

# Know! Teen Dating R-E-S-P-E-C-T

February is known as the month of love, so what better time than now to focus on teen romance and the complexities that accompany it. Young "love" has always been tricky, as adolescent hormones and emotions run high. But in the age of cell phones and social media, youth face additional challenges and must learn healthy and appropriate ways to handle it.

According to the experts at [LoveIsRespect.org](http://LoveIsRespect.org), a common complaint among young people in romantic relationships is that their partner is "disrespectful." They say things like, "I feel so disrespected when..."

- My partner dresses like they're single.
- My partner sees my texts and doesn't respond.
- My partner talks to other people right in front of me.
- My partner comments on others' pictures on social media.
- My partner posts certain selfies that I don't like, and then other people comment.

Disrespectful behavior can occur with any type of relationship, whether with a dating partner, a friend, a family member, etc. However, certain behaviors may be labeled as disrespectful when in fact they are not. Often they are simply unrealistic expectations influenced by the world surrounding our youth.

Young people need to hear that it is ok to feel jealous and insecure at times, everyone does. What is not ok is when those feelings, accompanied by possessiveness, turn into unhealthy or abusive behaviors, and are then used as excuses to control or isolate another person.

In regard to the examples used above, some people think that if their partner is even talking to another guy or girl, it is "flirting," and that is disrespectful. This unhealthy behavior is often rooted in possessiveness. In a trusting, healthy relationship, partners should be able to speak to and hang out with other friends - guys and girls - and not have to feel like they are doing something wrong.

As for social media, it's a great way to connect with others, but it is also a popular source of contention among youth. Many young people feel like their partner is being disrespectful based on pictures they post, their partner liking and commenting on other people's pictures, and their partner direct messaging certain people. What they need to learn is that their partner has a right to communicate and connect with people outside of their dating relationship. What partners do not have the right to do, is to monitor, harass or control the other person online. This includes not being pressured to share cell phone and social media passwords.

And when it comes to one person trying to dictate what another person can and cannot wear in the name of respect – wrong. That is a big, red flag. Again, this type of controlling behavior comes from a place of jealousy, insecurity, and possessiveness. In the name of

respect, partners should accept each other's personal choices in the way they decide to dress.

In a healthy relationship, partners make decisions together and know they can share what is on their mind without suffering negative consequences. They enjoy spending time together but can also be happy and feel comfortable spending time with others. They are supportive, celebrate each other's accomplishments, are not excessively jealous, and respect each other's boundaries. Healthy relationships are based on trust, honest communication, equality, and boundaries. Let your child know that if they and their partner have talked and are not able to come to an agreement on healthy boundaries, then it is likely not the right relationship for either of them. These relationships now are all part of the learning process that will help them figure out exactly the type of person and relationship they are looking for in their adult life.

While February is a great backdrop to get this conversation started, this is not a one-and-done discussion. Even if you think your adolescent son or daughter has no current "love interest," you are encouraged to incorporate the topic of healthy romantic relationships into your regular and ongoing talks with your child.

Love Is Respect is the national resource to disrupt and prevent unhealthy relationships and intimate partner violence by empowering young people through inclusive and equitable education, support, and resources.

Tip for Mentors and Adult Allies:

Young people need to know that healthy dating relationships include:

- Trust
- Honesty
- Communication
- Equality
- Boundaries
- Respect

Sources:

[LoveIsRespect.org: Healthy Relationships](https://loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships)