

Let's Talk Dating

by Mark and Heather Manning

Leader's Notes

Introduction

If you spend a few minutes eavesdropping on a conversation between a group of teens you will very quickly see that the topic of dating occupies much of their thoughts and conversations. Teenage magazines have articles on topics such as "Does He Like You? Ten Ways to Know for Sure," "Flirty Text Message Ideas," and even "Sex Q and A."

Remember back to when you dated in high school...and compare that with the experiences of today's youth. Needless to say, times have probably changed. The youth of today have many questions and concerns when it comes to dating but yet may be hesitant to discuss this topic with parents. In today's promiscuous culture, we need to provide Christian guidance.

A Few Things to Remember

To have a successful discussion it is important to get off on the right foot. Be aware that this topic may be sensitive for many youth—either because they feel threatened by the "don'ts" imposed by most adults, or because they simply are embarrassed to share their own experiences or lack thereof. While some teens may be involved in very serious relationships, others may not have had a first date yet, may not be allowed to date, or have no interest in dating. For this reason, start off with non-threatening questions. Don't be over anxious to jump in with all of the answers. Look for volunteers to answer rather than requiring everyone to share. Use the beginning section as a warm up to get everyone comfortable.

The student handout can be copied for group use. Some leaders may prefer not to use worksheets but a handout may assist in facilitating discussion. If your group is large you may want to break up into smaller groups to answer the questions and then come back as a larger group to discuss and share.

Suggested Uses for this Resource

- Use for Sunday morning Bible study
- Plan a youth night around the topic of dating
- Discuss dating during a lock-in or weekend retreat
- Use as a discussion starter between parents and teens

Getting Started

With the group, answer the following questions. Be sensitive to the fact that some youth may not have gone on any dates yet.

- Where do most of your friends go on dates?
- What was your worst date?
- What was the funniest thing happened on a date?
- What is your dream date?
- What movie star would make the best/worst date?
- Feel free to add any other creative questions to this list.

[The Questions: The following bulleted, boldface questions appear on the youth handout. The other questions can be used to explore an answer or topic further.]

Who?

- **Rate these characteristics from most important being 1 to least important being 10 with regard to who you would look to date.**

looks	popularity	money	personality	sense of humor
Christian	romance	car	body	good moral values

- **What does Scripture say about this? 2 Corinthians 6:14-15**

The Revised Standard Version reads "mismatched" rather than "yoked." This might make it easier to understand that as Christians we should be looking for other Christians to date.

- **Why is this important?**
Make sure that the discussion hits on the idea that it is easier for a Christian to grow in their Christianity if they share relationships with other Christians.
- **What are some possible benefits of dating a Christian?**
Some possible benefits include sharing Christian friendships, growing in faith, having activities that interest both people, mutual prayer support, shared moral values.
- **What are some possible problems that occur when a Christian tries to date a non-Christian?**
Some possible consequences include losing other Christian friends, losing interest in church/Bible study/youth activities, moral values are questioned, difficulty with family, sense of frustration.
- **React to this comment: "Well, if I date a non-Christian, that will give me an opportunity to witness to them and change them."**
Responses may be at opposite ends of the spectrum. Make sure that they understand that when you enter in a relationship, it is more difficult to "change" someone because of the closeness of the relationship. In fact the Christian might end up being changed because of their desire for acceptance. Dating should never be a reason for evangelism.

What?

- **What is the current slang for dating?**
Answers will vary based on the latest lingo. Possible answers may include "going out," "seeing each other," etc.
- **What makes a date a date?**
Some follow up questions for clarification might be "What are society's expectations of a date?" or "What has to happen for a date to occur?" Some answers might include a kiss, hand-holding, a hug, dinner out, a movie, being alone with your date, a make-out session, a good time. Society emphasizes "the flesh," a good time, and physical activities such as heavy petting and sex.
- **As a Christian, how should our expectations differ?**
Christians should emphasize a desire for relationships and friendships. Thus the emphasis is taken off the "good time" and focused on the person you are with.
- **What rules do your parents have for you regarding dating? How do you feel about these rules?**
In answering, some youth may express great dissatisfaction with their parents' rules. Guide conversation so that this does not become a discussion of gripes with parents. Play the other side of the coin by suggesting why this rule might make sense. Have youth put themselves in the place of their parents and ask what rules they might have for their children.

Where?

- **Where have you gone on a date?**
Answers will vary.
- **What are some concerns that you should have about where you go on a date?**
Youth may have concerns such as bad breath, acting stupid, doing something that will make their date unhappy. They should also be concerned about safety. Listen to their concerns, and then lead into the following discussion about safety.

What is safe or unsafe about the following scenarios?

Scenario 1: Your date has just announced to you that they have made the most perfect plan for Friday night. They tell you about a lake five miles out of town that nobody goes to. They invite you to a "romantic" getaway for just the two of you in their truck. They have promised that this will be a night that you will never forget.

Consider having the guys and the girls answer separately. Both should be concerned about the physical danger that might come from this situation. Being by yourselves in a secluded place that no one goes to should raise some red flags about safety. A date rape or other physical harm may occur. In this situation, there is no one who can help you nor is there anywhere you can go for safety. Both guys and girls should be concerned about legal consequences. When you are left alone, not only can your moral values be compromised, but there is the possibility of a girl or guy making false accusations about what happened. Not only is your moral reputation on the line, but your legal reputation as well.

Scenario 2: Your date has just announced to you that they have made the most perfect plan for Friday night. They tell you that they have planned an evening consisting of dinner at your favorite restaurant followed by some dancing at the teen hot-spot.

Have the guys and girls answer separately. This should prove to be a safer date for both guys and girls because of the public nature of the entertainment. This will provide girls a chance to yell for help or leave if something dangerous begins to occur and it also limits any false accusations due to the presence of many people.

When?

- **When should you be able to date?**

At this point, youth might respond with a certain age. Your challenge in this section could be to move them from a number (their age) to an attitude. Since all people mature at different rates, youth will be "ready" at different times.

- **What makes one ready to date?**

Hopefully this should help in defining an attitude rather than an age. Answers could fall into these four categories: responsibility, maturity, parental communication, trustworthiness.

- **Place an X on the line below rating yourself in the following characteristics. Then, put an * at the place where your parents would rate you.**

[See youth handout for complete chart.]

Discuss results. Emphasize that different people will be ready to date at different ages. Some youth may be ready to date but do not have parental consent. These youth should be encouraged to improve in these four areas and to continue to demonstrate to their parents their readiness. Impress upon them that they should at all times obey their parents' wishes. If they disagree, they should be encouraged to continue to communicate with their parents to reach a compromise. Remember the fourth commandment.

Some youth may be allowed to date but are not ready. For these youth, they should know that they need to improve in these four areas before considering going out on more dates. All youth should be encouraged to improve in the four categories listed above.

- **When should you introduce your date to your parents?**

Some youth will be embarrassed to introduce their parents to a date. Is it unreasonable that parents know who you spend time with? How could you introduce them to your parents in a low pressure situation? It does not have to be Thanksgiving dinner with all of the relatives when you finally bring that special someone home.

- **When should you bring your date to church or youth group (if he or she does not attend your church)?**

Emphasize that boyfriends/girlfriends are welcome to come to youth events! (Obviously retreats or weekend events may be excluded.)

- **When does "dating" become "going out"? When does a "date" become a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend"?**

Why?

- **Why do we date?**

There are two basic categories that answers will fall under: dating is recreation (for fun) and dating is to find a life-long partner. All answers are acceptable and this should just be a chance for youth to express their opinions. After reading the dynamics of the group and hearing their experiences, you may want to pose some situations to think about.

It may be necessary to say that it is okay to date for fun because it gives them a chance to get to know people as well as learn characteristics of the opposite sex. However, for those who are long-term daters, perhaps they should think about asking themselves if this is the person they would want to spend the rest of their life with. Some might be stuck in a relationship that is going too far physically and they may need to think about their reasons for dating this individual.

- **If you are dating to meet your future spouse, does this mean that you shouldn't date anyone you wouldn't marry?**

This question may spur on some lively discussion. The reality is that a minority of people marry a person they met in high school (although you may want to ask the members of your group how many of their parents were high school sweethearts) so the chances are rather unlikely for your group. However, the question is valid. If they want to marry a Christian, why are they dating non-Christians? If they want to marry a person with similar morals and values, why are they dating people for whom this is not true?

How?

- **How do I meet someone to date anyhow?**
- **Once I find someone I want to date, how do I ask them?**

For those youth who have not started dating yet, these are probably questions which are on their minds. Give some suggestions about meeting people at school, in clubs, or extra-curricular activities. Have the adult leaders of the group share how they have met people in the past. Discuss whether girls can ask guys out. What is a low pressure way to do this? Perhaps your youth have some ideas.

- **How far do you think is too far?**
- **Think (to yourself) how far you have gone*.**

Hand-holding

Kissing

French Kissing

Petting (includes touching other sexual organs)

Heavy Petting (includes oral sex)

Intercourse

*This statement will no doubt be uncomfortable and embarrassing for some youth participants and adult leaders. Please be sensitive to your group dynamics. This statement is for personal reflection.

The Bible is very clear about a definite boundary that is not to be crossed, and that is having sex outside of marriage. (Some Bible passages that you may want to assign or read yourself can include Colossians 3:5, 1 Corinthians 7:1-4, Matthew 19:5-6, Proverbs 6:23-26, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.) Most youth already understand this truth. It is the part before sexual intercourse that they sometimes wonder about. There are four natural "laws" that might help youth in deciding how far is too far.

1. The first is explained in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. If your mind is wandering into impure thoughts, then you have probably gone too far. Another passage to support this is Philippians 4:8. We must take captive all thoughts for Go. When we can think of nothing else than that other person in a sexual context, then our thoughts have taken us captive.
2. The second is called the Law of Progression. Youth instinctively know this law. When a relationship first begins, just being in the same room is enough to give pleasure. Soon, both partners may want to go further and start holding hands. They continue to progress, becoming more and more physical until they reach intercourse. Once a step is taken, it is more difficult to go back to the beginning. Therefore, the slower the relationship goes, the longer you will be able to enjoy your partner without having to worry about sexual intercourse.
3. This leads into the third law, which is to establish your boundaries before you go on a date. When these boundaries are in place, you can control the natural progression that normally takes place. Also, it is always advisable to do this in advance because it is more difficult to establish your boundaries while in "the heat of the moment." If at all possible, this should be communicated to your partner so that you can hold each other accountable and be able to avoid any misunderstandings.
4. The final law deals with thinking about the future. Since youth are often more concerned with the present, this law will help them plan long-term in establishing their boundaries. Guys and girls should think about their future spouse who could also be out on a date. How you want that guy/girl to treat your future spouse is the same way you should treat the girl/guy you are out with. Don't do anything with your date that should be saved for your future spouse in the context of a marriage relationship.

- **How could you encourage a friend who was feeling guilty or ashamed about going “too far”?**
Youth may know a friend who is struggling with this or may be personally struggling with this. Use this question and Scripture references to assure them of God’s forgiveness for all of our sins. Prepare a list or mention to the group where they can refer their friends (or themselves) who may want to discuss some of these things on a more in-depth level. Know your local congregational and community Christian resources where youth can go for a confidential, Christian listening ear. Research the legal and liability implications before offering yourself as a “counselor” to the youth.

Read Psalm 103:8-12, Psalm 130:3-4, and 1 John 1:9.

More...

These activities can supplement the discussion piece or may be used as a continuation at a future meeting.

Write a personal ad. How would you describe yourself? What kind of date are you looking for? Newspapers and online dating sites are filled with descriptions of “men seeking women” and “women seeking men”. Although your youth will not be sending them to a newspaper or dating site, this activity may help clarify priorities and characteristics of a desired type of date.

Role play the following situations. This will help youth think about situations which may arise when dating.

- Asking someone out: Sally and Mark have math class together. Neither is dating anyone right now. Have Sally ask Mark out.
- Meeting parents for the first time: Bring that special someone home to meet Mom and Dad.
- A Not-So-Great Date: Your date brings you to a party where there are no parents home and people are drinking. You do not feel comfortable staying but your date is having a goo time. Talk to him/her about leaving. What is he/she has been drinking and should not drive? What is plan B? What would you do?
- Breaking up: Buffy has decided that she doesn’t want to see Biff any more. How does she break up with him? How does he react?
- Boundaries: You are on a date and are being pressured to go further sexually than you feel comfortable. What do you say? What do you do?
- Curfew: You are out on a date and miss your curfew. Role play the confrontation when you walk in the door and see your parents.
- Dating memories: Have an older couple from your congregation tell about their first date. Have them share about their lives together—how they met, traditions, things they remember about their dating years.
- Etiquette: Is chivalry dead? Discuss how to act on a date—how to dress, opening doors for your date, who pays, etc.

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