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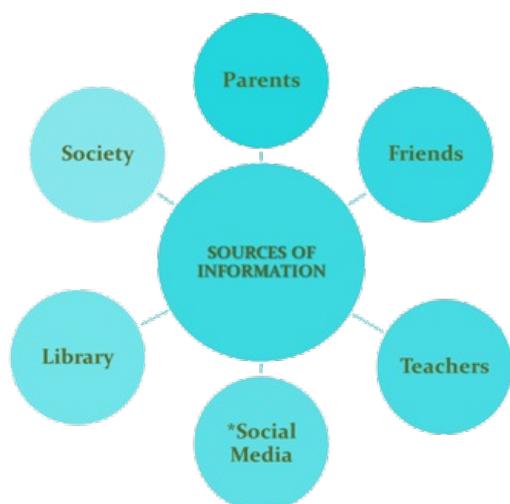
### When Can My Teenager Start Dating?

Parents of teenagers will need to learn how to help their children make good choices to form healthy relationships with the opposite gender. This is because more of our teenagers start having relationships with the opposite gender much earlier than we are comfortable to allow them to.

How can parents help our children so that they do not get hurt emotionally at too young an age?

#### Some Things Parents Need to Know About Teenagers

1. Puberty brings about physical and emotional changes (which may be traumatic for some youth) due to hormonal changes which results in a transition from childhood to adulthood.
2. Emotional instability may occur, as they begin to think independently and learn to make up their own mind. They may become confused of who they are (identity crisis); depressed because they do not quite like how they look or have a poor self-esteem due to peer pressure.
3. Sexual maturation takes place, where they want to find out more about their sexuality and gender issues as well as obtain knowledge of the male and female reproductive systems. The diagram below shows the main sources from which teenagers get information about sexuality issues.



\*Includes internet, TV, movies, newspapers

#### Helping Teenagers Make Good Choices On Gender Relationships

1. Care about their total well-being especially the physical and emotional changes they are experiencing.
2. Hold your horses! Wait for teachable moments/opportune time to find out if they are dating or are thinking of dating.
3. Offer to answer their questions whenever they are ready. Let them know that you are always ready to listen to their questions, doubts and fears. Encourage open discussions on the subject especially of sex. Be sensitive, offering security and a non-judgemental approach.
4. Instil discipline of time spent on the computer/internet, telephone/iPhone, going out with friends, etc. Do not condemn their friends but nurture their ability to question/challenge whether what their friends are telling them to do is helpful or harmful to them.
5. Communicate with them as friend-to-friend; not parent-to-child. It is very important to keep the communication lines with your children open. Surf the internet with your child together to show both the positive and negative influences of social media. e.g. in the recent movie, 'We Not Naughty', relate to them how a classmate's posting of nasty and false information about a girl on Facebook can cause her to commit suicide.

6. **Educate them regarding** what boys and girls need to know before they start dating. Enlighten them with your personal story/experience. Give them a good understanding of what dating is all about. Consider the following definition:

“The process of dating involves more than just having a good time. It also involves relating to another person in a meaningful way, a way that will help each of you feel good about who you are and about your relationship with the other person. Dating is a relationship and with every relationship, there are certain cautions and responsibilities.”

Adapted from Josh McDowell, in his book Love, Dad, Word Publishing

You can let your teenager ponder and answer the following five questions to help them determine if they are ready for dating:

1. Why do I want to date?
2. What kind of person will I not date?
3. What are my physical affection standards?
4. How will I control my passions?
5. If I blow it, what will I do?

Extracted from Love, Dad by Josh McDowell, Word Publishing

7. Set standards for dating. Explain to your child that there are values that our society upholds dearly with regards to what is acceptable behaviour although this may vary from culture to culture and from generation to generation.

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