



Surviving the Teen Dating Years

by Kristin Early

"Mom, I have a date." Have you recently heard these words or tremble at the thought of them? Chances are, sooner or later you will have to come to terms with the realities of teenage dating. When that day comes, trust in the wisdom of God and consider these dos and don'ts for first-time parents of teens.

Text Talk: basic text messaging terms

LOL - laugh out loud
IDK - I don't know
LTR - later
CUL8R- see you later

TTYL - talk to you later
BRB - be right back
PAC - parents are coming
PIR - parents in room

TOS - teacher over shoulder
JAM - just a minute
OMG - oh my gosh
EVRY1 - everyone
HAK - hugs & kisses

N2B - not too bad
T2G - time to go
G2G - got to go
NM - never mind
NP - no problem

WTG - way to go
PPL - people
THX - thanks

EVERYDAY LIFE:
How can you apply Scripture to teen dating discussions? Visit us online at www.Proverbs31.org and click on "Everyday Life" for more tips from author Kristin Early.

Sunlight washed the kitchen walls as I stood in the afternoon quiet listening to the peaceful hum of the air conditioner. The sound was a welcome refrain on a hot summer day in Texas. My ears perked up as the door opened and banged shut. A backpack hit the floor with a *thud* and tennis shoes squeaked their way down the hall. As usual, I heard him before I saw him.

"Mom, can I have some money?" The urgency of the request echoed through the kitchen.

"Well, hello there and yes, my day was good. Thanks for asking!" Smiling to myself, I shook my head and turned to meet my 16-year-old's pleading eyes. Those baby blues could do me in. In an effort to avert his gaze, I reached for a dish cloth, needlessly folded it a few times then deftly asked, "So, how was school?"

I got the standard shrug and a mumbled "uh dunna know." Clearly exasperated, he turned up the volume and said, "I *need* some money!"

"We just gave you gas money," I replied calmly.

"I don't need gas. I need money because I have a date Friday night."

Silence.
The floor beneath my feet gave way to unfamiliar ground. The word *date* buzzed in the air like a mosquito in need of a good swat.

"Talk to your dad when he comes home from work," I mustered.

Panic – in this case, a unique blend of motherly love and terror – flowed through my veins. I stood on a fault line: on one side was life as I knew it and on the other loomed a life I knew nothing about.

That night my husband and I talked at length about this new stage in our son's life. Like latecomers to a play, we felt disoriented, walking in darkness as the drama unfolds, ushered to our seats in a special section reserved just for parents of teens who date. Tragedy or comedy? Only God knew at this point.

We gave him money for his first big date but also told him to get more hours at the local grocery store where he worked as a courtesy clerk. If he felt mature enough to

date he needed to learn financial responsibility.

With the first big decision under our belt we felt pretty good about ourselves. We could do this after all, right?
Wrong.

Within weeks we found ourselves on slippery ground. Negotiating curfews, monitoring spending habits and keeping up with dating activities became a full-time worry. The landscape kept changing and we didn't have firm footing. Lacking in both appropriate footwear and wisdom we turned to our faith to guide us.

Led by prayer and godly counsel from a men's Bible study my husband attends, we created some guiding principles to help us navigate the teen dating world. We made peace with the word *date* and worked our way through some *dos and don'ts*.

D - Divine guidance

Do rely on God to guide your parenting. Pray for wisdom and discernment. Use Scripture to lead discussions with your child on sexual purity, alcohol, peer pressure, finances and responsibility.

Don't rely entirely on your instincts, the advice of friends or parenting books. These resources serve a good purpose but true wisdom comes from the Lord. Courageous parenting requires God's counsel.

A - Agree on dating rules and consequences in advance

Do set clear boundaries with your teen. Agree on both rules and consequences if a rule is broken. Be as specific as possible. Teenagers need the opportunity to make decisions as part of the maturing process. Clear cause and effect reference points aid decision making.

Don't wait until a conflict to communicate appropriate expectations. Words said in anger or under pressure rarely achieve lasting results. Heated emotions get the best of parenting – now is the time to keep your cool.

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T - Talk and text

Do keep the lines of communication open between you and your teen. Text messaging is the preferred mode of communication for most teens. Use this to your advantage. For example, a quick text from your teen while on a date can reassure you and at the same time not embarrass him or her with an obvious parental check-in.

Don't talk down to your teen or have a harsh, judgmental tongue. Our son has friends who are afraid to talk to their parents. Fear and isolation only lead to deeper relationship problems.

E - Exemplify godly relationships

Do lead by example. If you are married, use your relationship as a teaching tool. Show your teen how the two of you still date. If you are a single parent, be aware of your own behavior. You have the perfect opportunity to clearly set the stage for your teen with your own dating experiences.

Don't be a hypocrite. Nothing confuses a teen more than mixed messages. Keep your words and actions clear. Your teen needs to see you walk the talk.

When your teen introduces the word *date* into your family's vocabulary, cover panic with prayer. Trust in God the Father, trust in yourself as a parent and learn to trust your child. Take comfort in the wise words found in Proverbs, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*" (Proverbs 3:5, NIV). If you make trust the foundation of your relationship, you will survive the teen dating years. 🌸

Kristin Early is a communications expert who managed her own public relations firm and worked for global corporations. She left corporate life to raise her family and pursue a passion for writing. Kristin lives in Dallas, Texas with her husband and sons, ages three and seventeen. To learn more about Kristin visit www.KristinEarly.com.