

5 Things You Need to Know About Who Your Teen Is Dating

How does a parent help his or her kids to think long-term and start looking for characteristics they might desire in a spouse instead of focusing only on the short term goal of finding someone to date? It takes training. I write about this essential preparation in my book, *The Talks*.

When parents neglect to teach their kids to be discerning about the character of opposite sex friends in their lives, teens can easily “stumble” into romantic relationships without considering if they are in love with someone worth marrying.

It is never a bad idea to remind your sons (and even your daughters) of the truth found in Proverbs 31:30: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.” In other words, a pretty girl is nice, but you need to learn to look for something of more substance. That said, there are at least five important questions you can train your kids to ask as they consider the guys and girls around them.

1. How does he or she treat others?

Perhaps the easiest way to quickly evaluate a person’s character is to examine how they treat the people around them, especially in those moments when they think that nobody is looking. It might be wise to encourage your children to memorize the fruit of the spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23, and then use them as a quick mental checklist of things to look for in those around them. Nobody is perfect, but someone who more often than not naturally displays “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” as they interact with others is probably the type of person you want your kids to take note of. Wise

parents will challenge their kids to look for these traits in their opposite sex peers.

2. Does he or she operate with humility?

In our media-driven, reality television world, it has become more and more normal for young people to work extra hard to draw attention to themselves. Because everything seems to be a competition today, young people are constantly comparing themselves to their peers. This can very easily develop into an inner attitude of conceit that suggests they are better than others.

The apostle Paul commands in Philippians 2:3 that we should “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” Because humility is a basic trait of the transformed life (and a rarity in this culture), parents must train their kids to look for it in others. Because nothing can be more challenging than to be married for 50 years to an arrogant, self-centered person.

3. How does he or she spend free time?

Kids today are busier than ever, but they still have some measure of free time to do as they please. How they spend this time reflects a great deal on what is important to them. Consider the truth found in Ephesians 5: 15-16: “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Young people can learn a lot about their peers by taking note of how they spend their free time. Does a boy waste a lot of time on TV or video games? He might be lazy. Does a girl spend way too much time on personal hygiene? She might be too focused on her looks.

Does a boy spend all his time taking care of his car? He will probably care about it more than he cares about her.

Ultimately, you want to train your kids to notice if their peers spend any time focusing on things that have eternal value. Things like growing in Christ, developing Christian character, and investing in the lives of others.

4. How does he or she respond to authority?

A fairly consistent indicator of maturity in a young adult can be seen in how he or she relates to authority figures. While adolescents may be hard-wired to question authority, a potential boyfriend who has a pattern of rebellion should be a clear warning sign for your daughter to stay away. Paul makes it clear in Romans 3:2 that “whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. “

The key here is to examine attitudes, not just behaviors. Parents should train their kids to see the significance of how their peers respond to the authority of parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives. Specifically, parents should teach their kids that how a person submits to authority will reveal a great deal about how they will honor God and honor you in a long term relationship.

5. Does he or she speak naturally about a relationship with Christ?

It is very tempting to evaluate a person's faith by how involved she is in church activities. But my experience is that church attendance is not always a reliable litmus test for Christian maturity. A better way to evaluate the substance of a person's faith is to observe how easily and comfortably she speaks about Christ in her life. A regenerate young person who is allowing God to transform her life will speak of Him naturally. Hebrews 13:15 captures this well: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” If a

person truly has an authentic faith, Christ's activity will naturally come out of her mouth in the activities of daily life.

As you train your child/teenager to examine these character traits that they might begin to notice in the opposite sex, the big message you want to communicate is that the opposite sex is pretty cool. They do not, in fact, have cooties. When your daughter notices a good-looking and charming guy, we should celebrate it with her. When your son starts paying attention to an attractive girl (and paying attention to his own personal hygiene) we should celebrate with him. We should teach them that it is very likely in God's plan that they will one day marry. Thus, it is worthwhile to start exploring and observing what it is you are looking for in a spouse.

Realize that your goal as a parent should be to affirm their natural interest in the opposite sex. We must be careful not to demonize it. At the same time, we must coach our kids to guard their hearts very closely. They can look and observe and learn in ways that will serve them well in the long run, but that will enable them to avoid some of the drawbacks related to an overly emotional (and physical) relationship.

While the questions above can serve as a great filter for your kids to examine others, they can also serve as a guide for themselves. In addition to looking for the right person, you can also train them to start becoming the right person. This is probably the most important preparation lesson you can teach them.

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