

# What as a Catholic Father should I be doing as my kids are dating?

**Objective:** As fathers, we need to prepare our children to make wise decisions as they begin dating

**Song Suggestion:** They Will Know We are Christians ( Red 728)

## Bible and Catechism Readings:

**Mt 19:13-14** Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"

**Jn 17:15** Jesus said "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one."

**Pv 22:6** "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"

## Catechism 2226

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith.

**Vignette:** Mike's 15 son Josh is taking a girl to a school dance for the first time. Mike takes a few minutes in the days prior to talk with Josh about how a gentleman acts toward a young lady. From talking with Josh, Mike realizes that his son has a lot of misinformation about dating and how boys are supposed to act when around girls. Mike thinks maybe he's waited too long to talk with Josh about dating and has let the secular culture influence his son more than he has.

## Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Have you been tempted to not take responsibility for talking about dating with your young children, thinking that your good example of treating your wife with respect has been effective enough?

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What are some successes you have had in sharing thoughts about dating with your children?

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How do you handle it when your teenager tells you that your values about dating are old fashioned?

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Is Proverbs 22:6 too simplistic: ("train up a child and when he is old he won't depart from it", really??)

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## **Action Plan:**

- 1) This week, think about how your words and actions affect your ability to influence your teenager's choices in dating . Look for ways to share your thoughts with your child of any age.
- 2) Talk with your children about their views on dating and interacting with the opposite sex.

## **Resources:**

[http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/big\\_four/dating\\_advice.html](http://www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/big_four/dating_advice.html)

### **A Catholic Parent's Guide to Dating**

Talking about Theology of the Body in abstract terms is one thing, but how do we apply those lessons when it comes to our own sons and daughters? That's the challenge parents face when their teens want to start dating. It's a balancing act to allow them to pursue romantic relationships while also ensuring they don't inadvertently wander into sinful situations. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

#### **OFFER SPECIFIC GUIDELINES**

The last thing we want is for teens to take their cues from popular culture, which tells us almost everyone hops into bed after the first date.

You need to have a conversation with your teen about how to be chaste, modest and respectful of the person they are dating. However, to be effective, you need to get into some specifics. Otherwise, the directive to be chaste can be confusing. One teen might think it means never touching the person they date, while another teen may take it as approval to do everything short of intercourse.

Parents have used a variety of yardsticks to help their teens stay on the straight and narrow. These include advice to always stay in an upright position, never remove clothes or avoid any behavior that would be embarrassing if a parent could see it. For help in this area, the book *How Far Can We Go?* by Brett Salkeld and Leah Perrault may be helpful.

#### **HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS**

When you hand your son a pack of condoms or take your daughter to get a prescription for birth control, you are sending the message that you expect them to have sex. No matter how much you talk about waiting until marriage, offering contraception clearly shows you don't believe they will. What's more, doling out birth control makes it easy to duck out of the more difficult conversations about why teens should wait until marriage to have sex and how that is the expectation in your family.

Of course, it's important to discuss the theological reasons for waiting – namely that God created our sexuality to be shared between a man and a woman within the sacrament of marriage – but that will only get you so far with teens. A better approach may be to address what your son or daughter thinks they will get out of sex.

Some may see intercourse as proof of true love, while others may simply want to have an experience they have been told is a part of growing up. Remind your teen that true love means respecting someone enough to wait until marriage. Waiting until marriage will make the experience more meaningful.

#### **SET YOUR TEEN UP FOR SUCCESS**

Renting a hotel room for your teen and their friends after prom (something that seems to be done surprisingly often) is not setting them up for success. You are putting them in a position where it will be very easy to do things they may regret later.

Instead, set curfews, insist on modest dress and limit time alone for dating teens. Also, keep in mind that an open door is no detriment to unchaste behavior if teens are in a second-floor bedroom while everyone else is on the ground floor. Ask your teens to stay in public – and preferably highly trafficked – spaces while in your home.

The point here is to help your teen meet your expectations by minimizing any temptation to sin. What's more, it helps your teen avoid situations in which they may be pressured to do something they don't want to do.

### **KEEP LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN**

It's easy to overlook the emotional aspect of teen dating. Helping your son or daughter navigate relationships means being there to listen to their heartache or share in their joy, depending on the circumstances.

Don't interrogate a teen for details of their personal life, but do let them know that you are available to talk.

Show an interest in their relationships, and if your teen has a steady boyfriend or girlfriend, make that person feel welcome in your home.

Of course, not every teen wants to date, and they should be reassured that it's OK to simply hang out with friends at this stage of life. There will be plenty of time for dating later.

### **CONVERSATION STARTERS**

Struggling with how to open a conversation about sex with your teen? First, pick the right time. Your teen is more likely to respond if you are driving together, going for a walk or doing some other activity while talking.

Then, try one of these lines to get the conversation started:

- What do you think it means to be in love? This is a good question to pose to teens in serious relationships.
- What will everyone be doing after the game/dance/movie this weekend? Regardless of the answer, this provides a lead-in to talk about how to make smart choices in social situations that involve the opposite sex.
- What did you think about how the characters in a movie acted? If you happen to watch a movie or TV show modeling questionable behavior, use that as a starting point for a conversation.
- Seems like you and your boyfriend/girlfriend have been getting serious. Is there anything you want to know?

Your teens might have questions and just need an invitation to ask them.

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