

10 Tips for Talking to Your Kids about Relationships

1. Assess Your Own Values Before You Talk to Your Kids – How do you expect men and women to act? How should people behave when they disagree? How should decisions be made in a relationship? Make sure that you can explain your reasoning and can support it with examples.
2. Reveal the Unspoken “Rules of Dating” – Give your kids clear examples of what is appropriate behavior in a dating relationship. Talk to them about the standards of conduct that you expect rather than letting locker room or slumber party talk be their only source of information.
3. Tell the Whole Truth...Good and Bad – Pre-teens generally view dating very romantically. Support these expectations, but also be realistic with them about the bad things that can happen. Let them know that violence is never acceptable. Give them a few suggestions or phrases to help them get out of difficult situations (“I’m not ready to go that far,” or “I’m not comfortable, can we talk about this?”)
4. Teach Assertiveness, Not Aggressiveness – One of the best skills parents can teach their pre-teens is to make their feelings known by stating their opinions, desires and reactions clearly. For example, if they don’t want to do something, they need to say so. Finally, when there is conflict – if things cannot be settled – encourage them to always take a break and cool down before feelings get hurt.
5. Teach Anger Control – Help your kids recognize their personal warning signs for anger. Do they have clenched fists, gritted teeth, a red face, tensed arms and shoulders? Teach them to calm down by counting backwards from ten to one, deep breathing, visualizing a peaceful scene or happy memory, reassuring themselves that they’re in control, or, if all else fails, walking away.
6. Teach Problem Solving – When confronted with a tough issue, have your child determine what exactly happened and what may have caused the situation. Then, ask them to think of several different ways in which it could have been resolved, consider the consequences of each of the alternatives and discuss their choice.
7. Teach Negotiation – Help your children understand that compromising and taking turns are positive steps to a healthy relationship and that violence, threats and insults have no place in respectful negotiation. Teach your children to negotiate and acknowledge the situation. State each person’s point of view honestly and discuss options that allow both people to “win”.
8. Explain the “Danger Zone” – Teach them to recognize that thoughts of aggression are signals of frustration that need to be acknowledged and dealt with. Help your kids understand that any incident of violence in a relationship is a predictor of very serious problems that are very likely to continue and escalate.

9. Keep No Secrets – Secrecy that isolated kids from friends and family is not acceptable and can be the first sign of manipulation and coercion. Teach your kids that being strong means relying on the appropriate authorities, from parents and teachers to police, if necessary.

10. Be the Ultimate Role Model – Pre-teens learn by observing those around them, especially their parents. It is critical that you respect yourself, your partner and other people.

If your conversations raise real concerns, speak to your child's school counselor, doctor, clergy, or Domestic Violence Program of North Central Oklahoma.