

The Dating Academy

SIGN UP TODAY!



By Matthew O. Richardson

Served as Second Counselor in the Sunday School General Presidency from 2009 to 2014

While speaking to youth about how to prepare for a celestial marriage, President Thomas S. Monson emphasized that “proper dating is a part of . . . preparation for marriage.”¹ Have you thought much about happy relationships? Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said a “celestial marriage brings greater possibilities for happiness than does any other relationship.”²

When I was serving as bishop in a young single adult ward, I worried about those who approached dating with very little purpose, understanding, or direction. This caused me to wonder if my own children would be any different when their time came. My wife and I decided to help our children prepare for “proper dating” and happy relationships by creating the Richardson Dating Academy, or RDA as our children call it.

It wasn’t long after we started the RDA that friends of our children wanted to participate and even become RDA graduates. So, how about you? Are you ready to become a dating academy graduate yourself? Class is in session!

Learning the ins and outs of dating can be hard. Let this course turn you into a dating pro!



Lesson 1: Purposes and Standards of Dating

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once explained that most athletic contests have “lines drawn on the floor or the field within which every participant must stay in order to compete.”³ Success depends on how well a competitor knows and stays within the set boundaries. Likewise, it’s important to know the “dating lines” or the purposes and standards of dating as taught by Church leaders.

HOMEWORK

As you know, “dating” means different things to different people. Your first assignment is to figure out just what a “date” is according to Church standards. Can you explain the purposes of dating and the specific dating standards and guidelines set by the Church? Or, do you know when it’s most appropriate to be involved in dating and steady dating (having a boyfriend or girlfriend)?

You can find answers to these questions in the “Dating” section of *For the Strength of Youth*. The First Presidency reminds us why knowing and understanding these standards are so important. They promise, “The standards in this

booklet will help you with the important choices you are making now and will yet make in the future.”⁴

Now that you have a solid foundation of the standards and purposes of dating (you *did* do your homework and read that section, didn’t you?), it’s time to move on to lesson #2.



Lesson 2: Watch and Learn

One of the most common ways people learn is by watching others. Dating is no different. In the dating academy, we spend time observing others in dating situations. In our family, we learned many pointers—some to do, others to avoid—by watching dates in progress at restaurants and other settings. Yes, we went to certain places with the sole purpose to observe dates for “class.”

TIPS

Here are some suggestions that will help you learn as you observe.

- Watch but don’t be creepy. This is about learning from others but not stalking, staring, or even judging. Look for things you like and things you would like to avoid.
- Go to a variety of places and settings to observe others. Not every date is the same nor should it be. Watch how the setting affects the experience.
- Watch how people interact with each other. Can you tell who is with whom? Are they paying attention to each other? In what ways? Are they talking with each other? Do they look like they enjoy being with each other? How can you tell if they are having fun?
- Talk with a parent, leader, or good friends and share what you noticed and what you learned.

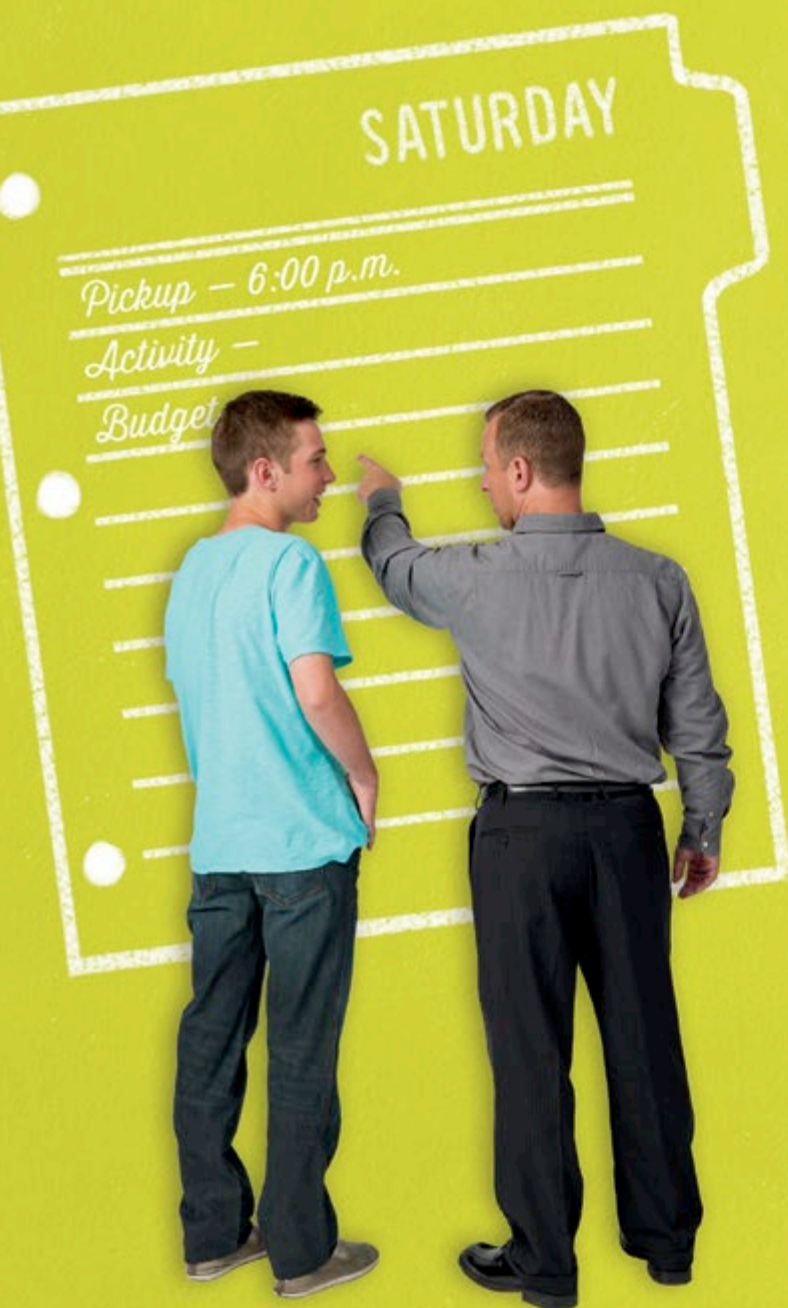
HOMEWORK

The next time you go out to eat, attend a movie, or go to almost any activity, make an effort to look around and see how other people are interacting. It may surprise you to see how much dating is actually going on! Take the time to learn from those around you by paying attention to what’s working and what isn’t.

Lesson 3: Planning a Date

The quality of experience you'll have with others is often determined by what happens *before* a date begins. Showing up on your date's doorstep with no plan is a recipe for an awkward experience. Nobody likes playing the "What do you want to do?" game.

You're better than that! With a little practice, you can become a date-planning champion. And young women, no fair skipping this section! While most of the time young men plan and ask for dates, you'll still want to have these skills down for when it's your turn.



TIPS

- Start planning early.
- Don't be afraid to bounce ideas off your friends, parents, and others. They can provide excellent suggestions that you haven't even thought about.
- Make sure you let your budget, amount of time available, the reasons for dating, and Church standards guide your planning.
- Think of what you hope will happen during the date from beginning to end. This helps you realize what needs to be done to make the date a success.
- Pay attention to details. Call ahead for event times, prices, menus, and what the proper dress is for the occasion.
- Plan for emergencies. For example, what will you do if you don't have enough money or have car trouble? What if your date gets sick?

HOMEWORK

Rather than leaving everything to chance, dating academy grads understand what needs to happen and they plan accordingly.

Your homework assignment, even if you're years away from dating, is to practice planning an event. You can brainstorm with friends really fun ideas for a date. Then work together to think of what planning is required to make those ideas actually happen. Or, you can ask your parents to let you plan the next family outing.

You might choose a place to eat or what to do. Plan all the details (event times, travel time, cost, backup plans) and then put your plan into action. You could even come up with a dating plan complete with backup ideas if something goes wrong and share it in family home evening, while talking together around the dinner table, or with friends. You may find that properly planning an activity is almost as much fun as the actual date!



Group Date Ideas

Need ideas? Check out [lds.org/go/ideasNE8](https://www.lds.org/go/ideasNE8). Some of the youth activities there could be adapted for dates.

Lesson 4: Inviting Others and Being Invited

You know your dating standards front and back, you've watched others in dating situations, and you've come up with a solid date plan.

Congratulations! Now you still need to invite someone. Or, you need to know how to respond when you are invited. So what's the best way? A phone call? Ask in person? Here are some different points to consider.

TIPS

- Be ready to give details when you invite someone on a date. Talk about what you have planned, start and end times, who's participating, and how they should dress (casual, dressy, etc.). Your excellent planning from academy lesson #3 makes this part of the academy easy.
- There's a time to talk by phone and a time to ask face-to-face. The more important the event is, the more personal the invitation should be. Don't be afraid to skip technology and actually talk with someone.
- Some events may require you to speak with your date's parents first. This shows respect and courtesy.

HOMEWORK

In the Richardson Dating Academy, all of our children practiced dating invitations. For example, our children might call an aunt, older sibling, or other family member to practice inviting someone on a date. Or our son or daughter would receive an invitation from a family member and practice responding. They learned how to deal with rejection, acceptance, or even a disinterested response or two.

Now it's your turn. Working with your parents, ask them to line up somebody in your family you can call and practice inviting on a date. Make sure you do this more than once!



Lesson 5: On the Date

It would be impossible for any dating academy to cover every little thing to consider or plan for in dating. So much depends on good judgment, communication with your parents, and listening to the Spirit.

Still, here are a few key points you might want to brush up on before putting your date plan into action.

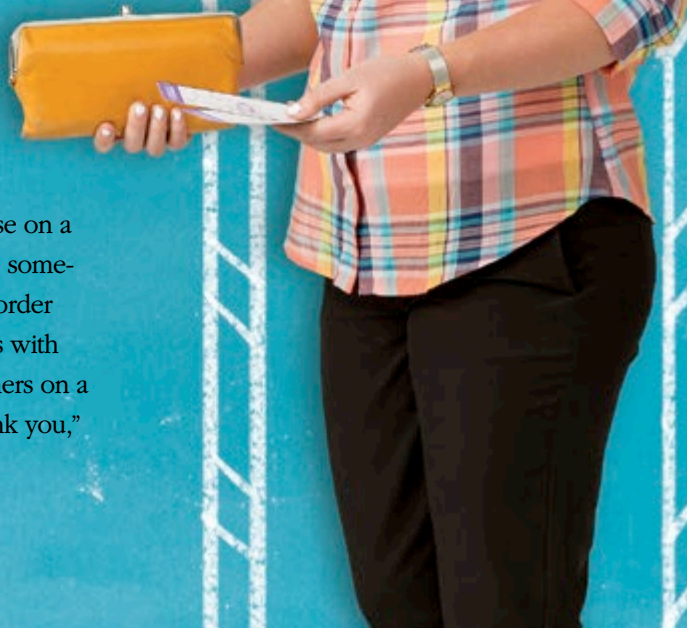
TIPS

- Develop a “you first” attitude. This means you always think of your date first. Is he or she having fun? Is he or she comfortable?
- Make sure you dress appropriately for the occasion. The way you dress usually communicates how you feel about others and about the event. Know the difference between casual (but never sloppy), semiformal, and formal and when it would be appropriate to dress in those ways.
- Show common courtesy by opening doors, saying thank you, talking less about yourself and more about your date, and extending sincere compliments.
- Learn how to navigate restaurants. Know how to make a reservation, get a table, calculate a service tip, and pay the bill.

HOMEWORK

Once again, the best way to learn any good skill is by practicing it. Our youth enjoyed role-playing different situations to think about how to act most appropriately. We also loved going out to eat as part of the dating academy experience. Our children learned how to act in a restaurant, order a meal, calculate the tip, and pay the bill by actually doing it when they were with us.

Look for opportunities to practice skills you should use on a date. For example, the next time you and your family go somewhere, ask your parents to let you purchase the tickets, order the meal, or calculate the tip. Treat your family or friends with the same respect and courtesy that you should show others on a date. Open doors for your family, be the first to say “thank you,” and pay attention so you are part of the conversation.



Lesson 6: The Doorstep

Last but not least, dating academy graduates know how to conclude a date on the right note. Nothing sours a great date more than a bad ending.

Here's how you can finish a date with success.

TIPS

- Express gratitude. Be sincere and to the point. If there was something you especially liked, tell your date what it was.
- There's no reason for dragging things on at this point. You've already spent plenty of time together! Avoid the "doorstep shuffle." When people aren't sure what to say, they tend to shuffle back and forth or move their feet in place. If you find yourself "shuffling" in place, it's a pretty good signal that you need to say good-bye!
- Know and follow the Church's counsel on kissing and physical intimacy. (You might also want to read John Bytheway's article "What Do Kisses Mean?"⁵ at lds.org/go/kissesNE8.)

HOMework

Yes, here's another opportunity for practicing. Our family has spent several family home evenings role-playing doorstep good-byes. It's been both helpful and fun to watch an older sibling coach the younger sibling with do's and don'ts.

Most memorable was an older sister showing how she could turn a hug into a handshake with the grace of a princess and the speed of a ninja. You too can get together with family members and role-play different scenarios that might happen on a doorstep. We guarantee it'll be an academy night you'll all remember!



Graduation

If you've studied all the material, worked on the tips, done the homework, and talked through the lessons with your parents and family, you too can become a dating academy graduate.

As you continue strengthening these important skills, you'll find support, strength, and power that will bless your relationships both now and in the future. You will be better prepared for happiness. **NE**

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Monson, "Preparation Brings Blessings," *Ensign*, May 2010, 64.
2. Russell M. Nelson, "Celestial Marriage," *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 93.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, "We Are All Enlisted," *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 45.
4. "Message to the Youth from The First Presidency," *For the Strength of Youth* (2011), ii.
5. John Bytheway, "What Do Kisses Mean?" *New Era*, Oct., 2004, 38–41.



Do Try This at Home

Interested in having a dating academy at home? Let your parents know there's an RDA article for them in this month's *Ensign* or at lds.org/RDA.