

Dating and Romantic Relationships in Middle School

Parent Education - 2/21/18

How To Get In Touch With Me!

Lauren Alexander

Counselor for 8th grade and 6th grade (last names Lo-Z)

650-312-7265 (phone)

650-539-4241 (text message)

laalexander@smfcsd.net

Think - Pair - Share

Think about the following questions:

- What rules did your family have about dating when you were growing up?
- What messages did you get from your family about dating and relationships when you were growing up?
- What do you wish you had known about relationships growing up?
- What is a situation with your kids relating to dating/relationships that you need help with?

Why this topic?

We aim to be **PROACTIVE, INFORMATIVE, and geared towards BUILDING COMMUNICATION**

In a study of young adults, over 70% of those surveyed wanted more info from their parents about:

- **developing a mature relationship (38%)**
- **how to deal with breakups (36%)**
- **how to avoid getting hurt in a relationship (33%)**
- **how to begin a relationship (27%)**

20% of 13-14 year olds have experience with romantic relationships

But...what does it mean to be dating in middle school?

Ask your kid!

Here's what I see...

Dating in middle school is about an essential question...

It probably has less to do with partnership and more to do with searching for answers to questions about IDENTITY:

“Am I the type of person someone could like?”

“Am I someone other people find interesting?”

“Am I someone worth spending time with?”

If your child is interested in dating or has friends who are...

Try to figure out what makes the crush/BF/GF so interesting!

What do you like about that person?

How does your friend say dating that person makes her feel?

Do people at school look at you differently since you started dating?

What does this person like about you? What drew them to you?

Basically, the trend we see is:

Simply being labeled as someone's boyfriend or girlfriend is confirmation that one is enough.

In middle school, kids are much more interested in the label than in the actual relationship.

Most middle school "relationships" only last a couple weeks to a few months.

That's just enough time to show their world they are indeed lovable.

THIS IS TALK ABOUT VALUES MORE THAN FACTS

“All we are taught is how to prevent stuff, how not to get pregnant. We should be discussing the values that should guide you in love and how to really love and respect someone else. And how to be loved by someone else. That’s a lot more important.”

Pace yourself with lots of small talks rather than one BIG ONE

Create a safe space where your child can feel free to talk to you or ask you questions

Tell them explicitly that you're happy to talk with them about anything

OR refer them to someone who can help them (sister, uncle, pastor, coach, counselor) if you're not there yet

Talk about different kinds of love/interest people have

Infatuation. Romance. Jealousy. Unconditional love. Objectification.

Do they see different examples among their friends?

What do popular songs talk about?

What type of love are they reading about in a book?

Talk about your own relationships!

What are lessons you've learned? How did you learn them?

What do you wish you'd learned or known before dating?

How did you go about asking your crush out?

How did I break up with someone I saw at school every day?

How did you deal when your friends were dating people that drove you CRAZY?

Even if it didn't last forever, there's value in talking about failed relationships as well.

Help teach your child that they DESERVE respect

Help point out examples of healthy and unhealthy relationships

Which examples are healthy? Which ones are harmful? Why?

Does their relationship makes them more or less happy, hopeful, caring, and generous?

How often does the relationship make them worried or depressed?

Does their partner have qualities that are concerning or troubling?

Help your child understand what skills are needed in a relationship

How does your child see adults dealing with conflict or disagreement?

What examples do they see of positive and healthy communication?

How could your child build an understanding of relationship time management?

What ways do you set physical boundaries at your house?

How could you help your child express their needs and limits?

Help facilitate conversations about ethical decision-making

What do I do if I know my friend is cheating on his girlfriend, who is also my friend?

Is infidelity justified under any circumstances?

Is it exploitation when a high school senior dates a freshman student?

What do I do if someone I know is sending nude photos to girls that they have crushes on?

What do I do if my partner wants me to do something I don't want to?

Developing household rules and expectations about dating

You may draw a hard line against dating, but in middle school, kids can be more attracted to both people and things their parents prohibit.

Instead of banning people, think about banning activities. You might say, “I’m not okay with you going on a date, or labeling this person your boyfriend/girlfriend, but it’s fine to get to know this person better through texts.”

If your middle schooler has a stubborn infatuation, invite their new friend to have dinner with your family. It may be old-fashioned, but keeping adults in the mix is a great way to slow things down.

Developing household rules and expectations about dating

Think about family rules regarding:

- Monitoring social media accounts (Instagram, Snapchat, texting)
- Phone use at home, in room, or when alone
- Expectations about spending one-on-one time together
- Getting to know a friend's parents and getting their contact info
- A requirement to meet new friends in person
- No technology in the car/dinner table

A few more notes

Language is important - kids pick up on the ways we talk about people and situations and start to figure out what we value

Give your child - particularly older middle schoolers - insight into WHY you have certain rules about dating

A closing argument

When your child asks if it is okay to go to the mall for a group date, instead of immediately saying no, think about what they may be learning from it.

It may just offer them the structure and knowledge you want to give them while giving them the opportunity to learn about dating while your child still has the guidance of her friends - and you - to rely on.

Let's return to one of our first questions

What is a situation with your kids relating to dating/relationships that you need help with?

Our Next Parent Education Opportunities

March 21st - Straight Talk on Common Core Math

8:20am PTSA Meeting, 9:00am Ms. Evans's presentation

March 28th - Body Image and Self Esteem at 6:30pm

April 17th - Stress, Anxiety, and Coping Strategies at 8am

May 7th - Preparing for High School and Beyond at 7pm