



The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents and Guardians of our Parish's Teens,

Have you ever had an awkward conversation with your teenager? I bet you have. The older they become, the more awkward the conversations seem to get, right? That's because the questions get harder, the stakes get higher, and the topics get more difficult to discuss. But what if it didn't have to be that way? What if you could discover a way to talk to your teenager about anything so that they would talk to you about everything? What if you could learn to build a foundation of trust with your teen that could open doors to more serious and difficult conversations?

This week's Online Parent Ministry provides you with some ideas, tools, resources, and some much-needed encouragement that I hope will help you as a parent to be better equipped to engage your teenager in ongoing conversations about dating, relationships, sexual integrity, and their relational/physical boundaries.

In the main body of the OPM email, I include two documents: 1) the handout about the teachings of [Theology of the Body](#) that our guest speaker distributed at HSM Sunday last weekend, and 2) a document with all sorts of [links](#) to videos, articles, books, and podcasts about teen relationships, dating, and sex.

I hope these additional materials are helpful to you. Be encouraged!

Peace,

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Talking to your teen about dating...

Parents need to talk to their kids about anything so they will talk to you about everything.

If you can pay attention to even the most trivial of topics that your kids want to talk about and actively listen to the most mundane stories, we build a foundation of trust that will open doors to more serious and sticky conversations.

One conversation that can be awkward for parents and teens to have is around the topic of dating. As parents, I'm sure you all hope and pray that your kids will one day find a spouse who will champion them, love them, and be a great life partner. You pray they will have a healthy, lifelong marriage. Ultimately, one step in making this dream a reality is for your kids to enter the world of dating. This can seem daunting as we may have memories, good and bad, of our own dating experiences. Of course, you don't want your kids to make the same mistakes you made. But, in reality, they will not have perfect dating relationships. However, you can help them navigate through it. **At times we may hope they don't enter the dating world until after high school (many do just that!), but truth be told, there may be a gift in them beginning dating while they still live in your home. If they do, you can truly walk with them through it.**

One thing that can be helpful is to discuss with your kids what the purpose of dating is. One good way to start this discussion is to ask your teen (or maybe even preteen) what they think the purpose of dating is. The next step is to actively **listen**. If they give a reason that doesn't quite sit right with you, try saying something like, "Tell me more about that." After your child tells you what they think the purpose of dating is, take the opportunity to share your thoughts. I'm sure this will vary from family to family and will change as your kids grow older, but may I suggest a thought on this? As with most things in our lives, God uses our circumstances to mold us to become more like Him. I think the same can be said for dating. Dating can teach teens to practically live out their values in a relationship. It can teach them to sacrifice for and serve others. It can teach them to develop empathy. It can help them learn to set up healthy boundaries in a relationship.

It can help them learn to be a trustworthy and faithful friend. **Hopefully, the focus of dating relationships with teens is not physical intimacy.** So, one way to look at a dating relationship is like a more intentional, personal, intimate friendship.

Yet in reality, a dating relationship is different than a friendship because romantic feelings are involved, so it is also important to talk to your teen about sexual integrity. Ideally, this can be part of a larger conversation about integrity in relationships in general. As people of faith, we want to be faithful to Jesus, and practically this looks like having integrity in our relationships. When it comes to sexual integrity, one way to think about it is as an ethic about how we interact with others with our bodies. **Ideally, we want to do this in a way that shows honor and respect for ourselves and others, as Jesus would have us do. But even more than that, sexual integrity is a response to who Jesus is in our lives. It is an act of faithfulness to Jesus as much as to ourselves or our future spouse.**

Another thing to think about – many parents decide to set up boundaries and possibly even restrictions when it comes to their preteens and teens dating. We often do this to help protect our children, and there can be benefits in doing so. But we need to remember rules alone don't set up healthy relationships. **It is so important to help our kids develop convictions around dating relationships based on their faith in Christ. Rules don't govern behavior nearly as effectively as one's heart.**

I want to leave you with this. **Don't get discouraged if you try to have a conversation about dating with your teen and it doesn't go as well as you hope.** This is definitely not a one-and-done conversation. Sometimes teens are in the mood to talk, and other times, they are not. Some of the best conversations you can have with your kids are not the ones we plan. Instead, be ready to talk to your child when the opportunity organically arises. Remember – talk to your kids about anything so they will talk to you about everything. You may be surprised what conversations they bring up to you.

Be encouraged!



Parent Ministry