



## Know! To Talk Teen Romance

It's spring, and love is in the air, regardless of there being a pandemic taking place. In fact, while COVID may be creating additional complexities for romance, young love is still blooming. Though some parents cringe at the thought of talking to their child about romantic relationships, it's a must-have discussion. As we think about the ongoing "talks" we will have with our sons and daughters, it's important to know that we would be amiss if those conversations focused solely on sex education, abstinence, how to prevent pregnancy and how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. While these are all necessary and vital topics, there is another monumental part of the teen romance talk that needs to be addressed, that is, what it means to have a healthy romantic relationship and how to recognize when it's not.

According to [LovessRespect.org](https://www.lovessrespect.org/), all relationships fall somewhere on The Relationship Spectrum from healthy to abusive, with unhealthy being somewhere in the middle.

Healthy relationships involve:

- Respect.
- Good communication.
- Trust.
- Honesty.
- Equality.

In a healthy relationship partners make decisions together and know they can share what is on their mind without suffering negative consequences. They enjoy spending time together but can also be happy and feel comfortable spending time with others. They are supportive, celebrate each other's accomplishments, are not excessively jealous and respect each other's boundaries. Healthy relationships are based on equality and respect.

Unhealthy relationships involve:

- Breaks in communication.
- Pressure.
- Dishonesty.
- Struggle for control.
- Inconsiderate behavior.

In an unhealthy relationship one person tries to make all the decisions. That person may pressure the other about sex or spending time only with them, and refuse to see how their actions can hurt. Unhealthy relationships are based on attempts to control the other person.

Abusive relationships involve:

- Accusations.
- Blame shifting.
- Isolation pressure.
- Manipulation.

In an abusive relationship, one person is in full control. He or she makes all the decisions surrounding sexual choices, friends, boundaries and even what's true and what's not. The other person feels like they cannot talk to other people or share what is really happening in their relationship. The dominant partner may show extreme jealousy or have explosive outbursts, a bad temper or mood swings. And while any form of physical harm falls under this category, it does not have to be physical to be abusive. An abusive relationship is based on an imbalance of power and control and can lead to devastating consequences.

We like to think of young love as fun and innocent, but the scars that can come from unhealthy or abusive relationships, even as tweens and teens, can be harmful and destructive in both the short- and long-term. While we cannot always prevent a heartache for our child, we can teach them what healthy relationships look like, and support and encourage them to not only be a good partner in a relationship but to expect mutual respect and not settle for anything less. While prom or even an ordinary date is a great backdrop to get the conversation started, this is not a one-and-done discussion. Even if you think your adolescent son or daughter has no current "love interest," you're encouraged to incorporate the topic of healthy romantic relationships into your regular and ongoing talks with your child.

Love Is Respect is the national resource to disrupt and prevent unhealthy relationships and intimate partner violence by empowering young people through inclusive and equitable education, support and resources.

*For more information, visit [LovelsRespect.org](http://LovelsRespect.org).*

## Sources

[LovelsRespect.org](http://LovelsRespect.org): The Relationship Spectrum.

## About Know! Parent Tips

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