

## Talking with Teens about Healthy Relationships

Source: ProtectKidsOnline

Healthy peer relationships play a central role in adolescent development, help build character and can be an important source of emotional support. Teen relationships (including romantic) are more often than not cultivated through the use of technology. Parental guidance is critical to influencing beliefs and shaping values around the use of social media in the context of teens developing healthy and fulfilling relationships.

### Ongoing conversations to have with your teen:

1. Discuss the qualities of a healthy relationship (being loving, caring, respectful) in comparison to unhealthy relationships (one person who is persistent, manipulative, or uses guilt and pity tactics). Without a clear understanding of what makes a healthy relationship, youth are more likely to tolerate relationships that put them at risk (e.g., interpreting jealousy or constant text messaging as a sign of love rather than controlling behaviour).
2. Talk about how to get out of an uncomfortable situation. There are direct ways (e.g., “I don’t want to”) and indirect ways (e.g., “My mom needs my help, I have to go now.”) to get out of a tough situation.
3. Use stories that arise in the media (e.g., movies, shows) to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours. Help your teen to start thinking critically about negative messages and stereotyping.
4. Discuss problems that may arise from engaging in sexual conversations online and creating or sharing sexual pictures or videos. Once content is sent, control over what is done with it is lost. The recipient may show it to friends, send or post it online or use it to manipulate the other person, for example, to engage in further sexual activity.
5. Explain the importance of establishing and respecting personal boundaries when using technology. The content that your teen has shared and that others have shared with your teen should be protected and handled with respect (i.e., not shared with others). Emphasize that this continues to apply once a relationship has come to an end.
6. Teach your child how to end relationships. Ending a relationship is always a hard thing to do but it’s important not to drag it out. Talk to your child about being honest, thoughtful, and to the point.

7. Be emotionally available and keep the lines of communication open. It is important to remind your child that they can always come to you for help without fear of getting into trouble, and reinforce that it's never too late to ask for help.