

KEEPING KIDS SAFE

A PARENTS' GUIDE

The Archdiocese of Washington is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of all children. This flier is one in a series of parents' guides produced by the archdiocese to help parents better understand how to protect and nurture their children.

By the Numbers

Teens and Abuse

- **1 in 3** teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked or physically hurt by their boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Nearly **1 in 5** teenage girls who have been in a relationship said a boyfriend had threatened violence or self-harm if presented with a break-up.
- **13%** of teenage girls who said they have been in a relationship report being physically hurt or hit.
- **1 in 4** teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse.
- More than **1 in 4** teenage girls in a relationship report enduring repeated verbal abuse.

Information from 2008 study by Teenage Research Unlimited

Helping your teen build healthy relationships

"Remember to share nicely with Katie."
"Hands are not for hitting, Tommy." Since your child was a toddler, you have been teaching him or her how to interact with their peers and family members. Now that your children are teenagers, guiding them towards healthy relationships with others requires different rules than it did when they were preschoolers. Adolescent children especially need to build healthy friendships and relationships, but helping them do so doesn't have to be a battlefield.



Here are some ways you can help your teen build healthy relationships:

- **Provide a safe and loving home environment.** Your child should feel comfortable bringing friends home, and her friends should feel welcome in your home. This gives you an ideal opportunity to observe your child's friends and spot troublesome relationships.
- **Teach responsibility.** Give appropriate amounts of independence and freedom. Do not instantly demand that your child end a relationship with which you are uncomfortable. Instead, choose a time to calmly express your concerns and gently remind your child about the boundaries and standards you have set for your family.
- **Resolve conflict.** Teach your child to respect other points of view. No relationship is without discord, and sometimes we have to lose the fight to win the relationship.
- **Be a good role model.** You are the most powerful example in your child's life. Let your child observe your own relationships, especially those that are long-standing—from junior high or your college days. Talk about your friendships openly—the good times and the not-so-good times, the ups and the downs.

Information from U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

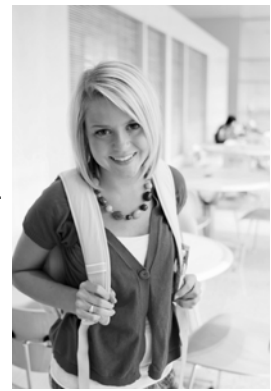
Learn more about the Archdiocese of Washington's commitment to protecting children and find the other inserts in this series at www.adw.org.

Click on "Protecting Our Children"

Office of Child Protection Services • 301-853-5328



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The warning signs of an unhealthy relationship

How to handle the ups and downs of adolescent dating is a challenge for any parent, just as it is for your teen. Your guidance is essential in helping your teen make the right dating choices, from recognizing the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship to educating your teen on Catholic moral teaching on chastity.

Talk to your teen about what an unhealthy relationship is: one that involves mean, disrespectful, controlling or abusive behavior, such as verbal insults, nasty putdowns, hitting and pressure to have a sexual relationship. For some who have grown up around this kind of behavior at home, it can almost seem normal or okay. Make sure your teen understands that it's not.

If you're wondering if your teen is in an unhealthy relationship, look for these **warning signs**:

- She apologizes for a boyfriend's behavior and makes excuses for him
- She loses interest in activities she used to enjoy
- She stops seeing friends and family members and become more isolated
- He calls her names and puts her down in front of other people
- He acts extremely jealous of others who pay her attention
- He controls her behavior, constantly checking up on her and asking who she's been with
- She casually mentions his violent behavior, but laughs it off as a joke
- She often has unexplained injuries or her explanations don't make sense

Information from www.loveisnotabuse.com

How to share Catholic moral teaching on chastity with your teen

- **Start a conversation today!** Talking to your child about chastity does not start with "the talk." It begins with spending time with your child and asking them about their day and life. Do this everyday and listen to their answers. A great time to do this is before bed every night.
- **Be not afraid.** Pray with and for your child. Say a prayer before speaking to your child about sexuality and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your discussions. Again this is not a one time talk; it is a series of discussions that take into account your child's thoughts, concerns and questions about sexuality as he or she matures.
- **Share with your child that sex is sacred.** Rarely will your child hear that sex is sacred and holy when expressed in marriage. Many teens use sex to try to keep relationships together, to overcome loneliness or to simply fit in. Let your child know that this is not what sex is for and that it will not make difficulties go away but will instead lead to other difficulties. Chastity may not always be easy, but it is always possible with God's help.
- **Talk to your child about chastity when they are young.** You know your child's maturity and questions better than anyone else. These early talks begin with developing virtues and a close relationship with God. Early lessons in virtue will bear great fruit later in life. Children learn best by example and will mirror loving and affectionate relationships. Teach your child that they have great dignity and worth and they were made for love and to love others, and most especially that you love them!
- **Chastity is not just about avoiding sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.** While these are important reasons to abstain from sex, these are not the only reasons for abstinence before marriage. The beauty of marriage and family life, and the commitment to one another, will be lost if the reason for abstinence before marriage is simply to avoid pregnancy or disease. To the best of your ability, share the fullness of the beauty and holiness that sexuality can be when lived out in marriage.
- **Set clear rules in your home.** Children need healthy boundaries and clear guidelines of behavior. As parents, you set the standards (for discipline, dating, modesty, use of media, etc.). Once you set the rules, be consistent in enforcing them.