, teach them to trust their instincts. Be the parent; it's ok to tell them they cannot go. They might be waiting for you to do so.
2. Talk to your teen about anxiety. If they are in a situation with a potential partner and feel anxious, teach them that those instincts are there to protect them. They must identify what makes them uncomfortable – not ignore signs or worse, drink, smoke or do drugs to avoid acknowledging feelings.
3. Ask questions. *Where are you going? Who will be there? Who is driving? Will parents be home?* Don't be afraid to bar your teen from attending a party or hanging out at someone's house if there are no adults to supervise. Don't hesitate to call the parents to get the real story. Your job is not to be popular, but to responsibly guide your teen.
4. Teens want guidance! I give mine lots of freedoms, but I'm strict when it comes to who they hang out with. They may complain, but I believe they appreciate this oversight.
5. Be present in your teen's life. Set a curfew, and stay up until they get home. Ask them to text you when they arrive at a destination. Be available 24/7; let them know they are your primary focus, no matter what.
6. Model healthy relationships. Young people learn from the adults around them how to be adults, and that includes how to have healthy relationships. Whether it's your spouse, partner, or even just a friend, think about the messages you're sending by how you speak to and treat one another, whether you're on your phones and distracted when together or focused on one another, and how you share responsibilities. If you've come up short, make changes going forward. It's never too late to set a great example.
7. Trust your kid. If your teen feels ready to date, let them. Just keep the lines of communication open.