



Our children are being challenged by the world's teachings about relationships. Counteracting those wrong messages starts with parents in the home.

Dating and VIRTUE

Ten things parents can do to help their children prepare for dating.

From an interview with David L. Beck, Young Men General President, and Elaine S. Dalton, Young Women General President

As worldly morals continue to degenerate, they challenge and even threaten traditional beliefs of dating and marriage. These threats are aimed forcefully at the rising generation. Particularly when it comes to relationships with the opposite sex, members of the Church need to hold to the iron rod. This has never been more true with the principles of dating than it is now, say the leaders of the Church's youth organizations.

"There's a big challenge today, just being in the world," explains Brother David L. Beck, Young Men general president. "Do we need to teach? Do we ever! We've got to counteract all the wrong messages that are coming, not only through the media, but also through associates and friends. Parents have a solemn responsibility to teach. It starts in the home."

Here, Brother Beck and Sister Elaine S. Dalton, Young Women general president, share 10 ideas to help parents teach their children appropriate methods of dating and help safeguard young people from the pitfalls of the world.



1. Understand the doctrine of dating and celestial marriage.

"The first thing parents need to do is understand the doctrine," says Sister Dalton. "The doctrine is the plan of salvation and includes celestial marriage, family, and parenthood. 'The Family: A Proclamation to the World' states that 'marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God.' That's why we're here on the earth—to form eternal families."

"I agree," says Brother Beck. "The family proclamation also declares that 'the family is central to the Creator's plan . . . [and] is ordained of God.' Marriage between a man and a woman is *essential* to His eternal plan and our eternal possibilities. The proclamation also has the doctrine for dating; it describes the boundaries on our physical relationships in that 'the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between . . . husband and wife.'"¹ (For a better understanding of what is meant by "sexual purity" and "immoral behavior," please see the sidebar on page 18, "*For the Strength of Youth: Sexual Purity.*")

Sister Dalton adds that young people also need

to understand the role of agency and their own identity. “In the premortal council in heaven, all of us fought to have agency. But when you step over the line into immorality, you’re compromising the agency of another person. You’re actually tampering with a power that God has entrusted us with to create other lives. If Satan can get youth to break the law of chastity, he can frustrate the purposes that we fought for valiantly in the premortal realm.

“If we could see each other for who we really are—children of our Father in Heaven—we would treat each other with the reverence, respect, and dignity that our spiritual heritage demands,” says Sister Dalton. “When we understand our divine identity, it will define all of our relationships with each other.”

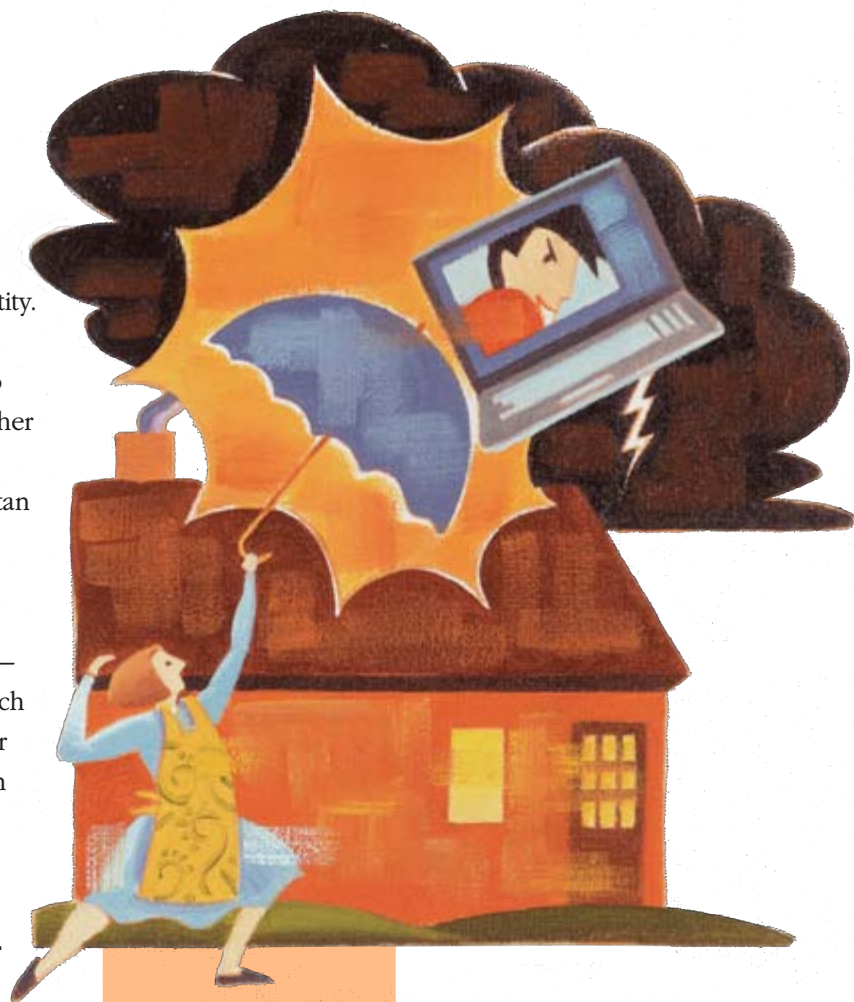
2. Don’t be influenced by the ways of the world.

The world, especially the media, would have us violate or ignore Heavenly Father’s teachings on dating and marriage. We don’t have to do that, says Brother Beck. “When we cross a line and engage in immoral behavior, we offend the Spirit, and when we lose that influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, all those wonderful things that the Spirit provides to us are lost. Immoral behavior destroys faith. Nothing I’ve seen seems so destructive to faith as immoral behavior.”

That’s one of the main reasons parents have to be so careful about what messages their children receive. “We’re just immersed in incorrect worldly messages through the media. It’s an overflowing scourge. You can’t spend an hour on television without getting false messages that create distorted views of reality which are against God’s purposes for us here on the earth. That’s why pornography—and all the immorality it portrays—is so destructive to relationships. It dehumanizes. Be very careful with the media you let into your home.”

3. Teach that virtue is not outdated.

With all those messages, parents have to remind their children that prophetic counsel hasn’t changed. “The



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prophets and seers have been telling us this for years,” says Sister Dalton, “and we have the words of current prophets, seers, and revelators as well. That is why we added the value of virtue to the Young Women theme and values. The word ‘virtue’ means chastity. The core of a virtuous life is chastity and sexual purity.

“Parents, teach your children that the body is a temple. Make sure they understand that we must be pure in heart to have the guidance of the Holy Ghost. That means we need to live so that we are worthy to enter the temple—now!

“When young men and young women start dating, teach them to ask themselves, ‘Will this person in this relationship lead me to the temple?’ If they can’t honestly answer yes, then they ought to think about what they are doing and make some changes.”

4. Teach the appropriate seasons of dating.

In the Young Men and Young Women programs, youth receive guidance in addition to what they may receive in the home on interacting with the opposite sex, explains Brother Beck. To help youth interact properly and successfully, “the Church sponsors group activities. We hold mutual and combined activities for youth beginning at age 12. These teach youth the fundamental lessons about respect. At age 14, youth start having youth conferences, dances, and other activities. *For the Strength of Youth* clearly points out that dating can occur at age 16 under conditions such as group and double dates that are positive and help maintain self-respect.”

Dating in these circumstances doesn't mean youth can't or won't have fun, according to Sister Dalton. “I've watched a lot of stake and multistake dance festivals, as well as mutual and service activities. Both the girls and the boys are excited to attend. And while they are having a good time, they learn appropriate social interaction and how to be respectful of one another, how to be careful about the way they dress. Even the Beehives and deacons learn how to honor one another in these wholesome settings. I believe that is why our prophet, President Thomas S. Monson, says that he is an advocate of these activities.”

FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH: DATING

In cultures where dating or courtship is acceptable, dating can help you develop lasting friendships and eventually find an eternal companion. Date only those who have high standards and in whose company you can maintain your standards. A young man and a young woman on a date are responsible to help each other maintain their standards and to protect each other's honor and virtue. You must honor the sanctity of the priesthood and of womanhood.

“Do not date until you are at least 16 years old. Dating before then can lead to immorality, limit the number of other young people you meet, and deprive you of experiences that will help you choose an eternal partner.

“Not all teenagers need to date or even want to. Many young people do not date during their teen years because they are not yet interested, do not have opportunities, or simply want to delay forming serious relationships. However, good friendships can and should be developed at every age.

“When you begin dating, go in groups or on double dates. Avoid going on frequent dates with the same person. Make sure your parents meet those you date. You may want to invite your dates to activities with your family. Plan dating activities that are positive and inexpensive and that will help you get to know each other. Do things that will help you and your companions maintain your self-respect and remain close to the Spirit of the Lord.”

For the Strength of Youth, pages 24–25.



Participation in wholesome group activities helps youth learn to honor each other while having fun.

FOR THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH: SEXUAL PURITY

“When you obey God’s commandment to be sexually pure, you prepare yourself to make and keep sacred covenants in the temple. You prepare yourself to build a strong marriage and to bring children into the world as part of a loving family. You protect yourself from the emotional damage that always comes from sharing physical intimacies with someone outside of marriage.

“Do not have any sexual relations before marriage, and be completely faithful to your spouse after marriage. Satan may tempt you to rationalize that sexual intimacy before marriage is acceptable when two people are in love. That is not true. In God’s sight, sexual sins are extremely serious because they defile the power God has given us to create life. The prophet Alma taught that sexual sins are more serious than any other sins except murder or denying the Holy Ghost (see Alma 39:5).

“Before marriage, do not do anything to arouse the powerful emotions that must be expressed only in marriage. Do not participate in passionate kissing, lie on top of another person, or touch the private, sacred parts of another person’s body, with or without clothing. Do not allow anyone to do that with you. Do not arouse those emotions in your own body.

“In cultures where dating or courting is acceptable, always treat your date with respect, never as an object to be used for your lustful desires. Stay in areas of safety where you can easily control your physical feelings. Do not participate in talk or activities that arouse sexual feelings.”

For the Strength of Youth,
pages 26–27.

A true friend makes it easier to live the gospel, brings out righteous qualities in you that make you better, and helps you be a guardian of virtue.



5. Encourage good friendships.

Proper dating and developing wholesome friendships are really about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, says Sister Dalton. “When I talk to young women about dating, I like to ask them to define what a friend is. I married my best friend. We became friends first. And he’s still my best friend.

“I love Elder Robert D. Hales’s definition of a friend,” Sister Dalton continues. “True friends make it easier to live the gospel.”² It is pretty simple. A person who brings out righteous qualities in you makes you better.”

Brother Beck says, “Teach young men about their priesthood responsibilities in the context of dating and how they should treat young women. Doctrine and Covenants 20 explains that a teacher should watch over the Church always and be with and strengthen the members. To the young men, I would say, ‘Think about that in the context of a relationship with a young woman you are watching over. You have this priesthood responsibility to watch over her when you are in her presence, to strengthen her. When you are with her, how are you strengthening and inviting her to come unto Christ?’”

Sister Dalton adds, “I call that being a guardian of virtue. I believe that these young men with priesthood power *must* be guardians of virtue. They must be virtuous themselves so that they can access that priesthood power and exercise it in purity and in holiness, and they also need to protect others’ virtue. And the young women also have to be guardians of their own virtue and guardians of the boys’.”

6. Set a positive example of dating and relationships.

“One of the most important things parents can do,” says Brother Beck, “is set the example by the respect they show each other and the joy they have in their relationship—seeing that it really is a wonderful thing. I don’t know that we could overstate what a motivator that is. Parents should try to model what a marriage can and should be.”

“I agree,” says Sister Dalton. “Those things make a big difference when we start dating and looking for qualities we want in an eternal relationship. I think parents can teach and model respect in their homes.”

7. Use Church resources.

Brother Beck explains that in addition to the Church programs already mentioned, there are a number of excellent resources to help parents teach their children. “Parents can use *For the Strength of Youth* to teach what the prophets have written to us about dating. Don’t just read or memorize it. Take these standards and appreciate them as words from the Lord’s anointed, and really listen to make sure our children understand them. *For the Strength of Youth* will provide a great protection for them.”

Sister Dalton concurs. “I think every parent would be wise to use *For the Strength of Youth* as a family home evening resource, especially with teenagers.”

“There’s also the *Family Guidebook*,” adds Brother Beck. “It teaches the organization and purpose of a family. We also need to point out that families bring happiness to Heavenly Father’s children by teaching them correct principles in a loving atmosphere. Those principles are best taught by example in the home.”

“There’s another powerful resource—the Book of Mormon,” says Sister Dalton. “Dating practices and



Learn to listen with the Spirit so that you can understand your children and develop a relationship in which they will want to talk and open up to you.

principles are contained right there. For example, Alma 39, with Alma’s advice to his son Corianton, is a very good place to start. Also in Doctrine and Covenants 88:40, the scripture says that light cleaveth to light and virtue loveth virtue. I think that’s a relationship scripture. We need to remember that good attracts good.”

8. Teach and influence by listening and spending time together.

Every point of teaching works better when we listen, says Brother Beck. “We need to emphasize the ability to listen with the Spirit so parents can really understand and have the kind of relationship in which a child will want to talk and open up.

“As a priesthood leader, I spend the vast majority of my time just listening. Sometimes you don’t need to say anything. It’s the same for parents. Parents need to teach, but they also need to listen and invite their children to express their feelings about what is going on.

“This can happen in family home evening, family council, at mealtimes, and in interviews,” Brother Beck continues. “During those times, listen and also express how you view these standards. Share your commitment, understanding, and appreciation for them.

“In addition, we need to spend time with our children and do things with them that they like to do—not just the things we want to do. This builds confidence and trust.”

FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC:

- Gordon B. Hinckley, "Great Shall Be the Peace of Thy Children," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 50–53.
- Gordon B. Hinckley, "Your Greatest Challenge, Mother," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 97–100.
- Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11.

All three of these addresses are available from Distribution Services on a single DVD entitled, "President Hinckley Speaks to Parents and Youth," item number 54591000 (DVD) or 53591000 (VHS).

- *For the Strength of Youth*, item number 36550000
- *The Family Guidebook*, item number 31180000

9. Prepare in advance to deal with difficult situations.

"Parents can also teach what I call 'refusal skills,'" says Sister Dalton. "Discuss with your children what situations might occur on dates and how they would react. Ask: 'So what if you get in this situation? What will you do?' Then let them actually act it out. Chances are good that they will do what they actually planned to do.

"The other thing is to help youth make 'preplanned decisions and commitments.' There are certain things you can decide right now, and you don't ever have to decide them again. Then, in the heat of the moment, you don't have to make that decision again. It's made! When I was a teenager, if someone offered me liquor or a cigarette, I'd respond, 'Are you kidding? I made that decision when I was 12. I'm not doing



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that.' I made those decisions once. I never had to remake them.

"But make sure you teach them to believe in the power and principles of repentance. They are young. They will make mistakes. But they need to believe they can repent and get back on track."

10. Let them know their parents and leaders trust them.

"Our youth need to know we believe in them," says Brother Beck. "We need to encourage them to do hard things and sometimes to take the path that stretches them. When each of us as individuals confronts our fears, we discover who we are. We discover God in our lives and we develop confidence. Go forward in faith, knowing that the Lord will support you. His grace is sufficient to help us through challenging situations."

Sister Dalton adds: "This generation of youth is the most noble and incredible ever. They're uniquely positioned in the world right now to make a difference. And they are full of hope. They want to be validated for who they really are. They come with such nobility inside. We need to provide opportunities that foster authentic relationships and help them develop the feeling and knowledge of their own divine identity. Parents, you can do that. Teach them to focus on the temple and on being worthy to make and keep covenants. Teach them with love and respect, and they will develop those same patterns." ■

NOTES

1. The Family: A Proclamation to the World, *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. Robert D. Hales, "The Aaronic Priesthood: Preparing for the Decade of Decision," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2007, 49.