



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents
with young adults.



Children, adolescents and young people should be taught how to enter into healthy relationships with God, with their parents, their brothers and sisters, with their companions of the same or the opposite sex, and with adults.

~Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality #53

Every person on earth wants to be part of a lasting relationship that is filled with love and joy. No one on this planet wants to be isolated or alone. Why is this? Relationships are essential to our well-being because God created us to live in communion with others. He wants us to experience social connections that enrich life and expand inner joy. And God wants us to avoid relationships that breed sadness and harm.

If you were to Google the question, “What are the elements of a great relationship?” you would probably find the following: build a foundation of trust, use manners, explore each other’s faith and interests, admit when you make a mistake and apologize, be respectful and safe, say what you mean and mean what you say, laugh at yourself, listen, be reliable and loyal... Sound familiar? Nothing on this list should surprise you because intuitively you know that if you want to be in a great relationship, you must possess these characteristics. And that is the toughest part of relationship success; developing the skills needed to make a relationship work.

Perfecting one’s relationship skills takes time and hard effort. It is not easy to do what the experts suggest. Admitting a mistake is difficult. Being trustworthy is tough. Letting your guard down so that someone else can get to know who you really are is unnerving. And yet, if we want to experience the goodness of being in a right relationship, we must “suffer” these difficulties and endure. It is a bit ironic that a person must “suffer” the affliction of becoming relationship-ready before he or she can experience the benefits of a right relationship. In reality, there is an order that has to be followed in one’s quest for good friendships and romances; work first, benefits second. Shortcutting the work or reversing the order likely results in shallow relationships that are filled with drama, harm and disappointment.

It should be noted that the elements of a great relationship mentioned above do not include sexual expression or intimacy. The main reason for this is that most relationships in life are not sexual. This does not mean that sexual intimacy

is not important. Rather, it means that sexual intimacy is so powerful that it rightfully belongs in the only relationship that lasts a lifetime, is mutually exclusive and is open to the creation of new life. That relationship is found within the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Unfortunately, young people in today’s society are being enticed to believe that great relationships begin with and are built upon sexual pleasures. They are being led to believe that the core of any friendship or connection is a physical encounter. They are being tempted to think that feelings of attraction guarantee a great relationship and that unmarried sexual expression is a pledge of undying love. None of this is true.

There are many negative consequences that occur when romance and sexual expression become the focus of a relationship. But the one that is most troubling is the reduction of sexual expression to a quick and intense recreational activity rather than to an intimate union that lasts for a lifetime. Most parents recognize the harm that occurs when a relationship starts with this ideal of romance and not friendship. In fact, many parents have first-hand experience with the harm caused when personal pleasure sets the course. They remember how the longing to be with someone can cloud one’s judgment and pull a person away from doing what is right and good. This “life experience” should motivate parents to become intentional about their guidance and to help their child set the right relationship course during the young adult years.

Parents who set expectations about what is and is not acceptable in relationships have youth with stronger relationship skills. Youth with parents who pay attention to what their child is doing experience more joy and less drama. Parents who stay engaged during the teen years forge a stronger bond of trust with their emerging adult. This will both help smooth the relationship bumps on the highway that leads to adulthood and ensure that relationships precede romance.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

The most important action that parents should take when it comes to relationship guidance is the establishment of _____.

Boundaries define what is _____ and they _____ and _____ us.

Setting boundaries begins with a _____ between the parent and the youth.

Middle and high school youth lack _____ and that often results in a lapse of judgment.

Single dating before the age of 16 leads to more _____ behaviors and _____.

Five questions to ask your child when they plan an activity with friends include:

1. Can you truly be _____ in this relationship?
2. Will this relationship help you be a _____ person or does it lead you to do things you shouldn't do?
3. Is there a sense of give and receive in this relationship or is this _____-sided?
4. Does this relationship provide you with opportunities to _____ and to be _____?
5. What would your parents _____ of the behaviors and actions that happen within this relationship?

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. How have relationships during the middle and high school years changed since you were a young adult?
2. Describe a healthy relationship that you would like your child to experience. What boundaries will help this really happen?
3. Discuss how each of the following boundaries help your child establish healthy relationships: curfews, adult supervision of activities, monitoring media, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, travel and driving restrictions, and practicing the Catholic faith.
4. Review the five questions that parents should ask their child about their current relationships. How can asking these questions guide your child towards healthy friendships?
5. Why is it important to limit single dating until at least the age of 16?

Make a Plan

For The Parent

Boundaries guard what we value and protect us from harm. Below is a list of common areas that require a boundary. Read each category and then write down the limits that you think your young adult should follow, including the consequence that will be given when the limit is broken.

When you are done, compare your worksheet with your young adult and let the negotiations begin. Discuss each area, listen carefully and establish the boundary. If necessary, discuss these boundaries over several conversations.

Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco – What are the laws of your state? What are the risks related to use?	
Boundary	Consequence
Clothing – What is modesty? Why is it important? How important is it to be trendy?	
Boundary	Consequence
Conduct – What manners show respect in the home? In school? In society?	
Boundary	Consequence
Curfew – What time is bedtime during the week? On weekends? Special events?	
Boundary	Consequence
Dating – When is group dating allowed? Single dating? Special relationships?	
Boundary	Consequence
Household Maintenance – What chores are expected? How often? Are these shared?	
Boundary	Consequence
Money/Finances – Who is paying for activities? For clothing? For recreation?	
Boundary	Consequence
Cell Phone - What are rules on general use? On data plan? On texting?	
Boundary	Consequence
Internet Usage – Public or private? What sites are permissible? Time requirements?	
Boundary	Consequence
Physical Affection – What is right and moral: holding hands, simple kiss, prolonged kissing, touching, laying down together, genital activity	
Boundary	Consequence
Vehicle Usage – What are the laws of your state? How far away can you go? # of passengers?	
Boundary	Consequence

Make a Plan

For The Student

Boundaries guard what we value and protect us from harm. Below is a list of common areas that require a boundary. Read each category and then write down the limits that you think you should follow, including the consequence you should get when the limit is broken.

When you are done, compare your worksheet with your parent and let the negotiations begin. Discuss each area and establish the boundary. If necessary, discuss these boundaries over several conversations.

Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco – What are the laws of your state? What are the risks related to use?	
Boundary	Consequence
Clothing – What is modesty? Why is it important? How important is it to be trendy?	
Boundary	Consequence
Conduct – What manners show respect in the home? In school? In society?	
Boundary	Consequence
Curfew – What time is bedtime during the week? On weekends? Special events?	
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Dating – When is group dating allowed? Single dating? Special relationships?	
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